

# ***More Blessed to Give Rebbe Nachman on Charity***

**by Chaim Kramer**

This week we'll focus upon the fast of Tisha b'Av (The Ninth of Av). Tisha b'Av is the anniversary of the destruction of both the First and Second Temples. The fast day also commemorates the return of the spies from their mission to the Holy Land. They slandered the Land, bringing the Jewish Nation to tears crying, "We were better off in Egypt..." (*Numbers* 14:3). Their denigration of the Promised Land angered God, and He decreed that the Jews remain in the desert for forty years. As our Sages teach, "You [Jews] cried over nothing; I will give you something to cry over." The night the spies returned was Tisha b'Av. Their crocodile tears begat real tears, as Tisha b'Av became the day fixed for crying for generations of Jews (*Taanit* 29a).

So the spies returned, giving the Jews a frightening report about the Holy Land. They whipped the crowd into a frenzy, causing them to rise up against the voices of reason (spoken by Kalev and Yehoshua) and to rebel against their leader, Moshe, who had toiled ceaselessly on their behalf. They were sentenced to wander 40 years until they finally entered the Land of Israel. Nonetheless, some 900 years later, the First Temple was destroyed on Tisha b'Av, and some 500 years after that the Second Temple was destroyed on the same date. Instead of inheriting a Land flowing with milk and honey, we were bequeathed a day of mourning.

The Talmud asks about the reaction of the Jews when the Second Temple was built? Did they fast or did they rejoice? The answer: when there is peace (i.e., the Temple stands), there is rejoicing. When there is strife and argument, there is fasting (*Rosh Hashanah* 18b). What does fasting accomplish? How does it patch up our strife, our mistaken fears and our unnecessary tears? Rebbe Nachman teaches (*Likutey Moharan* I, Lesson #179):

Know! there is a way to counter all forms of strife. Whether in material matters, or spiritual matters so that a person is unable to pray or do what he must in serving God, it is all in the category of strife... Now, in order to eliminate the strife, no matter what aspect it may be, and make peace - fasting is necessary. This is as our Sages teach: The more charity, the more peace (*Avot* 2:7). Charity is an aspect of fasting. For the essence of fasting is charity, as our Sages teach: The merit of fasting is charity (*Berakhot* 6b). [The commentaries explain that one should donate the money he would have used to pay for his meals on the day he fasted. This is "the merit of fasting is charity."] [Thus charity is equated with fasting.]

For the concept of strife involves a conflicting will...And the propitiousness of fasting is found in the *Zohar* (III, 68b): "On that very day [i.e., Yom Kippur] you shall afflict your souls" (cf. *Leviticus* 23:27) - the benefit of fasting is the humbling of the heart, to attach the will of the heart to the God. Through fasting, the heart is subdued. All the person's other wills are negated in the face of the will of God. Therefore, by means of fasting, strife - the aspect of the will of others being unlike his will - is eliminated. As our Sages teach: Negate your will to His will so that the will of others will be negated to your will (*Avot* 2:4).

Through fasting, one's will is already negated to the will of God, and so the will of others is negated to his will. Strife is eliminated and peace is made. As mentioned above: The more charity, the more peace.

This is as our Sages teach: "The fast of the fourth month [17th Tamuz], and the fast of the fifth month [9th Av]...will become celebration and joy" (*Zachariah* 8:19). How can it be called both a fast and celebration? When there is peace, there is "celebration and joy," but when there is no peace, there is "a fast" (*Rosh Hashanah* 18b). That is, when there is strife, fasting is necessary. And by fasting, peace is made. Then, "when there is peace, there is celebration and joy." Because by fasting, the structure and vitality of joy is constructed.

For the value of fasting is that it revives the dead - one's days spent in darkness that have no vitality. This is because drawn into each and every day is an influx of bounty from Above. On a day a person performs mitzvot and good deeds, he then gives life to that day and draws into it vitality and a great influx of bounty from Above. But if, God forbid, he does not perform mitzvot, then the influx of bounty from Above descends only in a very limited manner - only enough for restricted survival. For when he takes that day and performs evil on it, God forbid, he then diminishes, nurtures from, and sucks up the limited influx of bounty which that day has. Eventually, he also sucks up the essence of the vitality of the day itself, aside from the influx of bounty which routinely comes from Above (since each day is a creation, with its individual vitality aside from the influx of bounty). Thus he also sucks up the day's individual vitality until these days are left dead. This is analogous to an infant who nurses from his mother's breast. As long as she has milk, he continues to suckle the milk. But when the milk stops, he sucks up her blood and her very vitality.

However, by fasting, a person revives these days - thus we see that it all depends on the fasting. This can be understood in the following analogy: When a person fasts, he consequently has no vitality and strength from that day, since then he does not eat or drink. Nevertheless, he serves God. In that case, he serves God with the strength that he has from the previous day. Were it not so, from where does he have the strength? We find therefore that he serves today with yesterday's strength, and brings vitality into that previous day. And afterwards, when he again fasts - in which case the previous day's strength is not enough for him because the body has already been weakened - he must then go even further back and make use of the preceding days' strength. Consequently, each time he brings vitality and illumination into the earlier days which fell and died. It is even possible to fast so much that he will have to make use of the strength of the days during which he nursed from his mother's breast. Then, he revives and illuminates all the days. Therefore, by fasting, the structure of joy - the vitality and core of all the mitzvot - is constructed. The point is that by fasting - by removing the strength of all past days and incorporating it into the service of God, thus reviving all the dead days which he blemished - he thereby constructs joy.

This is as is written (*Psalms* 90:15), "Make us rejoice according to the days You afflicted us." The word "*ANiTanu* (You afflicted us)" is similar to *TAaNit* (fasting). In other words, the joy should be "according to the days of fasting." For commensurate with the days of fasting, so does he revive the earlier days with his mitzvot and good deeds. And accordingly joy is constructed.

This is what the Sages teach: When there is peace, there is ``celebration and joy." For when peace exists, i.e., by fasting, as a result there is celebration and joy. This is as in, "Make us rejoice according to the days *anitanu*" - commensurate with the *taanit* is the joy.

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Rebbe Nachman thus teaches that the value of fasting is to work to revive retroactively one's "dead" days. One's fasting brings vitality to those days gone by. Furthermore, as the Rebbe has taught, charity is akin to fasting. We learn from this lesson that the power of charity is so great that it can revive one's days and revitalize them with joy. If charity can help rectify the past, most certainly it can help for the present and the future.

Charity has the power to overcome strife, the cause of the delay in the desert and of the destruction of the Temples. It can mitigate one's opposition, it can still the arguments in one's heart. This is why the prophet said, "Zion shall be redeemed with justice; its returnees with charity" (*Isaiah* 1:27). May we merit to this redemption, speedily, in our days. Amen.

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