

פרשת כי תשא

The Parasha begins with Hashem instructing Moshe to take a census of the Jews by taking a half shekel from each and every one of them. This half shekel donation of the people was eventually used to purchase sacrifices for atonement. The Pasuk says "ונתנו איש כפר נפשו"-"every man shall give his atonement". The word ונתנו (give) is a palindrome (a word that can be spelled both forwards and backwards) If we read ונתנו backwards it is also ונתנו. This is to hint to us a reason why we should give. Life is like a wheel that is constantly turning. One day someone can be on top but the next day on bottom. One must give when he has the ability to give and not delay, since "who knows" when the wheel of life will turn against him. One who does not have the means to give, should not despair and never give up since his time of good fortune may be "right around the corner". The word ונתנו that is read both ways shows us that the giver may end up a taker, and a taker may end up a giver, the roles may reverse! " (Another word for currency is זוז. The word זוז also means "to move". The word itself hints to this concept that money moves from hand to hand and does not stay put!). Therefore if one has the ability to give he must do so without delay. If one does so, he insures that his fortune remains with him. This too is hinted in the word ונתנו, since as mentioned it is read in both directions. This shows us that one who **gives** will end up **receiving** from Hashem in an even greater measure. The money ends up "coming back" to him as indicated by the reverse reading of ונתנו.

The Baal Shem Tov explains in a similar vein the Pasuk in Tehilim ה' צלך על יד "Hashem is the shade of my right hand". The right hand represents חסד-kindness, when one is kind and gives charity, Hashem "shadows" the man's hand and just like he stretched out his hand to give, Hashem follows suit and gives him even more than he gave out! There is a story of a man who was constantly giving charity. The more he gave the more Hashem blessed him with even **more** money! His friends asked him; what's going on?! He explained to them; it seems that the more I shovel out, Hashem shovels in. However Hashem's shovel is much bigger than mine!!

The Pasuk refers to this charity as "מחצית השקל"-"half a shekel". The word מחצית hints to the powers of giving charity. The middle letter of מחצית is the צ. צ stands for צדקה. The letters on each side of the צ are ח-י which means life. The furthest - outer

letters to the צ are מ-ת which means death. Showing us the closer we are to charity giving the closer we are to life! However one who is “far” from giving charity is unfortunately closer to the opposite.

There is a custom that a groom gives charity on the day of his wedding. One reason given is that there is a Pasuk in Tehilim "פזר נתן לאביונים"-"he gives a distribution to the poor". The first letters of those words spell the word נפל, (which is a miscarriage) in order to prevent a נפל in the course of a marriage, the groom gives charity on his wedding day. There is something else that the charity given on the day of the wedding is hinting to. There are two Pesukim describing a wife. One says "מצא אשה מצא טוב"- "when you find a woman you've found **good**", and the other Pasuk says "ומצא אני את מות"-"I find the woman more bitter than death"! One is obviously referring to a good and proper wife and the other is discussing the opposite. It says about charity, "צדקה תציל ממות"-"charity saves from death" (as hinted in the word מחצית mentioned previously). The groom, in order to have a good omen, gives charity on his wedding day in order to be spared from the “death” referred to by the Pasuk of having a difficult wife, and ensure that his marriage will be pleasant. In addition there is a Gemarah that says that a man who has a “difficult” wife will be spared from Gehinom in the next world; this is because his wife was his Gehinom on this world! The groom gives charity to be spared of the “Gehinom” of a difficult wife and merit to have a peaceful marriage!

Fasting and Charity

The Gemarah in Berachot Daf vav says "אגרא דתעניתא צדקתא"-"the reward from a fast is for the charity that is given". What is the meaning of this statement that the reward of a fast is charity? The basic explanation is that the Gemarah is instructing a person to better his ways. צדקתא is מלשון- צדיק to become more observant and religious. This is the purpose of fasting. If someone fasts but doesn't change his evil ways, what good is the fasting?! Like one Rabbi once said; people fast and abstain from eating. This is punishing the stomach by depriving it of food, but what did the stomach do?! It was his eyes or heart that caused him to sin, so why punish the stomach?! Therefore the Gemarah instructs one who is fasting to better his ways in order to make his fast a meaningful one.

Rashi explains "שנותנין צדקה לערב לפרנסת עניים שהתענו היום"-"because people give charity in the evening to the poor people that had fasted that day".

How does Rashi explain why this is the “reward” of fasting? This seems to be just a byproduct of the fast; that it will be a situation of poor people collecting money in order to have food to break their fasts. How does Rashi explain the phrase of the Gemarah?! (The Maharasha gives an explanation and prefaces his words by saying that he is giving an explanation different than Rashi’s. We can infer from the words of the Maharasha that what Rashi was saying is indeed an explanation of the Gemarah’s phrase!) If we analyze the words of Rashi we see the emphasis on the word **לערב** - in **the evening**. In the evening towards the end of a fast a man is hungry and can empathize with the hunger pains of the poor. It is precisely at this moment when his heart motivates him to contribute to the poor and hungry.

In general a man is usually full and satiated and cannot fathom someone else being hungry and unable to afford food for his table. However towards the end of a fast when we feel the hunger pains, we can clearly associate with the hunger and pain of others. We give them more than we would ever give! This is illustrated in the story of a rabbi in Russia who went to collect for the poor and needy who could not afford the wood to fuel their fireplace in the cold of winter. The Rabbi approached the home of a wealthy man and knocked on his door. The man answered and greeted the Rabbi warmly. He offered the Rabbi to please come inside his warm house instead of standing out in the cold. The Rabbi refused and stood outside with the rich man engaging him in conversation. After a few minutes the rich man pleaded with the Rabbi to please come inside; its getting cold!! Finally the Rabbi explained to the rich man that the purpose of his visit was to collect funds for the poor who were unable to afford wood to fuel their furnaces. The rich man -himself freezing from standing outside so long- readily agreed to give the rabbi’s a sizeable donation. He was feeling what it was like to be cold!! This is the meaning of "אגרא דצדקתא תעניתא" the reward of the fast is the situation one is put that “pushes” him to give charity! This in itself is the great benefit of fasting that ultimately we merit to give much more charity than originally planned.

The Maharasha explains that the Gemarah is instructing the one who is fasting to give charity so as not to benefit financially from the money he saved by not buying food to eat that day. If a person does not give charity than the fact that he saved money may subconsciously become the reason that he is fasting. To prevent this, the Gemarah instructs us to give to charity at least in the amount of money he had saved that day by not having to purchase food. This is hinted to in the קדש ורחץ (the order of the Seder of the night of Pesach) we say שלחן עורך (which literally means a set table referring to the meal portion of the night) the word עורך means an estimate or appraisal;

one must estimate his שולחן-his table. What he normally would eat on the day of a fast he must give that amount to charity.

Another explanation of the Gemarah is through a story of R' Akivah and Turnus Rufus. Turnus Rufus once asked R' Akivah; "if your Hashem loves the poor people why does he make them poor?!" R' Akivah answered; so that he can give a merit to the rest of the people by giving them the opportunity to give charity.

Just the opposite; exclaimed Turnus Rufus. It is like a king who gets angry at a certain servant and in his anger throws the servant in a cell. The king commands that no one feed the servant. If someone disobeys and gives the servant food he would surely be punished! So too a poor man is like a slave of Hashem that Hashem has commanded to be poor and not be able to afford food. How then can one "disobey" Hashem and give food to the poor man?! R' Akivah explained; your parable is **almost** accurate. It is not like a master and slave- it is like a **father** that in his anger towards his son locks his son in his room and commands that no one feed him. If someone sneaks food to the boy in order to sustain him, he will surely be rewarded when the father's anger subsides! We are Hashem's children as it says "אתם בניו" - "you are **sons**" if someone gives charity in order to feed one of Hashem's children he will surely be greatly rewarded!

We see from this answer of R' Akivah that charity is what "activates" our being called sons to Hashem (the giving of charity brings out this point of being Hashem's children in the parable of R' Akivah). As a result of giving charity we find ourselves as the beloved children of Hashem, this helps us in our petition and requests to Hashem. After a long day of fasting (which is accompanied by prayers and supplications to Hashem) the way we are successful in having our prayers answered is by being the children of Hashem and this is accomplished through charity. In order to make our fasting beneficial and effective we must give charity. This is the meaning of "the benefit of fasting is giving charity".

This combination of fasting, prayer, and charity is hinted in the word תענית (fast) . The first and last letters are תת which means "to give" and the middle letters are עני "to a poor man". The first and last letters תת are also stand for תשובה תפילה and the middle letters עני represent giving charity to a poor man. These 3- תשובה, תפילה, צדקה - comprise the three things needed to break an evil decree ח'ו.

Another explanation of אגרא דתעניתא צדקתא is based on a concept from the Hida. There is a well known saying "שכר מצות בהאי עלמא ליכא"-“there is no reward in **this world** for Misvot. The reward for a Misvah is reserved for the world to come. This is why in many prayers we ask Hashem to bestow goon upon us, מאוצר מתנת חנם - from the storehouse of free unearned gifts. Since we know we cannot ask based on the Misvot we have done. (There was once a famine in the time of the Hafetz Haim, one of his students asked him; why can't I “cash in” my Misvah of putting on Tefillin that I did this morning and with that reward we can end the entire famine?! The Hafetz Haim explained to the student that this is comparable to a young boy who goes into a candy store and asks for a small candy. The cashier tells the boy the price of the candy is five cents. The boy reached into his pocket and pulled out a \$100 bill! Obviously the cashier does not make change for such a bill on such a small purchase! So too the reward for each and every Misvah that we perform, is so great that it is impossible to cash it in for such a small request [the request of ending a famine was small in comparison to the reward in Olam Haba for one Misvah]!).

If so, why does it say אגרא-reward?! There is no reward in this world?! In addition, since when do we do things for the sake of reward? Aren't we supposed to do the Misvot לשם שמים?! Why is the Gemarah even discussing reward? The Hida explains that this concept of שכר מצות בהאי עלמא ליכא is only on the Misvot that we are **commanded** to perform, ie; Tefillin, Succah, Lulav, etc... but regarding the Misvot that are done **voluntarily**, we actually do indeed receive reward **in this world**. The Gemarah says that when R' Zera would get tired from his learning and needed a break he would sit by the door of the Midrash to put himself in the position to get reward for standing up for the other Rabbis as they walked in. Why did Rav Zera say he was doing this; to get the **reward** of standing? Because this was not obligatory for him to sit by the door in order to stand for Rabbis, but he did this nonetheless, since he knew he would receive reward because we only receive reward for the “extras”.

This explains why the Gemarah only says that a man should respect his wife in order to become wealthy. A woman is not obligated in the Misvot as men are and therefore many of their Misvot are considered “extra” and is therefore rewardable in this world. For example פורו ורבו “to be fruitful and multiply”. This is an obligation of the man but not for a woman. Women- who endure the pains of pregnancy and labor- receive a Misvah as a non commanded Misvah. Therefore a man, who respects his wife, is respecting this aspect in her of “non commanded Misvot” and receives Hessed and blessing in **this world** on her account. She becomes his source of שפע and ברכה.

This explains what the Gemarah was saying אגרא דתעניתא צדקתא, that since the fast is an obligation there is no reward **in this world** for it. However the charity given on a fast is indeed considered extra since there is no strict obligation on how much to give. Therefore the אגרא reward that we will see **in this world** from a fast, is the charity given on that day.

One final interpretation of אגרא דצדקתא תעניתא is referring to a certain group of people who value the money **more** than their own bodies. In שמע we say that we have to love Hashem " בכל נפשך ובכל מאדך " – "with all your soul and all your money". Most people value their bodies and their physical well being more than their assets. However some value the assets even more than themselves. This leads to overworking and miserliness. For these people they would actually **rather** fast and inflict their bodies rather than to part with some money. It is for these people that there is a requirement to give money to charity, in order that they too feel the "discomfort", and the only ways they will feel discomfort is if we make them give some money. This will insure that the fast will have the desired effect on all the different types of people.