

Parshas Reeh-We are all Brothers by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Devarim 15:7 we read, 'If there be a destitute person among you any of your brothers in any of your cities in the land that Hashem will give you shall not harden you or close your hand to your poor brother.' Rashi tells us the mesorah we have on this verse which is that it teaches us priorities in whom to give tzedaka. The brother from one's father's side takes priority over the brother from the mother's side. One's brother takes priority over other relatives. The poor of one's city take priority over the poor from another city. This is the halachic explanation of the above verse.

Perhaps because of the way the verse is phrased we can understand the verse homiletically a little bit differently. While the halachic explanation remains, in a way of mussar we can learn an important lesson. Drashos very often give us a mussar or a moral lesson independent of the halachic understanding.

It is noteworthy that the Torah here uses the word brother for a fellow Jew. Sometimes the Torah uses the word brother and sometimes uses the word friend. Each mitzvah has a specific lesson to teach us and the Torah changes the phraseology accordingly. When we see fellow Jew who is poor, we should see him as our brother. Not a strange Jew from Yerushalayim, Bnai Brak or even Syria or Persia. It does not matter that he does not speak the same language as we do. No matter how culturally different he may appear to be, no matter that his orientation may be different from ours, he is *Achicha Haevion*, your poor brother. If, chas veshalom, someone close to us became destitute, we would not approach him as a stranger and we would help any way we can. And even if we could not help so much financially, nevertheless, we would be so exceedingly careful with how we deal with him. Indeed, even if we cannot give money we must always be very careful to empathize with the poor person. We should make it clear that we would like to help more. If we do the mitzvah of Tzedaka properly the Torah promises that we will only receive brachos in all that we do. Tzedaka money does not belong to us in the first place. It was merely deposited with us.

In addition, when we give we should give with a good eye and heart and not 'have a bad heart' when we give. Indeed there are more brachos for a person who gives willingly as the Gemara in Baba Basra 9B tells us one who gives money for Tzedaka receives six brachos and one who appeases the poor one with words receives eleven brachos as deduced from Yeyshaya 58:11-12, 'Then Hashem will guide you always, satisfy your souls in times of drought and strengthen your bones and you will be like a well-watered garden and a spring whose waters never run dry. Age-old ruins will be rebuilt and you will erect foundations for generations and they will call you fixer of the breach restorer of paths for habitation.'