

# Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Vayakhel

“TAKE FROM AMONG YOU AN OFFERING FOR HASHEM, WHOEVER HAS A WILLING HEART SHOULD BRING IT...” (SHMOS 35:5)

**We will never lose out monetarily by giving charity**

RABBEINU BECHAYA, in his introduction to this *parasha*, tells us that while our natural instinct is to avoid giving *tzedakah*, our *seichel* – our wisdom and understanding – demands that we do give *tzedakah*. Rabbeinu Bechaya goes on to remind us that we will never lose out monetarily by giving charity, as Shlomo HaMelech states, “One who gives to a poor man will not be lacking” (Mishlei 28:27). In a similar fashion, the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 247:1) tells us that there is a positive commandment to give charity and a negative commandment against turning away from a poor person in need. One who does refuse a poverty stricken individual is considered as if he committed idolatry. In his next paragraph, the Shulchan Aruch attests to us that no man becomes poor or is damaged in any way by giving *tzedakah*.

Why do Shlomo HaMelech, Rabbeinu Bechaya and the Shulchan Aruch all encourage us to give charity by promising us that we will not lose by contributing? Giving *tzedakah* is both a positive and negative Torah commandment and neglecting this *mitzvah* is a grievous sin comparable to idol worship. We are obligated to give even if we would lose out by aiding the needy. Isn't this attitude of, “I won't lose” an inferior approach to serving Hashem?

**It will rebel and throw the trainer off**

Man, in trying to control his *Yetzer Harah*, has been compared to an elephant trainer – a small but intelligent man trying to control a huge unintelligent beast, and to convince it to act in a desired fashion. If he tries to force the beast against its own desires, it will rebel and throw the trainer off. If, however, he uses his wisdom in dealing with the elephant he will be successful. Similarly, if we try to compel ourselves to give *tzedakah*, simply because the Torah requires it, we may be defeated by our *Yetzer Harah* in this direct confrontation. And even if we do succeed in forcing ourselves to give, it may be done begrudgingly, without the wholehearted joy that should accompany a *mitzvah*. To avoid this dangerous confrontation, and to ensure that our charity is given willfully, it is advisable to, “throw the animal a bone,” i.e. to keep our animalistic tendencies at bay by reminding ourselves that we will not lose one penny by giving *tzedakah*. Once these selfish desires have been tamed and their objections removed, our *seichel* is now free to perform the *mitzvah* for the proper reason because Hashem commanded us to do so, regardless of whether we stand to lose or not.

**We should not be reluctant to use practical arguments in favor of serving Hashem**

We should not be reluctant to use practical arguments in favor of serving Hashem. It may seem that these thoughts represent ulterior motives whose only justification is that they eventually lead to *lishma* – for the sake of Heaven. In reality, they themselves are completely *lishma*. Our goal is lofty: to do *mitzvos* for the glory of Hashem. We are hampered in this pursuit by our selfish desires. Using practical arguments to neutralize this resistance, thereby freeing our minds to perform *mitzvos* for the sake of Heaven, is in itself a purely *lishma* endeavor, and is therefore recommended by our Sages and codified by the Shulchan Aruch. With this approach, we will increase and enhance our *mitzvah* performance, bringing ourselves to ever higher levels of closeness to Hashem the purpose of all creation.