

צְדָקָה

Tzedakah

Listen to the words of Yeshua:

“When therefore you give tzedakah, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give tzedakah, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your tzedakah may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.” (Matt 6:2-4)

What do you suppose Yeshua meant about not letting your right hand know what your left hand is doing? Well, He was teaching us a principle about Tzedakah which many of the other Sages also taught, namely, that when you give Tzedakah you should do so without embarrassing the person you’re giving to, and without drawing attention to yourself. Not letting your right hand know what your left hand is doing was a way of saying that you did it in secret. Now that has to do with *why* you give Tzedakah. If we give Tzedakah to those in need so that others will look at us and say, “my, what a righteous person he is” or “what a wonderful lady she is”, then we’re giving Tzedakah for the wrong reason. We should give to help those who are in need because we love HaShem, and because He has commanded us to give Tzedakah. The Torah teaches us to help the poor with food, with gifts, with hospitality—in general, helping them wherever they have need. So when we help the poor, we are first and foremost obeying G-d. If this is our motivation, we won’t care if anyone sees or knows that we’ve helped someone else. That’s how HaShem wants us to give Tzedakah.

That’s why we put the Tzedakah box at the back of the synagogue instead of taking up a collection—we want everyone to be able to give privately, without making a show. What is more, no one should feel embarrassed if they have nothing to give. Each should give as HaShem prospers. Giving as HaShem prospers us reminds us of a very important truth: all of our wealth comes from HaShem. No matter how hard we work or plan, in the end, what we have comes from Him. So it makes sense to honor HaShem by giving to others.

Once a business man came to Rebbe Schneerson. He complained that his profits were far too low in every business venture he pursued, no matter how hard he or his partners worked. “And how much of these profits do you give to charity?” the Rebbe asked. The man shamefacedly replied that he had given none. “In your next venture,” the Rebbe suggested, “make G-d your partner by contributing ten percent of your profits to charity. G-d, like any good business partner, will then do everything in His power to ensure that the business succeeds.”