



You Shall Surely Give Him

Parshas Re'eh

Leilui Neshmas Meira Chaya Nechama Bracha A"H

Bat David Mordechai V'Zelda Shaindel Sheychu

During the years of the Soviet regime in Russia religion was squashed, unable to practice publicly many lost their connection with Judaism. When the Iron Curtain fell I arranged a trip to meet this beleaguered Jews, I found people who were proud, brave Jews, but many of them knew little.

During one of the events a woman appeared and she told a grim story. The woman fought to maintain her Judaism throughout the years; her husband was grabbed by the KGB, taken to an unknown place and never heard from again. She had one request. Her son was turning thirteen. She knew he was to become Bar Mitzvah; yet she did not know what it meant.

During the previous evening we held in event at a big club in the heart of frozen Moscow. Together with me were the musical performers Mordechai Ben-David and Moshe Rosenblum. We sang with the crowd songs of belief and trust in G-d, warming the hearts. Inspired, she came with the request to make a "Bar Mitzvah".

Where is your son? I asked her. Playing with his friends in the soccer field, she answered. Please call him in, I asked of her. A short time later a big young man came to the house. Boris, who grew up without a father, turned out to be an average Russian child, who showed no interest in his Judaism.

I sat him next to me and told him I had something interesting to show him. I opened my Tefillin bag and removed one of the Tefillin. I kissed it with much adoration. Boris watched my actions with bewilderment, never having seen anything like this.

I explained to him briefly that the Jews have a direct connection with the Creator, and by His will we connect with him daily, through these Tefillin, made of leather. I told him that they were not mere boxes, and that they contained scrolls of parchment with verses of the Torah written on them which denote to the strong bond we have with G-d. Would you like to put them on? I offered.

Yes, he answered dryly and rolled up his sleeve. I helped him put on the Tefillin, he reciting the blessings word by word after me. I then recited the *Shema* with him. Tears filled the room. His mother stood there weeping. In her most wild dreams she did not dream her son would be wearing Tefillin on his Bar Mitzvah day.

Then the telephone rang...

In our weekly Parsha we find the commandment of Tzedakah, (charity): "If there will be among you a needy person, from one of your brothers in one of your cities, in your land the Lord, your G-d, is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, and you shall not close your hand from your needy brother... You shall surely give him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him; for because of this thing the Lord, your G-d, will bless you in all your work and in all your endeavors".¹

The commentators address the apparent repetition in the verses: "You shall not harden your heart, and you shall not close your hand from your needy brother", and then "You shall surely give him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him".

They further inquire about the blessing "for because of this thing the Lord, your G-d, will bless you in all your work and in all your endeavors" – where else in the Torah do we find such a blessing? And furthermore, we know that generally we are not rewarded for the fulfillment of commandments in this world, why has the Torah stated otherwise here?

Sefer Hachinuch explains: "You should not refrain from doing acts of kindness and charity, and especially to those who hold a different view on things... we have the ability to support them, and this is the meaning of the words "you shall not harden your heart, and you shall not close your hand from your needy brother". You should refrain from miserliness, but rather you should prepare your heart for generosity and compassion, and you should not think about your financial loss, for this reason G-d shall bless you, and His blessing is immeasurably blissful than treasures of gold and silver".²

We have here two separate commandments. The first is not to refrain from acts of charity. The second is that we refrain from stinginess, and all our contributions should be given generously. That's why the Torah's verses are seemingly duplicated. First, we should not stand by with indifference to the needy. Secondly, "you shall not harden your heart" – meaning one should contribute bigheartedly and willingly.

That's how the commentators address the issue of reward stated here. One is not rewarded for fulfilling the Mitzvah in this world, but one may be rewarded for adding to the Mitzvah, for giving openhandedly, with an open heart.

On the phone was the philanthropist Zeev Wolfson Z"L, who passed away this week. His broad heart followed us everywhere on our trip through the Former USSR. He stepped every step with us, contributing heavily to redeem Russian Judaism after years of Communist rule.

He supported Torah across the globe; in Israel, the US, Russia and France. He applied to himself the words of the Chinuch "you should not think about your financial loss", and had strong belief that he who contributes does not lose. He was blessed by Heaven, as the Chinuch writes: "His blessing is immeasurably blissful than treasures of gold and silver".

I told him: "Reb Zeev, we are having a Bar Mitzvah for Boris, a Jewish young man who has just become Bar Mitzvah. He is wearing Tefillin and has just recited the *Shema*". Silence came from the other end. Sobs were then heard. His great heart was touched. He could not control himself for what seemed like many minutes.

"Reb Zeev, what would you like to say to the youngster?", silence, and then he whispered: "Boris, I would like you to learn at the Migdal Ohr Yeshiva which will be established in Moscow".

"I promise", Boris replied. We all dried our eyes.

¹ Dvarim 15, 7 – 10.

² Commandment 478.