

## HOW MUCH MONEY DO YOU REALLY HAVE?

### PARSHAS TERUMAH

One of the Rothchilds was once asked how much wealth he had. He read from a ledger that had the list of his many donations to tzedakah and told the man the total of his "wealth". His secretary thought he had taken out the wrong ledger and not the one that stated his wealth. Rothchild told him that it was true that he owned mines and property, .... However, that wealth was not guaranteed. The mines could be flooded, the properties could be confiscated, war could disrupt his business and render all his securities worthless. Only the money that he gave to tzedakah was really his and could never be taken from him. (Ethics From Sinai as quoted in Love Your Neighbor by Zelig Pliskin)

Hashem told Moshe to ask Bnei Yisroel for donations to build the Mishkan, the Tabernacle.

The commentators are bothered by the wording of the pasuk (Shmos 25:2). Why did Hashem say to Moshe to tell Bnei Yisroel, "וְיָקְחוּ-לִי", that they should take for Me their donations, rather than saying that they should give Me?

The **Malbim** explains that Hashem wanted the donations to be voluntary, stemming from the feelings of the heart. Had Hashem told Bnei Yisroel to give donations, that would have indicated that it was a mitzvah and obligation to do so. Therefore, the pasuk says, "that they should take for Me". Representatives should be appointed to accept all donations from whomever desired to give.

**HaKsav VeHaKabalah** explains that when you are giving something to a distinguished person it makes you feel so good, it is as if you are receiving that item. **HaKsav VeHaKabalah** proves his point. When our forefather Avraham prepared food for his guests (the 3 angels who appeared as travelers), he said, "וְאָקַח פֶּת לַחֵם", let me take some bread for you,

*"Speak to Bnei Yisroel and let them take for Me a portion, from every man whose heart motivates him you shall take My portion."  
(Shmos 25:2)*

instead of saying let me give you. Also, when Eliezer gave Rivkah the jewelry, he said, "וּיקַח הָאִישׁ נָזָם זֶהָב וְיִקַּח צְמִידִים", he took jewelry, instead of saying that he gave (see **Talmud** Kiddushin, 42, for another proof).

The **Beis Halevi** (quoted in **Talelei Oros** by Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rubin) has a different explanation. He says that **the only money that is truly ours is the money that we give to tzedakah**. The money that we keep for ourselves is not really ours. We are simply holding it, for the time being. The **Talmud** (Bava Basra 11A) says that during the reign of King Munbaz (**Rashi** and **Rabbeinu Gershom** say that he was the son of Queen Helana, a descendant of the Chashmonim kings), there was a terrible famine. The king gave away his treasures and the treasures of his ancestors, distributing the money to the poor. His brothers and his father's household joined together against him to protest his actions. They said to him, "Our ancestors stored up money in their treasuries and added to the treasures of their ancestors, and you are liberally distributing it all to the poor." King Munbaz replied, "Not so. My ancestors stored up below, whereas I am storing

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above... My ancestors stored up treasures in a place where the human hand can reach, and so their treasures could have been robbed, whereas I am storing up treasures in a place where the human hand cannot reach, and so they are secure, ... My ancestors stored up something that does not generate profit, as money sitting in a treasury does not increase, whereas I am storing up something that generates profit... My ancestors stored up treasures of money, whereas I am storing up treasures of souls... My ancestors stored up for others, for their sons and heirs, when they themselves would pass from this world, whereas I am storing up for myself... My ancestors stored up for this world, whereas I am storing up for the World-to-Come.”

*There was a man who lived in the land of Israel who owned a very fertile field. Every year the field yielded*

*1,000 measures of wheat and every year he gave one tenth of that as ma'aser to the Leviim. Before he passed away, he exhorted his son to be heedful of giving ma'aser. He said that would guarantee the bountiful production of the field. The man passed away and his son inherited the field. At first, he gave ma'aser regularly. Then he started giving less and less ma'aser. Each following year that he gave less ma'aser, the field produced less. Eventually, the field only produced 100 shares instead of the original 1,000! (**Midrash Tanchuma** Parshas Re'eh, cited in *Our Sages Showed the Way* by Yocheved Segal).*

The **Sforno** says (Devarim 14:22) when you give the Levi, ma'aser, a tenth of your crops of the fields and orchards as well as that of your livestock, you will actually increase their numbers This is what our chachamim, our sages, meant when they said in the **Talmud** (Shabbos 119) עשר בשביל שתתעשר, “Give the tithes so that you will be enriched.

**Who is truly wealthy?! Our wealth does not belong to us. We are only guardians of it. The only wealth that truly belongs to us is the money that we give to tzedakah or use for mitzvos.**



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*Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.*

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