

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter LIX: Kohelet (Ecclesiastes)

### Essay 4. The reward of giving charity

"מה-יתרון העושה באשר הוא עמל" כלומר אם עקר הצדקה תלויה בלב טוב של האדם ואין הצדקה משתלמת אלא לפי גמילות חסדים שבה. אם כן אם האדם לא יתנדב אלא בטורח ובעמל וביגיעה ועל כרחו, מה יתרון לו בצדקה שהיא? וזהו מה יתרון יש לעושה אם אינו עושה אלא בעמל ובעל כרחו. אבל מי שמתנדב בלב שלם ובשמחה יהיה לו יתרון רב ושקר גדול, וכיוצא בזה בשאר המצוות.

Eccl. 3:9 is typically translated as, “**What profit does the worker have from his toil?**,” but could instead be translated as, “**What profit does the doer have from his toil.**” What is the man doing? He is giving charity, per the Zera Shimshon. **This is asking if the essence of charity depends upon the good heart of the man,** as it says in the Gemara:

Rabbi Elazar said: [The reward for] **charity is paid** [from Heaven] **only in accordance with the kindness** [included] **therein** [and in accordance with the effort and the consideration that went into the giving]. [It is not merely in accordance with the sum of money] as it is stated: “Sow righteousness for yourselves; reap the fruits of goodness” (Hosea 10:12).

- Sukkah 49b

**If so, if the person only gives charity through effort, and toil, and hardship, and by his necessity of following halacha, what profit does he have by this charity? This is the meaning of the verse, asking, what profit is there for one who does the mitzvah of giving charity, if he only does so with effort, toil, and hardship, i.e., he resents having to give charity? But he who donates wholeheartedly and happily will have a great profit and a big reward, and similarly with one who fulfills the rest of the commandments wholeheartedly and happily, instead of looking upon them as a burden.**

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**אִי נָמִי** בְּדַרְךְ אַחֲרַת, הֲלֵא אָמְרוּ ו"ל גְּדוֹל הַמַּעֲשֵׂה יוֹתֵר מִן הַעוֹשֶׂה. אֲכַל מִי שֶׁמַּעֲצָמוֹ יְכוּף אֶת טַבְעוֹ, שְׂלֵא הִנֵּה רוֹצֵה לְהִתְנַדֵּב, וְהוּא מְקַרֵּים אֶת יִצְרוֹ וְטוֹרֵם עַל זֶה כְּדֵי שֶׁתִּהְיֶה דַעְתּוֹ רְצוּיָה לְהִתְנַדֵּב בְּלֵב שְׂמֵחַ, אִזּוּ יִקְבַּל שְׂכָר גְּדוֹל יוֹתֵר מִמִּי שֶׁהוּא נָדִיב בְּטַבְעוֹ שֶׁאֵין צוֹרֵךְ לוֹ לְטְרוֹם וְלַעֲמוֹל לְכוּף אֶת יִצְרוֹ. וְזֶהוּ שֶׁאָמַר הַכְּתוּב מֵהוּ סוּף הִיתְרוֹן שֶׁיֵּשׁ לְ"עוֹשֶׂה בְּאִשְׁרֵי הוּא עֹמֵל", דִּהְיִינוּ שְׂלֵא הִנֵּה לוֹ טַבַּע לִהְיוֹת נָדִיב וְהוּא עוֹמֵל וְטוֹרֵם לְכוּף אֶת יִצְרוֹ, וְזֶהוּ סוּף הִיתְרוֹן שְׂלוֹ, שֶׁהָרִי הוּא יִקְבַּל שְׂכָר כְּעוֹשֶׂה וְכַמַּעֲשֵׂה שֶׁהָרִי גַם הוּא מַעֲשֵׂה אֶת עֲצָמוֹ.

**Alternatively, in another way, haven't [the rabbis] of blessed memory said, "One who causes others to perform [a meritorious act] is greater than one who performs [that act himself]."**<sup>1</sup> **But one who by himself bends his nature—for he did not previously want to donate, but he subdues his evil inclination and he imposes upon himself such that he will have the desire to donate with a happy heart—then he will receive a greater reward than one who is generous in nature who does not have to bother and toil to conquer his evil inclination. This is what the Scripture said: What is the end benefit of the doer from his toil. That is, he did not have the nature to be generous and he labors and troubles to conquer his evil inclination, and this is the end of his benefit, for he will receive a reward as one who does [a meritorious act] and also as one who causes others to do [a meritorious act], for he has also caused himself to do this mitzvah of giving charity.**

**וְעוֹד** בְּדַרְךְ אַחֲרַת הֲלֵא אָמְרוּ ו"ל "מִי הַקְדִּימִנִי וְאֲשַׁלֵּם" מִי עֹשֶׂה לְפָנַי צְדָקָה עַד שְׂלֵא נִתְתִּי לוֹ מְעוֹת וּנְכֹסִים? וְכֵן אָמַר הַתַּנָּא תָּן לוֹ מִשְׁלוֹ, שֶׁאֲתָה וְשָׁלַף שְׂלוֹ. וְלִפִּי זֶה הִנֵּה מְקוּם לוֹמַר שֶׁאֵינוּ מִן הָרְאוּי שֶׁיִּהְיֶה לְאָדָם כֹּל כֶּף שְׂכָר בְּנִתְיַנֵּת הַצְּדָקָה, שֶׁהָרִי אֵינוּ נוֹתֵן כְּלוּם מִשְׁלוֹ אֶלָּא מִשְׁלֵי הַקַּב"ה שֶׁכִּבְרָתָן לּוֹ.

**Also, in another way of analysis, didn't [the rabbis] of blessed memory say, "Who has advanced Me [anything] that I should repay [him]? Everything under Heaven belongs to Me!' (Job 41:3). Who performed the mitzvah of charity in front of Me, before I gave him money and possessions?"**<sup>2</sup> **And the Tanna,**<sup>3</sup> **Rabbi Elazar of Bartota, said: "Give to Him of that which is His, for you and that which is yours are His."**<sup>4</sup> **According to this, there's room to say that it's improper that a man should receive such a great reward for giving charity, for he's not giving anything of his own, rather he's giving something that the Holy One, Blessed be He, previously gave to him.**

<sup>1</sup> Bava Batra 9a, quoting Rabbi Elazar.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Midrash Tanchuma, Emor, 7:1, citing Job 41:3, and adding, "Who offered Me praise, before I gave him breath? Who has performed circumcision for Me, before I gave him a male child? Who made a fringe for Me, before I gave him a prayer shawl?" Other examples are provided there, though not charity.

<sup>3</sup> A rabbi quoted in the Mishnah.

<sup>4</sup> Pirkei Avot 3:7.

אֵלֶּא שְׂבִמָּה שְׁאָמְרוּ ו"ל "וּבִרְכָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ" יְכוּל יְהִי יוֹשֵׁב וּבִטֵּל? תִּלְמוּד לֹא מֵר "בְּכָל־מִשְׁלַח יָדָךְ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה". אִם כֵּן אָדָם זֹכֵה בְּעוֹשֶׂה וּנְכֻסִים מִמִּתְנַת הַקַּב"ה נֹאֵף עַל יְדֵי עֲמָלוֹ, שְׁעַל יְדֵי טְרַחוֹ וְעֲמָלוֹ בָּאוּ לוֹ הַנְּכֻסִים. וְאִם יִתֵּן לְצַדִּיקָה יִהְיֶה לוֹ הַשְּׂכָר בְּשִׁבִיל שְׁנוּתָן מִמָּה שְׁזָכָה בְּעֲמָלוֹ. וְזֶהוּ פִירוּשׁ הַפְּסוּק "מִה־יִתְרוֹן הָעוֹשֶׂה" הֲלֵא הַכֹּל הוּא מִהַקַּב"ה, וְתִירֵץ "בְּאֲשֶׁר הוּא עֲמָל" גַּם הוּא יֵשׁ לוֹ חֵלֶק בָּהֶם לְפִי שְׂבָאוֹ מִחֲמַת טְרַחוֹ וְעֲמָלוֹ.

**Rather, regarding what [the rabbis] of blessed memory said, “the L-rd, your G-d, will bless you” (Deut. 15:18), is it possible He will sit idly? We learn that G-d is involved “in all the enterprises you undertake.”<sup>5</sup> If so, a man merits wealth and property from a gift of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and even by his labor, that by his toil and his labor the possessions came to him. Then, if he gives to charity, he will have the reward for giving from what he has merited by his labor. This is the explanation of the verse, “What profit does the worker have,” for doesn’t everything come from the Holy One, Blessed be He? The solution, “from his toil,” is that he also will have a share in the [wealth and property], that comes because of his toil and his labor. That is, G-d can arrange for some men to receive wealth even if they never work, but in other cases, G-d chooses to give man wealth in proportion to how much effort the man exerts in his labor. Thus, one who toils and gives a portion to charity can be looked at not as someone who is merely giving away G-d’s property, but as giving away some of his own wealth.**

**וְעוֹד** בְּדֶרֶךְ אַחֲרַת אָמְרוּ ו"ל שְׂכֵן דְרַכּוֹ שֶׁל גּוֹמֵל חֲסָדִים לְרוּץ אַחֲרֵי דָלִים, דְּהֵינּוּ לְתַת לָהֶם הַצְּדָקָה קוֹדֵם שִׁישְׂאֻלֵהּ. וְזֶהוּ "מִה־יִתְרוֹן הָעוֹשֶׂה" וְתִירֵץ "בְּאֲשֶׁר הוּא עֲמָל" לְרִדּוֹף אַחֲרֵיהֶם וּלְהַכִּין לָהֶם הַצְּדָקָה קוֹדֵם שִׁישְׂאֻלֵהּ.

**Also, in another way of analysis, [the rabbis] of blessed memory said, “Indeed, it is the manner of one who bestows loving-kindness to pursue the poor,”<sup>6</sup> which means to give them charity even before they ask for it. This is the meaning of “What profit does the doer have,” and “from his toil” is solved to mean to pursue after [the poor] and to prepare charity for them even before they ask for it.**

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<sup>5</sup> Deut. 28:20: “The L-rd will let loose against you calamity, panic, and frustration *in all the enterprises you undertake*, so that you shall soon be utterly wiped out because of your evildoing in forsaking Me.” While this verse is directed to a curse, the point is that just as G-d will involve Himself in every detail of someone’s life for a curse, He will do the same when He wants to bless someone.

<sup>6</sup> Shabbat 104a.