

Does Family Come First?

**Rav Dovid Grossman, Rosh Bais HaVaad**

**Question:** When giving *ma'aser* to poor people, can one give priority to needy family members? Is one obligated to do so?

**Answer:** We learn from *pesukim* that needy relatives should be given priority when it comes to both giving loans and charity. There also is a concept that the poor of one's own city should take precedence over others. The general rule is that one should first give to those in his own circle who are reliant on him for assistance. An exception to this rule are the poor people of Eretz Yisroel, who are given priority status even though they are not from one's own city.

In a teshuva written by the Chasam Sofer, he suggests that although one's family members come first when giving tzedakah, one should preferably not give more than 50% of his *ma'aser* funds to relatives.

If one's minor children still live at home and are supported by their parents, one may not use *ma'aser* money to pay for their needs. A person may not use *ma'aser* money for personal obligations, and since one is obligated to support his children, he can't use *ma'aser* money for this. Although technically one only has this obligation until his children are 6 or 7 years old, Rav Moshe Feinstein says that it is accepted in today's society that parents support their children until they reach the age of self-sufficiency; therefore, *ma'aser* money cannot be used to support children under that age. Once a child is married and living on his/her own, a parent may use *ma'aser* money to support him/her, and he/she should be given the preference of a family member.

The Gemara in Kiddushin says that supporting one's parents with *ma'aser* money is a lack of *derech eretz*. It would, therefore, be preferable to support parents who need assistance with non-*ma'aser* money. However, if a child only has the ability to support his parents if he uses *ma'aser* money, he should definitely do so and he should give them preference over others.