

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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Chapter XXXV: Naso (Num. 4:21–7:89)

Essay 3. The punishment for withholding tithes

פְּסוּק "עֲטַרְתַּת חֲכָמִים עֲשָׂרָם אֲנֵלֶת כְּסִילִים אֲנֵלֶת". הַפֶּפֶל נֶשֶׁל "אֲנֵלֶת כְּסִילִים אֲנֵלֶת" יוֹבֵן בְּמָה שְׁאָמְרוּ ז"ל עֲשָׂר בְּשָׁבִיל שְׂתֵת־עֶשְׂר. וּבְפָרְק ו' דְּבָרְכוֹת אָמַר ר' יוֹחָנָן מִשּׁוֹם ר' יְהוֹדָה בְּרַ אֶלְעָאִי בָּא וּרְאָה מָה בֵּינ דוֹרוֹת הָרֵאשׁוֹנִים לְדוֹרוֹת אַחֲרֹנִים. דוֹרוֹת הָרֵאשׁוֹנִים הָיוּ מְכַנְיָסִים פִּירוּתֵיהֶם דְּרָדָ טְרַקְסִימוּ [ו] כְּדִי לְחַיֵּיבָם בְּמַעֲשָׂר, דוֹרוֹת אַחֲרֹנִים מְכַנְיָסִים פִּירוּתֵיהֶם דְּרָדָ גָּגוֹת, חֲצָרוֹת, וְקַרְפִּיפּוֹת, כְּדִי לְפוֹטְרוֹן מִן הַמַּעֲשָׂר. לְפִיכָּד לֹא נִתְבָּרְכוּ פִירוּתֵיהֶן.

There is a verse: **“The crown of the wise is their wealth; [but] the folly of fools is [only] folly”** (Prov. 14:24). **The doubling of the word *evelet* [אֲנֵלֶת] [folly] in “the folly of fools is [only] folly” will be understood by what [the rabbis] of blessed memory said:**

Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi] raised a dilemma before Rabbi Yishmael, son of Rabbi Yosi: [Regarding] the wealthy of the Land of Israel, how do they merit [their wealth]? He said to him: Because they tithe, as it is stated: “A tithe you shall tithe [*aser te’aser*] [עֲשָׂר תַעֲשָׂר] [from all the crops of your seed that come out of the field each year]” (Deut. 14:22). [The rabbis interpreted this homiletically:] **Take a tithe** [*asser*] [עֲשָׂר] **so that you will become wealthy** [*titasher*] [תִּתְעַשָּׂר].¹

- Shabbat 119a

Also, in the sixth chapter of tractate Berachot:

Rabba bar bar Chana said that **Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Yehuda, son of Rabbi El’ai: Come and see that the later generations are not like the earlier generations. In the earlier generations, people would bring their fruits into their courtyards through the main gate in order to obligate themselves in tithes. [However,] the later generations bring their fruits through roofs, courtyards and enclosed courtyards, [avoiding the main gate] in order to exempt themselves from [the mitzvah of] tithing.**

- Berachot 35b

Therefore, their fruits were not blessed.

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¹ “Tithe” [עֲשָׂר] [*aser*] and “wealthy” [עֲשִׂיר] [*ashir*] have the same root.

ובפרק ט' דברכות כל מי שאינו נותן תרומות ומעשרות לכהן סוף נצרך לכהן על ידי אשתו שנגאמר וכו'. ועוד אמרו "איש איש כִּי־תשטה אשתו" אין אדם חוטא אלא אם כן נכנס בו רוח נשטות. ובזה יובן הפסוק "עֲטַרְתַּם חֲכָמִים עֲשֶׂרֶם", שפאשר יתברכו פירותיהם ויתעשרו זהו עטרה להם שהיא סימן שמקיימין המצוה פהלקתה. אמנם אנלת של פסילים להכניסם דרך גגות וקרפפות זה יגרום לאנלת אחרת דהיינו אנלת של אשתו, שבשביל שלא נמן המעשרות לכהן תשטה אשתו.

Also, in the ninth chapter of Berachot:

Chizkiya, son of Rabbi Parnakh, said that Rabbi Yochanan said: Why is the portion of *sota* juxtaposed with the portion of *terumot* and tithes (Num. ch. 5)? To tell you: **Anyone who has *terumot* and tithes and does not give them to a priest, will ultimately require [the services of] a priest by means of his wife, as it is stated:** “And every man’s hallowed things shall be his” (Num. 5:10). To this [the Torah] juxtaposed: “If any man’s wife go aside and act unfaithfully against him” (Num. 5:12). And it is written: “Then shall the man bring his wife unto the priest” (Num. 5:15). [I.e., if someone keeps his *terumot* and tithes so that they are his, instead of properly giving them to the priest, his punishment will be that his wife will be unfaithful (or at least suspected of such behavior). He will have to take her to see the priest, who will administer the *sotah* water that will determine if she is guilty.] Moreover, ultimately [that man] will require assistance from the tithe given to the poor, as it is stated: “And every man’s hallowed things shall be his” (Num. 5:10). [I.e., since he has kept the valuables that should go to the poor, he himself will become poor in order to “deserve” these things.]

- Berachot 63a

Also, it says in Sota 3a [regarding the verse], “If any man’s wife goes astray [*tisteh*] [תשטה]” (Num. 5:12), Reish Lakish says that a person commits a transgression only if a spirit of folly [*shetut*] [שטות] enters him [or her]. I.e., instead of reading “*tisteh*” (she goes astray), Reish Lakish reads the word as “*tish~~te~~h*” (she becomes foolish). **In this way, the verse, “The crown of the wise is their wealth” will be understood, for when their fruits will become blessed and they will become wealthy, this is their crown, which is a sign that they have fulfilled the mitzvah according to its halacha. Indeed, the folly of fools to bring in [their fruits] through roofs and enclosed courtyards, avoiding the main gate in order to exempt them from the mitzvah of tithing, this will cause a different folly, which is the folly of his wife, which will lead her astray, for because he does not give tithes to the priest, his wife will go astray.**

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