

More Blessed to Give Rebbe Nachman on Charity

by Chaim Kramer

Essay #15

This week's *parshah* opens with the mitzvah of *gemilat chessed* (acts of benevolence). Sarah passes away and Avraham seeks to bury her. This act of *gemilat chessed* is part of the mitzvah of attending a funeral and/or escorting the deceased to his grave. Honoring the deceased is a major mitzvah for it reflects the person's honor of God by giving honor to the image of God, namely, the person to be buried.

In fact, our Sages refer to this mitzvah as *chessed shel emet* (a genuine act of benevolence). This is because one who pays his last respects to the deceased and accompanies him on his final journey, cannot ever expect the deceased to return that favor. Therefore, the deed is totally altruistic, without any expectation whatsoever of a favor in return. May God grant we do all our good deeds so genuinely.

The *parshah* speaks of a second *chessed*. Eliezer, following the instructions of his master Avraham, goes to find a wife for Avraham's son, Yitzchak. This mitzvah is known as making a *shidukh* (matchmaking). Unfortunately, there are many singles waiting for "Mr. (or Miss) Right" to come along. The Torah teaches us that we **MUST** seek a mate; a lifetime marriage partner doesn't come one's way so simply. The *parshah* though cautions against randomly selecting a mate. As we see from the Bible's narrative, the two members of a couple should be complementary to one another. Each brings good points into the marriage. Each must learn that the other has other points which would have been best left at home prior to the wedding. However, since every person is a "package deal," it is best to learn that each has room for growth, and that by developing their good points, they can survive early marriage and the subsequent child-rearing years. Thus, anyone who can help others by "arranging a meeting" of the minds and directing someone to a *shidukh*, performs a mitzvah of *gemilat chessed*.

Let us return to the story of Avraham seeking to purchase the Cave of Makhpelah as a burial plot for himself and his wife Sarah. As related in the Zohar, the Makhpelah Cave is the entranceway to the Garden of Eden. When Avraham first saw it, he found it filled with beautiful aromas and amazing light. Efron the Hittite, who at that time owned it, knew nothing of the spiritual lights and aromas that were in the Cave. When Avraham sought to purchase it, Efron jumped at the opportunity and took advantage of Avraham by selling what he deemed a worthless piece of property for 400 silver talents (see *Genesis 23*; *Zohar 1:128a*).

What is interesting is that Avraham and Efron were standing at the same place at the same time. Yet, Avraham merited a divine manifestation of the Makhpelah Cave while Efron saw nothing, smelled nothing and knew nothing of it. How can two people be standing right next to each other, yet one experiences the amazing while the other absolutely nothing? Furthermore, Efron originally said, apparently out of politeness, that he would give Avraham the property for free. What made him change his mind and demand an exorbitant sum for a property he considered worthless?

We can better understand this exchange between Avraham, the Hittites and Efron by examining a lesson

in which Rebbe Nachman addresses similar issues which have faced the Jewish Nation throughout its long exile, until today. This week we will present the salient points of the lesson. In the next few essays we will, God willing, expand these points, showing how the next few parshahs address the mitzvah of charity. The following is excerpted from Likutey Moharan I, Lesson #25.

1. Every person must break the power of imagination and enter the intellect. But when he is drawn after the illusory desires, this is the aspect of "the vision of the heart" (cf. *Deuteronomy 29:18*). He follows his heart's inclination. One must therefore extricate himself from the heart's vision and follow the intellect.

And as long as he has not transformed his intellect from potential to actual - as yet not used his intellect - then for him the intellect is latent, even if he has already broken the imagination. The characteristic of his intellect has surfaced, yet it is still in potential [i.e., *Chakhmah*]. Afterwards, when he probes with his intellect and uses it, then the intellect is actualized - he has shifted the sweetness of his intellect from latent to active [this step is called *Binah*]. Afterwards, when he grasps with his intellect all that the human intellect has the power to comprehend, then his intellect becomes acquired intellect [this is known as *Daat*].

"Acquired intellect" is the name given to that which a person knows many things with one knowing. At first, it is necessary to know much introductory material before one knows some matter. But afterwards, once one has grasped the matter, one discards its introductions and knows the thing with a single knowing.

Now, the main fountain of wisdom flowed from the Temple, because that was where the sacrifices were brought. What is sacrificed is the person's animal nature and the power of illusion. As is written (*Psalms 51:19*), "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit" - the breaking of the illusion is achieved through the sacrifices.

The Rebbe is speaking about a person's ascending above his animalistic desires, for otherwise one cannot attain clear and acquired intellect. Attaining that intellect is comparable to being aware of God at all times; hence it is compared to the Holy Temple, where God's presence was always felt. The Rebbe next addresses the question why a person who has ascended the spiritual ladder and entered intellect and awareness of God by having at least partially subdued his illusions, must continue to strive to subdue his illusions. Why is he still challenged by his illusions?

2. And know! in each and every world, and on each and every level these illusions exist. They are the shells that precede the fruit and surround that which is holy, corresponding to (*Psalms 12:9*), "The wicked walk round about." When a person moves on from one level to the next, he then has to pass through these illusions in order to attain a greater level of holiness. As soon as he ascends to the level, the evil forces on this level are roused and they surround him on every side. He has to subdue and break them in order to purify that place from the forces of evil.

3. And know! no two people are alike...Therefore, when a person wants to ascend from his level to a higher level, then the person on the higher level goes and moves on to a still higher level. This is because it is impossible for two people to be on the same level...And though the husk on the higher level has already been broken by the upper man, nevertheless, when the upper one moves on from there and the lower one ascends, the evil force is

reawakened. This is because it was only subdued before the light of the upper one...Because of this, he has to break the evil force and subdue it anew....

4. However it is only possible to subdue the evil forces - i.e., the illusions, evil thoughts, desires, confusions and obstacles-of a particular level, by proclaiming the greatness of the Creator as explained by the ARI (*Pri Etz Chaim, Shaar HaZemiroh* 1, p.139). And the greatness of the Creator is revealed through the charity that is given to a deserving person in need. This is because the primary greatness and splendor is the revelation of the Supernal Colors. And silver and gold are themselves the Colors, for the Supernal Colors are in them. But the Supernal Colors which are en clothed in silver and gold do not shine unless they come to a Jew. For that is their place. One becomes encompassed in the another, and these Colors radiate, as in (*Isaiah* 49:3), "Israel, in whom I take pride." This is because the place of the Colors is only with Israel.

"Supernal Colors" refers to the supernal energies, the **sefirot**, in this case **Chessed** (Lovingkindness), **Gevurah** (Judgment) and **Tiferet** (Beauty). Chessed is represented by silver, which reflects the color of white, a clear radiant color that suggests goodness. Gevurah is represented by gold, reflecting an off-color red, the aspect of judgments. However, only when these two "colors," i.e., the sefirot of Chessed and Gevurah, are properly aligned do they form the **sefirah** of Tiferet (a yellow or purple color), i.e., a revelation of the beauty of majesty and splendor. The Rebbe will show now that these "colors" reflect the pride that God takes in the Jews, and how the revelation of this pride reveals Godliness which repels the **kelipot** and forces of evil, thus subduing a person's illusions.

And when the Colors radiate, the Holy One then exults and takes pride in them, as in (*Haggai* 2:8), "Mine is the silver, Mine is the gold." From them "garments of *yesha* (salvation)" (*Isaiah* 61:10) are made. "*YeShA*" is looking, as in (*2 Samuel* 22:42), "*YiSh'Au* (they looked) to God." Due to the splendor, everyone looks at Him, because they all desire to look at Him. However, as long as the silver and gold are by the nations, the Colors' lights disappear and do not shine, because that is not their place. They only belong with the Jew, as in, "Israel, in whom *etPaER* (I take pride)." For the *Pe'ER* (splendor, i.e., *Tiferet*) of the Colors is there.

The Rebbe thus explains that God's *Pe'ER*, His pride, is in Israel, the Jew. But this pride is manifest only when the Supernal Colors are revealed, when people recognize that "Mine is silver, Mine is Gold," namely, that one's funds are from God. When a person recognizes and accepts God's Authority, and that all is His, then the Supernal Colors begin to radiate and God's spirituality becomes manifest for all to see. When His majesty and beauty are revealed, then all look to God, which causes the forces of evil to flee from before Him. However, the illumination of the Jews' money takes place when it is used for holiness and spiritual matters, which is why the Rebbe speaks of revealing God's greatness through giving charity to a deserving Jew. By performing mitzvot with one's wealth, we clearly see that money truly reveals Godliness.

Having established that the radiance of Godliness can illumine when the Jew has money which is used for charitable purposes, Rebbe Nachman now addresses a phenomenon which took place throughout Jewish history. Wherever the Jews lived, secular and ecclesiastical rulers would impose tax after tax upon them. No matter how much was given, aristocrats and authorities in the Dark Ages, in Medieval Europe and even as recently as the Holocaust, sought more and more money from the Jews, taxing them and/or holding them for ransom time and time again.

This is why we find that the nations crave the money of Israel. Although they have a great deal of silver and gold, they crave the money of the Jew, as if they never saw money before. This is because in the silver and the gold, which they possess, the Colors do not shine. Grace and value do not rest on their money. For the splendor and grace are only revealed with

Israel. This is seen in the Mishnah, "Beware of *rashut* (rulers) for they befriend someone only for their own benefit; they act friendly when it is to their advantage" (*Avot* 2:3). These authorities are called "impoverished," as in, "Beware of **RaShut** (rulers)" - for they are **RaShim** (impoverished). They have no pleasure whatsoever from their money, as though they were impoverished and poor. They therefore crave the money of Israel, because the splendor and grace rest upon the money of a Jew; and everyone craves to look at the splendor and the grace. But know! no sooner does the non-Jew receive the money of Israel, than the grace and splendor immediately disappear within the money. Because of this, the non-Jew is always demanding further money from the Jews. He forgets about the money he has already received because the grace disappeared as soon as it reached his hands. This is the meaning of, "for they befriend someone only...when it is to their advantage."

Now, by virtue of the charity which one gives from his money, he rectifies all his money so that the Colors are revealed and shine. All his money takes on the aspect of "Mine is the silver, Mine is the gold," and "...garments of salvation, covered me with the robe of charity." Even the money, which the nations take from us, is considered charity. This is as our Sages taught concerning the phrase "and your taskmasters, charity" (*Isaiah* 60:17), for money which is forcibly and unfairly taken away from the Jew by the tax collector is also considered [a type of] charity (see *Bava Batra* 9a).

5. Know too! In order to subdue the surrounding evil force that is at every level, it is necessary to arouse the joy of a mitzvah and draw it upon himself. That is, he should rejoice by remembering that he has merited coming closer to the Holy One and merited coming closer to the tzaddikim who bring him closer to the Holy One. And through this joy, he breaks the forces of evil and enters holiness....

We see then that giving charity reveals Godliness which allows a person to overcome his illusions, because the forces of evil flee when God's greatness is revealed. Rejoicing in one's Jewishness, feeling pride in one's ability to serve God, also allows a person to break his illusions and ascend to intellect, to attain Daat, the acquired knowledge.

Next essay, God willing, we will begin to delve into the reasons why charity has so much effect on expelling the forces of evil. For the moment, we can begin to understand why Efron lusted so for Avraham's money. Having told him he'd give away the Makhpelah Cave for nothing, Efron began to see the Cave from Avraham's viewpoint - it was amazing, it revealed Godliness, supernal lights and aromas. Yet Efron was so steeped in his imagination that his illusory powers had complete control over him. Instead of seeing the spiritual delights that Avraham noticed, Efron only saw the illumination of the Supernal Colors cloaked in Avraham's money. He thus revealed his animalistic cravings and greedily requested 400 silver talents for what he perceived as worthless. Even though Avraham gave him the money, it was of no use to him. Efron remained as spiritually poor and impoverished as he was before (*Likutey Halakhot, Matanah* 4:11).

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