

Parshas Re'eh 5775 | 1

“נראה הטעם, דאילו היה מאמין שהכל בא מהקב”ה, ודאי שהיה נותן [צדקה]. כדאמרינן (אבות ב”ג מ”ז) תן לו משלו, שאתה ושלך שלו, ועל כרחך שחושב (דברים ח-יז) כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה את כל החיל הזה, ולכך חשוב כאילו עובד עבודת כוכבים.”

If the person truly believed that everything comes from HKB”H, he would surely have given tzedakah—as it states (Avos 3, 7): “Give him from what is His; for you and yours belong to Him.” Hence, it is certain that he believes (Devarim 8, 17): “My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!” Therefore, it is considered as if he worships idols.

Since this is such an important subject, we shall elaborate on this fundamental idea, based on a warning provided by the Torah in parshas Eikev. The Torah warns us that abundant wealth and possessions can corrupt a person to the point that he forgets Hashem (ibid. 11):

“השמר לך פן תשכח את ה' אלקיך... פן תאכל ושבעת ובתים טובים תבנה וישבת, ובקרך וצאנך ירביון וכסף וזהב ירבה לך וכל אשר לך ירבה, ורם לבבך ושכחת את ה' אלקיך המוציאך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים... ואמרת בלבבך כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה, וזכרת את ה' אלקיך כי הוא הגותן לך כח לעשות חיל.”

“Take care lest you forget Hashem, your G-d, by not observing His commandments . . . lest you eat and be satisfied, and you build good houses and settle, and your cattle and sheep increase, and you increase silver and gold for yourselves, and everything that you have will increase — and your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem, you G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery, . . . And you may say in your heart, ‘My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!’ Then you shall remember Hashem, your G-d, that it was He Who gave you strength to make wealth.”

Here we have an explicit statement regarding the inherent danger associated with the accumulation of wealth and property. It can cause a person to forget Hashem, his G-d, Who gives him the strength to earn wealth, chas v’shalom; instead, he credits himself with his own success, believing erroneously: “My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!” It should be apparent to any intelligent person that this is tantamount to avodah zarah. Therefore, it is not surprising that the wisest of all men, Shlomo HaMelech, states (Koheles 5, 12): “יש רעה חולה ראיתי תחת השמש עושר שמור לבעליו לדעתו” — there is a sickening evil that I have seen under the sun, riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune.

Now, there is a bona fide way of determining whether a person believes wholeheartedly that HKB”H is the source of his strength and wealth, or whether he believes that he is responsible for his own success and good fortune. If he gives of his wealth to the poor and to those who engage in Torah-study, it is solid proof that he

believes that HKB”H endowed him with this strength and wealth on the condition that he would distribute a portion of his wealth to the needy, like a treasurer in charge of the tzedakah funds.

The Ohr HaChaim hakadosh applies this concept to interpret the following passuk (Shemos 22, 24): “אם כסף תלוה את עמי את העני עמך” — when you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you. He explains: “If you see that your finances exceed your needs and you choose to lend money to My people, know full well that this portion (money) does not truly belong to you; it belongs, in fact, to the poor among you. This is a hint that you should open your hand and return to him that which was originally his.”

From his actions, it should be clear which category he falls into. If he refuses to give tzedakah to the poor and to those who engage in Torah-study, and keeps all of his wealth for himself instead, it is a tell-tale sign that he believes that his money and possessions are truly his. According to his misguided opinion, he earned that wealth, because of his hard work, business savvy and determination. This, in fact, is the message our blessed sages wished to convey with the statement: “If anyone averts his eyes from giving tzedakah, it is as if he worships idols.” His actions prove that in his heart he actually believes: “כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה.”

Money Is the Yetzer HaRa of Avodah Zarah

It appears that we can add a spicy tidbit to expand on this noble idea based on a precious introduction from the writings of the great Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, zy”a, in Igeret HaKodesh. It states in the Gemara (Yoma 69a) that the members of the Great Assembly—the Anshei Keneset HaGedolah—captured the yetzer hara of avodah zarah and abolished it. He explains that this does not mean that they abolished it completely, eliminating it from this world, but rather that they succeeded in eliminating and altering its influence; it could no longer persuade human beings to actually worship a real avodah zarah. In its place, they allowed it to persuade human beings to pursue money and wealth—the current avodah zarah prevalent in our times. Here is what he writes:

“ושמעתי מגדול אחד שאמר, זה היצר הרע של עבודה זרה אנשי כנסת הגדולה הרגו אותו, זהו תמיהה גדולה, האיך אפשר להרוג המלאך שהוא גוף נקי זך ורוחני, אלא רק שהעבירו מאומנתו ראשונה, אם כן מזה הוא אומנתו עתה, הלא כל מלאך נברא לאיזה שליחות, אלא שנותנים לו אומנות הממוון, לבלבל בני אדם ברדיפת ממון ועושר, שזהו קרוב לעבודה זרה בעוונותינו הרבים, רק צריך להיות וותרן בממון, כמו שמצינו ביעקב אבינו ע”ה שהיה וותרן בממונו ונתן חומש מכל, כמו שכתוב (בראשית כח-כב) וכל אשר נתן לי עשר אעשרנו לך.”

I heard the following from a great scholar. It is difficult to comprehend how the Anshei Keneset HaGedolah could have killed the yetzer hara of avodah zarah. How is it possible to kill

a malach that is a pure, spiritual creature? Rather, it means that they altered how it operates. So, what is its current mode of operation? After all, every malach is created with a particular mission. Now, it focuses on money; it confuses people by persuading them to pursue money and wealth. This ranks along with avodah zarah, among our countless transgressions. It is vital to be generous with money, as we find with Yaakov Avinu, a”h. He was generous with his money and gave away one fifth of everything he owned, as it is written (Bereishis 28, 22): “And whatever You will give me, I will surely give a tenth to You.”

We can find support for this interpretation based on the exposition in the Gemara concerning the “cheit ha’eigel” (Berachos 32a):

“ודי זהב, אמרי דבי רבי ינאי, כך אמר משה לפני הקב”ה, רכוננו של עולם בשביל כסף--from the words “ודי זהב” [which appear in sefer Devarim (1, 1)], the academy of Rabbi Yannai derived that Moshe presented the following argument before HKB”H: Master of the Universe, because you lavished silver and gold upon Yisrael until they said, “Enough!”; that is what caused them to make the Golden Calf.

Based on what we have just learned, we can suggest the following explanation. Seeing as an abundance of silver and gold represents a subcategory of avodah zarah; therefore, the abundance of silver and gold caused them to fall and actually worship a true form of avodah zarah.

With this incredible insight—that the avodah zarah prevalent in society today is man’s lust for money and profit—we can begin to solve an obscure riddle concerning man’s natural tendency to covet and lust for money. We see that the more money a person accumulates, the greater his lust for money. The Midrash teaches us (Koheles Rabbah 1, 13): “אין אדם יוצא מן העולם וחצי תאוותו בידו, אלא אן אית ליה מאה, בעי למעבד יתהון תרתין מאון, ואן אית ליה תרתין מאון, בעי למעבד יתהון ארבעה מאה—a person does not leave this world with only half of his craving in his hand; if a person possesses one hundred, he wants to turn it into two hundred; if he has two hundred, he wants to turn it into four hundred.

At first glance, this seems to defy logic. It is certainly true that man’s inclination is to lust for money and profit. Why, however, does the more a person has cause him to desire double that amount? Seemingly, the opposite should hold true. The more money a person has, he should become less obsessed and his lust for profit should steadily decrease.

Based on what we have learned, however, the matter makes perfect sense. The Anshei Kenesses HaGedolah transferred the yetzer hara in charge of avodah zarah to be in charge of monetary pursuits—also a form of avodah zarah. For, the abundance of wealth

is liable to cause a person to fall prey to the sacrilegious belief of the yetzer of: “כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה”—denying the influence and gifts of Hashem.

It turns out, therefore, that the more money a person possesses, his potential for avodah zarah increases. This is an example of (Avos 4, 2): “עבירה גוררת עבירה”—one aveirah leads to another aveirah. The avodah zarah that he already possesses leads to an enhancement of his lust for profit. Thus, the cycle is never-ending; this particular yetzer hara gets stronger and stronger.

The solution is to follow the advice of Rabbi Elazar in Igeres HaKodesh cited above; one should follow in the footsteps of Yaakov Avinu, who set aside a portion of his wealth as tzedakah. By giving tzedakah to the poor, a person reveals that he believes wholeheartedly that HKB”H is the source of his strength, wealth and success. In this manner, he shatters the false god of “my strength and my efforts”—“כוחי ועוצם ידי”.

Hence, we can suggest that this is the thrust of the admonition written in the Torah with regards to the mitzvah of tzedakah: “You shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother. Rather, you shall open your hand to him.” For, a person who closes his hand tightly and attempts to keep his money to himself, demonstrates that he has fallen prey to the yetzer of: “כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה”—he attributes his success to his own efforts and denies Hashem’s influence. Therefore, the Torah warns a person not to close his hands: “כי פתוח תפתח את ידך לו”—open your hands in order to abolish the avodah zarah of “כוחי ועוצם ידי”.

This is the lesson Chazal teach us: “If anyone averts his eyes from giving tzedakah, it is as if he worships idols.” By refusing to give tzedakah, he demonstrates that he has fallen prey to the yetzer hara of the false god of money and affluence. He no longer believes that HKB”H is the source of his power and his success, and that HKB”H entrusted him with this money to act as an administrator responsible for distributing funds to the poor and needy. Instead, he believes that he earned his wealth of his own accord, in keeping with the misguided belief of: “כוחי ועוצם ידי”. This truly constitutes a form of avodah zarah, which he must abolish by fulfilling the mitzvah of tzedakah.

The Magnificent Elucidation of the Parashas Derachim

It is with great pleasure that I would like to present on the royal table the magnificent elucidation found in the sefer Parashat Derachim, written by the great author of the Mishneh LaMelech, regarding the statement: “כל המעלים עיניו מן הצדקה כאילו עובד עבודת כוכבים—if anyone averts his eyes from giving tzedakah, it is as

if he worships idols. He teaches us a very important principle; HKB”H commanded us to give tzedakah to the poor, because we have the status of being the Almighty’s children. We learn this from the following Gemara (B.B. 10a):

”שאל טורנוסרופוס הרשע את רבי עקיבא, אם אלקיכם אוהב עניים הוא מפני מה אינו מפרנסם, אמר לו כדי שניצול אנו בהן מדינה של גיהנם. אמר לו אדרבה זו שמחייבת לגיהנם. אמשול לך משל למה הדבר דומה, למלך בשר ודם שכעס על עבדו וחבשו בבית האסורין, וצוה עליו שלא להאכילו ושלא להשקותו, והלך אדם אחד והאכילו והשקהו, כששמע המלך לא כועס עליו, ואתם קרוין עבדים שנאמר (ויקרא כה-נה) כי לי בני ישראל עבדים.

אמר לו רבי עקיבא אמשול לך משל למה הדבר דומה, למלך בשר ודם שכעס על בנו וחבשו בבית האסורין, וצוה עליו שלא להאכילו ושלא להשקותו, והלך אדם אחד והאכילו והשקהו, כששמע המלך לא דורון משגר לו, ואנן קרוין בנים דכתיב (דברים יד-א) בנים אתם לה’ אלקיכם.”

The wicked Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva: If your G-d loves poor people, why doesn’t he provide for them? He replied: So that by giving them tzedakah, we may be saved from the judgment of Gehinnom. Turnus Rufus responded: On the contrary! This is what condemns you to Gehinnom. I shall provide you with an analogy. This is analogous to a human king who was angry at his servant and confined him in prison; he ordered that he not be given food or drink. One man went and fed him and gave him drink. When the king hears of this, won’t he be angry at this man?! And you are called servants, as it says: “For unto Me are Bnei Yisrael servants.”

Rabbi Akiva responded: I shall provide you with an analogy. This matter is analogous to a human king who was angry at his son and confined him in prison; he ordered that he not be given food or drink. One man went and fed him and gave him drink. When the king hears of this, won’t he send the man a reward?! And we are called sons, as it is written: “Sons are you to Hashem, your G-d.”

Here we learn an important principle. The reason we are permitted to give the poor tzedakah is because we have the status of being the Almighty’s children. It pleases the King that we are feeding His children. Now, if we were merely considered the Almighty’s servants, we would be prohibited from giving tzedakah to the poor. Then it would be analogous to the case of the king who was angry with his servant and ordered that no one give him food or drink.

“What you have in mind shall never come to pass!”

Based on this fundamental notion that Yisrael are considered to be G-d’s children, the Parashas Derachim interprets HKB”H’s statement to Yisrael delivered by the prophet Yechezkel (Yechezkel

20, 32): **”והעולה על רוחכם היו לא תהיה, אשר אתם אומרים נהיה כגוים כמשפחות הארצות לשרת עץ ואבן, חי אני נאום ה’ אלקים אם לא ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה ובחימה—What enters your thoughts—it shall not be! What you say: “We will be like the nations, like the families of the lands, to serve wood and stone.” As I live—the words of my Lord, Hashem, Elokim—with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured fury will I rule over you.** The Gemara explains the crux of the argument that ensued between Yisrael and Yechezkel hanavi (Sanhedrin 105a):

”באו עשרה בני אדם וישבו לפניו, אמר להן חזרו בתשובה, אמרו לו עבד שמכרו רבו ואשה שגרשה בעלה, כלום יש לזה על זה כלום. אמר לו הקב”ה לנביא, לך אמור להן (ישעיה נ-א), איזה ספר כריתות אמכם אשר שלחתיה, או מי מנושי אשר מכרתי אתכם לו, הן בעוונותיכם נמכרתם ובפשעכם שלחתם אמכם... והעולה על רוחכם היה לא תהיה, אשר אתם אומרים נהיה כגוים כמשפחות הארצות לשרת עץ ואבן, חי אני נאום ה’ אלקים אם לא ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה ובחימה שפוכה אמלך עליכם.”

Ten men came and sat before him. He said to them: Return by means of teshuvah. They said to him: A slave whose master has sold him or a wife whose husband has divorced her, do they continue to have any claim on one another? (Since HKB”H sold us to Nevuchadnetzar and divorced us from Himself, does He continue to have any hold on us?) Then HKB”H said to the navi: Go say to them (Yeshayah 50, 1): “Where is the divorce document of your mother whom I dismissed? And which of My creditors was it to whom I sold you off? It was for your sins that you were sold off, and your mother was dismissed for your crimes.”... “What you have in mind shall never come to pass! What you say, ‘We will be like the nations, like the families of the lands, to worship wood and stone.’ As I live-- the words of my Lord, Hashem, Elokim—with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured fury will I rule over you.”

The Parashas Derachim explains that in that generation Yisrael were of the opinion that they had the status of servants of the Almighty. Therefore, they argued: **“A slave whose master has sold him . . . do they continue to have any claim on one another?”** Clearly, a slave whose master has sold him to another master is no longer the property of the first master and is no longer obligated to him. To this argument, HKB”H responded: **“What you have in mind shall never come to pass! . . . As I live--the words of my Lord, Hashem, Elokim—with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured fury will I rule over you.”** Yisrael does not possess the status of a servant to the Almighty, allowing them to go free and do as they please; they are the children of the Almighty and have a part of the divine within them. As such, they are bound irrevocably to their Father in Heaven. So, if they fail to perform teshuvah of their own accord, He will rule over them like a king who rules over his children with fury in order to return them to good standing.

This clarifies Chazal's statement very nicely: **"If anyone averts his eyes from giving tzedakah, it is as if he worships idols."** For, anyone who casts a blind eye on the act of tzedakah demonstrates that he views himself as a servant of the Almighty's. Therefore, he believes that it is prohibited to give tzedakah to the poor—analogous to the king who ordered that no one give his disenfranchised servant food or drink. According to this viewpoint, we can interpret Yisrael's argument in the times of Yechezkel: **"We will be like the nations, like the families of the lands, to worship wood and stone."** They wanted to worship avodah zarah just like all of the other nations, because they had been released from HKB"H's servitude, chas v'shalom, and were free to do as they pleased. In this light, we can understand Chazal's statement: **"If anyone averts his eyes from giving tzedakah, it is as if he worships idols."** This is the gist of the Parashat Derachim's explanation.

Redeem Your Error with Tzedakah

Continuing this line of thought, let us proceed to expound on the continuation of the passuk: **ורעה עיניך באחריך האביון ולא תתן לו וקרא "עליך אל ה' והיה בך חטא"—and you will look malevolently upon your destitute brother and you will not give him—then he will call out against you to Hashem, and there will be sin upon you.** First, let us explain the well-known fact that the mitzvah of tzedakah has the power to provide atonement for one's transgressions, as it is written (Daniel 4, 24): **"והטאך בצדקה פרוק"—redeem your sin with tzedakah.** Likewise, we proclaim in the piyut on the High Holidays: **"ותשובה ותפלה וצדקה מעבירין את רוע הגזירה"—and teshuvah and tefilah and tzedakah avert the evil (brunt) of the decree.**

It appears that we can provide an explanation based on the well-known fact that teshuvah is only effective for Yisrael. The source for this notion comes from the Midrash Tanchuma (Ha'azinu 4): **כתבי: (במדבר ו-כ) ישא ה' פניו אליך, וכתוב אחד אומר אשר לא ישא פנים, עושה תשובה נושא"—it is written in the passuk: "May Hashem show you favor." Yet, in another passuk, it is written: "He will not show favor (deferential treatment)." If he performs teshuvah, He shows him favor. Does this apply to everyone? We learn from the passuk "to you"—implying that this does not apply to any other nation.**

Now, there is a well-known principle regarding teshuvah that we learn from the great gaon Chida, ztz"l. He explains in Rosh David (Emor) why teshuvah is effective for Yisrael but not for goyim. For, the Gemara states (Kiddushin 32a): **"האב שמחל על כבודו - כבודו מחול"** — a father is permitted to forego his honor. Seeing as HKB"H is Yisrael's father and we are His children, He is permitted to forego His honor and accept our teshuvah. With respect to the goyim, however, HKB"H is a king, as it is written in Tehillim (47, 9): **"מלך אלקים על גוים" — G-d reigns as King over the nations (goyim).** Concerning this latter

situation, the Gemara teaches (Kiddushin 32b): **מלך שמחל על כבודו אין כבודו מחול** —even if a king renounces his honor, it is not renounced. Therefore, it is inappropriate to accept their acts of teshuvah.

Accordingly, we can suggest that the reason the mitzvah of tzedakah is a beneficial and effective means of atoning for transgressions is because the person who gives tzedakah to the poor and needy demonstrates that Yisrael possess the status of the Almighty's children. In this capacity, it behooves them to give tzedakah, for it is analogous to the king who was angry with his son. Anyone who fed him or gave him to drink was rewarded. In this merit—"midah k'neged midah"—HKB"H forgives a person for his transgressions. He is like a father Who forgoes His honor. If a person neglects giving tzedakah, however, he demonstrates that we possess the status of the Almighty's servants. In that case, his transgressions are not forgiven, because a king cannot forego his honor.

Now, we can provide a very nice and satisfactory interpretation of the remainder of the passuk: **"Beware lest there be an irreverent thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year approaches, the year of release,' and you will look malevolently upon your destitute brother and you will not give him—then he will call out against you to Hashem, and there will be sin upon you."** In other words, beware that you do not harbor in your heart a form of avodah zarah, referred to as **"בליעל"—irreverent.** (Recall that this is derived from the fact that this same word is also employed in relation to an "ir hanidachas.") Then the passuk goes on to explain what irreverent act it is referring to: **"And you will look malevolently upon your destitute brother and you will not give him"**—because anyone who averts his eyes from tzedakah is considered to be an idolater—a worshipper of avodah zarah.

Then the passuk goes on to explain the great harm such a person causes to himself: **"Then he will call out against you to Hashem."** The Torah is informing us that the poor person is justified in complaining to HKB"H regarding the fact that he is not being given tzedakah. After all, HKB"H is his father and wants people to feed and sustain His son. So, if a person does not give tzedakah, because he is of the opinion that we have the status of the Almighty's servants, and as such it is prohibited to give tzedakah: **"There will be sin upon you"**—all of the sins you have committed will remain in force. After all, according to your point-of-view HKB"H is not permitted to forego His honor; for, even if a king renounces his honor, it is not renounced.

The Amazing Connection between "נעשה אדם" and the Mitzvah of Tzedakah

As it is the nature of Torah to be elucidated in seventy different ways, I would like to present my own elucidation of the statement: **"If anyone averts his eyes from giving tzedakah, it is as if he worships idols."** Let

us refer to the following passuk regarding the creation of man (Bereishis 1, 26): "וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ" -- and G-d said, "Let us make man in our image, as our likeness." Rashi notes that our blessed sages question the usage of the term "נַעֲשֶׂה"—let us make—in the plural. As we all know, HKB"H is singular; He is the One and Only. Rashi answers that HKB"H employed the plural term "נַעֲשֶׂה", to indicate that He consulted with the malachim regarding the creation of man. HKB"H wished to teach us a lesson in humility; it is essential for bigger and greater individuals to seek out the opinions and advice of those beneath them.

Additionally, we can justify HKB"H's use of the plural form "נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם" based on a tremendous chiddush we find in the Zohar hakadosh (Bereishis 13b). According to the Zohar, HKB"H was appealing to each and every Jew to give tzedakah to the needy. Here is the Hebrew translation of the passage in the Zohar:

"מִצְוַת תְּשִׁיעֵת לְרַחֵם עַל עֲנִיִּים וּלְתַתּוֹת לָהֶם מִזֶּן, דְּכַתִּיב נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ, נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם שִׁיחָא בְּשׁוֹתָפוֹת כָּלִל זָכָר וְנִקְבָּה, בְּצַלְמֵנוּ עֲשִׁירִים, כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ עֲנִיִּים, שְׁהָרִי הַעֲשִׁירִים הֵם בְּכַחֲנִית זָכָר וְהָעֲנִיִּים בְּכַחֲנִית נִקְבָּה, כְּמוֹ שֶׁהַזָּכָר וְהַנִּקְבָּה הֵם בְּשׁוֹתָפוֹת אַחַת, וּמִרְחֵם זֶה עַל זֶה, וְנוֹתֵן זֶה לָזֶה וְגוֹמֵל עִמּוֹ טוֹבָה, כֵּן צָרִיךְ לְהִיּוֹת הָאָדָם לְמִטָּה, שִׁיחָהּ הָעֲשִׁיר עִם הָעֲנִי בְּחִיבּוֹר אֶחָד, שִׁיתֵּן זֶה לָזֶה וְיִגְמֹל טוֹבָה זֶה לָזֶה."

The ninth commandment is to have mercy on the poor and give them food—as it is written, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Let us collaborate to make man, including male and female counterparts. "In our image" refers to the rich; "after our likeness" refers to the poor. For the rich represent the male, and the poor represent the female. Just as the male and female collaborate together, have mercy on one another, give to one another and do good for one another; so, too, should man be down below. The rich man and the poor man should be united as one; one should give to the other and one should do good for the other.

Let us endeavor to explain the holy Zohar's assertion that the proclamation "נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם" alludes to the mitzvah of tzedakah, based on another teaching in the Zohar (Eikev 273b) related to the passuk (Mishlei 10, 2 and 11, 4): "וְצִדְקָה תְּצִיל מָמוֹת, דְּעֲנִי חֹשֶׁב כְּמוֹת וְאִיהוּ מוֹחִיָּה לֵיהּ, אוֹף הִכִּי קוֹבֵה" —"but tzedakah rescues from death"; for a poor person has the status of a dead person and you revive him; similarly, HKB"H revives you. Let us explain. The Gemara (Nedarim 64b) teaches us that a poor person has the status of a dead person. Consequently, one who gives tzedakah to a poor person is in effect revitalizing the dead—"מַחִיָּה מֵתִים"; he is restoring the life force to a virtual dead person. Hence, "midah k'neged midah," he is spared from death.

With this understanding, the meaning of the Zohar hakadosh is now quite clear. With the proclamation "נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם" HKB"H was alluding to

the mitzvah of tzedakah. Seeing as a poor person is like a dead person, giving him tzedakah is tantamount to creating him anew. This is the message HKB"H was conveying: "נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם"—just as I made man when I created him, so, too, I request that every Jew join Me in making the poor person into a man—so that he will no longer be viewed as dead.

Now, we have a very nice explanation for the statement above: "If anyone averts his eyes from giving tzedakah, it is as if he worships idols." By averting his eyes from tzedakah, it is impossible to assert that the proclamation "נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם" in the plural was intended to teach him about giving tzedakah to the poor. Therefore, with regards to him personally, the words "נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם" in the plural imply the sacrilege, chas v'shalom, that there are two domains; this is tantamount to avodah zarah.

Let us spice this notion up a bit. Seemingly, an alternative explanation exists. Although the proclamation "נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם" cannot be interpreted as an allusion to the mitzvah of tzedakah with regards to such a person; nevertheless, it can be interpreted as Rashi does—to teach us a lesson in humility, to show us that HKB"H consulted with the lesser malachim. This interpretation, however, is also not viable.

For, we learned in the Gemara above: "The wicked Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva: If your G-d loves poor people, why doesn't he provide for them? He replied: So that by giving them tzedakah, we may be saved from the judgment of Gehinnom." We see from this Gemara that the mitzvah of tzedakah is intended to save mankind from the judgment of Gehinnom. It would stand to reason, therefore, that a person who refuses to give tzedakah is confident that he does not deserve Gehinnom. In truth, there is no greater form of false pride and arrogance than considering oneself to be a tzaddik. Accordingly, with regards to this person, we cannot interpret the proclamation of "נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם" as teaching us the virtue of humility. Therefore, by refusing to give tzedakah, the only alternative he has for interpreting the proclamation "נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם" in the plural is as an indication of the existence of two domains, chas v'shalom. Therefore, it is considered as if he worships avodah zarah.

In conclusion, we now have a deeper appreciation of the magnitude of the mitzvah of tzedakah. By giving tzedakah, a person abolishes the avodah zarah of: "וְאָמַרְתָּ בְּלִבְךָ כּוֹחִי וְעֹצְמִי יְדֵי עָשָׂה לִי אֵת"—denying what Hashem has given you by believing that you have accomplished everything on your own. Furthermore, in the merit of fulfilling the mitzvah of tzedakah, a person fulfills HKB"H's vision of: "נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם"—that we participate in the creation of the poor person by bringing him back to life and restoring his dignity. In this merit, HKB"H will fulfill His promise: "You shall surely give him, and let your heart not feel bad when you give him, for in return for this matter, Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all your deeds and in your every undertaking."

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