

Shemini Atzeret

CHARITY

Deuteronomy 15:7-8

If there be among you a needy man, one of your brethren, within any of your gates, in your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart, nor shut your hand from your needy brother, but you shall surely open your hand unto him and shall surely lend him sufficient funds for his need in that which he wants.

Mishnah Peah 8:9

Anyone who does not need public charity and takes it will become dependent on others before he dies. And anyone who is in need of charity and does not take it, will support others from his own money before he dies of old age.

Bavli Baba Metzia 31b

“You shall surely open” (Deuteronomy 15:11). Here we learn that you must give to the poor of your own city. From where do I know that you must give to the poor of another city? The verse teaches “*Pato’ach tiftach*” (the verb for “open” is doubled)—meaning, in all cases.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the Torah tells us not to harden our hearts before telling us not to shut our hands? What connection is there between Pharaoh's hardened heart (*l'chabed lev*) and this hard heart (*l'ametz lev*)?
2. This mishnah gives us an example of "Jewish karma": What goes around comes around. Can you think of examples of this phenomenon in other Jewish sources? In your own life?
3. Far or near, large or small, the Gemara tells us we must give *tzedakah*. (The sages deduce this by a playful interpretation of the emphatic Hebrew double verb form. The sages make each part of the verb apply to a different situation.) What are some ways you can incorporate this idea of charity into your own life? Are there other ways to interpret this doubled form of the verb in our Torah text?

How could you double the amount of generosity in your life?