



"Tzedakah": A blind trust?

Who are the recipients of our charity?

I thought long and hard before writing the following words. For a couple of years, I dithered and I paused. For many months, I questioned whether I had the right to be critical of those seeking our assistance. But events that happened recently in Eretz Yisroel convinced me that some things had to be said, regardless of their sensitivity.

You may have read about it. Some weeks ago, a number of "chareidim" (quotation marks intended) in Beit Shemesh attacked a couple of chareidi soldiers -emphasis on chareidi- and the police had to intervene to rescue these soldiers and their families and shelter them from harm. A number of "chareidim" (including a 14-year old boy) were arrested and face criminal charges.

Unfortunately, this has become a common occurrence in some sections of Beit Shemesh and Jerushalaim. Please note that these soldiers are the brothers of these attackers, come from the same background and share the same teachers and leaders. Their only sin is that they have decided to reject the mantra of "kollel forever" and joined the Israeli army so to be able to enter the workplace after their service. The vast majority of these individuals remain chareidi in their beliefs and in their conduct throughout their lives. Yet, they are vilified viciously and, often, attacked by "chareidi" thugs.

This matter, as awful as it is, would not have merited a written reaction if I did not think that it spilled over in our lives here in the United States. Most of you reading this column attend daily prayers in shuls and shtiblech in Brooklyn, Monsey and elsewhere. And most of you are deluged daily by "meshulochim" asking for our charity in helping them for "hachnossas kallah" (marrying a child), caring for a sick relative or even just paying off one's debts. The great majority of these "meshulochim" come from Israel and virtually all of them are "chareidim".

For a long time, I did not begrudge these individuals, who descend in such great numbers on our shuls, the quarter or the dollar that they get from us. But in recent times, my thoughts drifted to the events in Israel that I mentioned. My thought was simply, am I giving tzedakah to someone who is actively encouraging these "chareidi" thugs that are such a disgrace? Did these same "meshulochim" who ask for our charity now march in Jerushalaim and shout "nazi" to a policeman doing his job? I do not have to go out on a limb and guess that the majority of these "meshulochim" are anti-zionists. Should I then subsidize such a person if I am a (chareidi) committed zionist to the core and resent the vicious attacks on chareidi soldiers and anyone who does not agree with their philosophy? Should I commit spiritual suicide by supporting my adversaries? Khrushchev, the Communist leader, once remarked that "the capitalists themselves will sell us the rope with which we will hang the capitalist society". In the same vein, are we giving people the means of subsequently excommunicating us, their benefactors, from the Jewish people?

Many readers will sigh and continue to give money to these meshulochim. My own conscience, though, is very disturbed at me giving any support to someone who would dismiss ME in the most vicious way if I would be living in Israel. Here, in the United States, apparently my money is good but in Israel, my views would be considered "apikorsus". That, my friends, is not a fair bargain.