

More Blessed to Give Rebbe Nachman on Charity

by Chaim Kramer

Investment advice

"A person can bring a special gift to a great king, but the king might not accept it from him. Even if the king does accept the gift, this does not guarantee that the person will be permitted to enter to see the king. God, however, does not act this way. If a person gives a contribution to the poor, he merits a revelation of God [even in this world]!" (*Bava Batra* 10a).

The commentaries explain point out that a revelation of God is a private experience. Therefore, the charity-giving being referred to is discreet giving, that does not embarrass the recipient. By the same token, giving that results in a revelation cannot be an act of self-aggrandizement. Now, use your imagination. Just by giving a small gift to the impoverished, a person merits experiencing God! Not a bad investment; not at all. The Talmud continues:

Rabbi Yochanan said: What is the meaning of, "One who shows mercy to the poor is a lender to God" (*Proverbs* 19:17). Were the verse not recorded, we would never be able to make such a statement. Scripture makes it clear that if we donate to the poor, it is considered as if we are lending money to God!

Note that God is not becoming a guarantor to replace the donor's money. Rather, Scripture emphasizes that God actually becomes a borrower — as if He Himself had signed a promissory note to repay the donor (Maharsha, loc. cit.). What better assurance or guarantee could one need when lending money, when it is common knowledge that the Debtor always has the means to return the loan?

"Men from among you will rebuild your ruins, they will restore the foundations of old" (*Isaiah* 58:12). Rabbi Tarfon, who was very wealthy, once gave 4,000 gold coins to Rabbi Akiva to invest for him. Rabbi Akiva, who was a manager of charitable funds, promptly gave away the money to poor yeshiva students so that they would be able to continue their studies.

A while later, Rabbi Tarfon asked to be shown his investment. Rabbi Akiva took him to the House of Study and began to recite Psalms with him. When they reached the verse (*Psalms* 112:9), "He gave generously to the needy, his merit endures forever, his strength is raised in honor," Rabbi Akiva pointed out to Rabbi Tarfon the poor students. "This is the investment I made on your behalf." Rabbi Tarfon was so pleased he embraced Rabbi Akiva and gave him another generous sum to distribute to the poor.

The Midrash cites this story to teach us that those who donate to charity are compared to those who rebuild ruins, those who restore destroyed foundations and those who reestablish life (*Mesekhta Kallah* 1; see also *Vayikra Rabbah* 34:16). As discussed in the previous essay, charity represents hope — hope

of salvation, hope for redemption.

The idea of charity as an investment, money that is given to a genuine "blue chip stock" and a business venture that returns substantial dividends, is based upon the verse, "'Bring all your tithes to the treasury...please test Me on this,' says God. 'Will I not open the floodgates of the Heavens and pour down upon you abundant blessings?'..." (*Malachi* 3:10). The Talmud teaches that though one is prohibited from challenging God, a person is actually permitted to test God to see if his giving tithes will bring him blessing (*Taanit* 9a)!

Furthermore, it is written, "*Aseir, t'aseir*, (tithe, you shall tithe), the crops of your fields" (*Deuteronomy* 14:22). Why the redundancy of the Hebrew word *aseir*? The answer is based on the etymology of the word. **ASeiR** (tithe) so that you should **t'ASHeiR** (become wealthy).

Tosafot (*Taanit* 9a, s.v. *aseir*) cites a Midrash of a man whose field yielded 1,000 bushels each year. He would always tithe the produce and give away 100 bushels for charity. When he passed away, he directed his son to do the same. The son briefly continued this custom, but felt he was giving away too much of his wealth. He decided to give only a small amount of his yield as tithes. The following year, his field produced 100 bushels worth of crops. His family said to him, "When you tithed properly, you were the landowner and God was the "priest" who received your tithe. Now that you decided to stop tithing, God took back His field. He is the landowner and you are the "priest." It is you who now receives the tithe, the 100 bushels."

One verse about charity states, "Open, you shall open your hand" (*Deuteronomy* 15:8). Rebbe Nachman asks, why "open" twice? He answers that every beginning has difficulties, which accounts for the struggle necessary to open the doors of opportunity. Charity has a rare and great power which can open all doors for a person. First "open" your hand to give charity. Then you will be able to "open" the doors of opportunity.

Understanding charity as the means to open doors and channels of blessing, and as the means to overcome obstacles and difficulties (e.g., when seeking or beginning a new job, or other new situations, such as marriage, birth of a child, changing residences), is presented in one of Rebbe Nachman's more intricate lessons (*Likutey Moharan* II, Lesson #4). God willing, we will discuss this lesson in later essays. With this fundamental teaching, we can begin to understand why one who gives charity can literally open the channels of blessing. As the Rebbe explains, this benefit is not only for the giver, but for the entire world!

With these few insights into the greatness and power of charity, we will begin to explore the mitzvah of charity. In the upcoming essays, we will present some of the laws of charity and then some quotes from Rebbe Nachman about charity. The sources are from Rebbe Nachman's *Sefer Hamidot* (*The Aleph-Bet Book*) and from Reb Noson's *Likutey Eitzot* (*Advice*).

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