

Spreading Out Tzedakah

Once an illiterate farmer from a small village came to the market with his usual sacks of grain. Due to the farmer's limited scope of education, his mathematical acumen was, at best, poor. For every sack that he emptied into the silo, he made a mark on the wall noting the size and number of the sack. The farmer heard that recently the businessmen in the city had been maintaining a code of ethics that was far from scrupulous. They were constantly taking advantage of the hapless farmers. Our farmer came upon what he thought was a very astute plan which would protect his interests. He appeared before the buyer and placed his cap upon the table. He told the buyer that for every sack which he poured into silo, the buyer should place a gold coin into the hat. When they completed pouring the sacks they would count the coins and know the number of sacks that had been purchased.

The buyer left the room for a few moments to check on the quality of the grain. During this time our farmer, whose principles paralleled his literacy, decided to put his hands into the till and steal half of the coins before the buyer realized what had occurred. The fool did not realize that for every coin that he stole, he was losing the value of a sack of grain.

The Chofetz Chaim quipped, "The same things happens to those who think that a penurious attitude towards their money will increase their fortune. On the contrary, for every coin that they save, they ultimately lose material and spiritual assets.

In his inimitable manner the Dubno Maggid explains this with a parable. A man once came into the city with a wallet filled with one hundred dollars which he unfortunately lost. The next day, as he was walking down the street, he found a wallet containing two hundred dollars. While he was certainly happy with his newly found money, the consolation for his prior loss was limited. He reasoned, that had he not lost his original wallet, he would now possess three hundred dollars.

If, however, the bags of one who was transporting grain from place to place were to tear open and spill out all over the place, he surely would go home an unhappy man. If later on, when he happens by the area in which his seeds had dispersed, he were to see a field filled with full grown grain which had grown from the seeds that blew away, he would attribute his good fortune to his prior loss. Certainly, now he would be completely consoled over his loss. Likewise, we should realize that what we "spread out" for tzedakah will bear fruit only as a result of our sensitivity towards those less fortunate than we are.