

## “Good Fortune”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

In the Torah, each Israelite is told to give a half shekel. (Ex. 30:12) The Hebrew word for “and you shall give” is *v'natenu*. In Hebrew, *V'natenu* is a palindrome — it can be read the same way forwards and backwards. The Vilna Gaon comments that this is to remind us that one who gives today may need to receive tomorrow.

It is easy to confuse good luck with earned rewards. Many who are fortunate consider not their fortune but their merit. “Of course I have done well,” goes the self-satisfied refrain, “I worked hard.” That may be true, but many work hard and fail. Many work hard in environments, countries, and ages when hard work is not rewarded. Many are not born with the endowments that enable them to flourish, even with great effort.

Most of what we have in this life is a gift, and gifts are not always permanent. Therefore we are enjoined by our tradition to give to others, not out of largeness of heart — although that too is important — but out of simple justice. We have received so much, been so extravagantly blessed, who would deny the simple fairness of giving? As the Vilna Gaon reminds us, our good fortune is not an earned payment, but a bounty of God. We may fleetingly possess some of the goodness of this world, but ultimately, God’s benefactions belong to all.