

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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Chapter XLVII: Re'eh (Deut. 11:26–16:17)

Essay 5. Tithing supports Torah learning

מדרש ילקוט על פסוק "עֲשֹׂר תַעֲשֹׂר" וְשִׂמְחָתָּ בְּכָל־הַטּוֹב" אין טוב אלא תורה דכתיב "כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם", לפיכך משה מזהיר את ישראל "עֲשֹׂר תַעֲשֹׂר" עכ"ל.

There is a Midrash Yalkut Shimoni (remez 892) on the verse, “You shall surely tithe all the yield of your sowing that is brought from the field year by year.” (Deut. 14:22): “ ‘And you shall rejoice in all the good which the L-rd your G-d has given you, and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the stranger that is in your midst’ (Deut. 26:11). There is no good other than Torah, as it is written, ‘For I give you good instruction; do not forsake my teaching’ (Prov. 4:2). Therefore, Moses warned Israel, ‘You shall surely tithe.’ ”

והוא תמוה דמה ענין תורה למעשר? ומלבד מה שפיתנו לעיל בסמוך עוד יש לומר במה שפיתנו המפרשים דיש חילוק בין מה שהקב"ה מבטיח על ידי עצמו ובין מה שהבטיח על ידי שליח או נביא, שמה שהקב"ה מבטיח בעצמו יכול לחזור בו שהקב"ה עושה מה שטוב לו, מה שאין כן אם הוא על ידי שליח, לא יוכל לחזור בו שאם יחזור מההבטחה יאמרו שהשליח או הנביא שקר הוא עכ"ל.

This is strange, for what’s the connection between not forsaking Torah and tithing? I.e., why is this mitzvah emphasized over so many others? Besides what we wrote above in the adjacent essay, i.e., essay 4, about how special tithing is, it can also be said that the commentators wrote that there is a distinction between what the Holy One, Blessed be He, promises Himself and what is promised by a messenger or prophet.¹ For what the Holy One, Blessed be He, promises Himself, he is able to reverse it, for the Holy One, Blessed be He, does what is best for Him, i.e., what is best for the world. This is something that is not the case in the hands of a messenger, for then He would not be able to reverse [the promise], for if he would reverse [the promise], [people] would say that the messenger or prophet is false. This would not only result in discrediting the messenger or prophet, but we also know from Deut. 18:20-22 that the Torah tells us to put a false prophet to death!

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¹ Rambam, Introduction to the Explanation of the Mishnayot, section two.

ובדברי הימים כתוב "ויאמר לעם ליושבי ירושלים לתת מנת הפהגים והלוים למען יחזקו בתורת ה' ". ואמרין בפרק י"א דסנהדרין כל המחזיק בתורת ה' יש לו מנה, ואין נותנין מתנה לכהן עם הארץ, וכל המנהגה תלמיד חכם מנכסיו הוא מתעשר ויש לו הרבה טובה. והמעשר ניתן לישראל כדי שכולם יזכו לתורה, שעל ידי המעשר, הפהגים והלוים יכולים ללמוד התורה, נמצא שכל ישראל גרמו זאת התורה ו"עץ-חיים היא למחזיקים בה".

In II Chronicles 31:4, it is written: “He ordered the people, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to deliver the portions of the priests and the Levites, so that they might strengthen themselves in the Torah of the L-rd.” It is said in the 11th chapter of Sanhedrin (page 90b), “Everyone who firmly adheres to the Torah of the L-rd has a portion,” and therefore “Rav Shmuel bar Nachmani said that Rabbi Yonatan said that one does not give a gift [terumah, the heave-offering] to a priest who is an *am ha’aretz* [i.e., an ignoramus regarding Jewish law].”² Each one who [utilizes his wealth] to benefit a Torah scholar from his property will become wealthy and will have much benefit. Tithing was given to Israel in order that everyone would merit the perpetuation of the Torah, for thanks to the tithing, the priests and the Levites would be able to learn Torah, as they would be free from having to work to support themselves. Thus, it’s found that all of Israel saved the Torah, and “she is a tree of life to those who grasp her” (Prov. 3:18).

ואם כן אמר המדרש "ושמחת בכל הטוב" על פרקה דמיירי בטובת העולם הבא דהיינו התורה, שהרי טובות עולם הזה כבר נאמרו בפסוקים הקודמים. ועוד דלא שייך בהם כל כף שמחה ואינם ראויים להקרא טוב בסתם. ומשום הכי פירש דמיירי בזכות התורה שהוא גורם במעשרותיו, ועל כן משה מזהיר את ישראל "עשר תעשר" דהיינו "עשר" בשביל שתתעשר שבנדאי תתקיים הבטחה זו שתתעשר, שאם לא היית מתעשר היית אומר שנה הפהג או הלוי לא למד או אינו ראוי ובשביל זה לא נתעשרת.

If so, the midrash says, “you shall rejoice in all the good which the L-rd your G-d has given you,” you must necessarily say this refers to the good of the World to Come, which is what the Torah explains, for the good of this world was already discussed in previous verses. Further, [the good things in this world] shouldn’t be considered to bring so much joy compared to what can await in the World to Come, and it is not suitable for [the good things in this world] to simply be called “good,” for we said above that “good” refers to Torah and to its blessings, which we know that regarding Torah study, “man enjoys the fruits in this world while the principal remains for him in the World to Come.”³ Therefore, it’s explained that it’s talking about the merit of the Torah, which He brings about through [Israel’s] tithes. Therefore, Moses warned Israel, “you shall surely tithe,” which is “tithe” [עשר] [aser] so that you will

² Our current edition of Sanhedrin states that “one does not give the heave-offering [תרומה] [terumah] to a priest who is an *am ha’aretz*. The passage appears in Chullin 130b stating “a gift” [מתנה] [matana]. Perhaps Rabbi Nachmani used Chullin 130b instead of Sanhedrin 90b, or he may have had a version of Sanhedrin that stated “a gift.”

³ Mishnah Peah 1:1.

become wealthy [תִּתְעַשֵּׂר] [*titasher*],⁴ **for certainly this promise that you will become wealthy will be fulfilled, for if you don't become wealthy, I would say that this priest or Levite to whom they had given the tithes had not learned Torah or was not suited to receive the tithe for some other reason, and because of this you didn't become rich.** As explained above, G-d wouldn't reverse His word that was given through a messenger or prophet, as He wouldn't allow a true messenger or prophet to be labeled as a false prophet, and thus to be subject to death.

וְאֶפְשֶׁר שְׁזָהוּ הַטַּעַם שֶׁדִּוְקָא בְּמִצְוָה זוֹ שָׂרִי לְנִסְוִי הַקַּב"ה דְּכִתִּיב "וּבְחִנּוּנֵי נָא בְּזֹאת", לְפִי שְׁזָהוּ נִקְרָא כְּמוֹ מֵה שְׁמִבְטִיחַ עַל יְדֵי נְבִיא וְשְׁלִיחַ שְׂאִינּוּ יָכוֹל לְחַזֹּר בּוֹ.

It's possible that this is why that especially for this mitzvah it is possible to put the Holy One, Blessed be He, to the test, as it says, "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, and let there be food in My House, and thus put Me to the test—said the L-rd of Hosts; I will surely open the floodgates of the sky for you and pour down blessings on you" (Malachi 3:10). This is possible because this is considered something that was promised by a prophet and a messenger, that He cannot reverse [the promise].

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⁴ "Tithe" [עֶשֶׂר] [*aser*] and "wealthy" [עֲשִׂיר] [*ashir*] have the same root.