

More Blessed to Give Rebbe Nachman on Charity

**by Chaim Kramer
Essay #16**

This week's *parshah* (Toldot) speaks of the kindness Yaakov did for his brother Esav. Yaakov acted kindly despite Esav's hatred toward him, for Esav jumped at any chance to destroy his brother. When Esav demanded (not asked, but demanded) food, Yaakov fed him. By doing so, Yaakov fulfilled King Solomon's advice, "If your enemy is hungry feed him..." (*Proverbs 25:21-22*). Yaakov, however, was no fool. In exchange, he asked for the contended birthright; Esav willingly agreed.

We also find in the *parshah* acts of kindness performed by Yitzchak. During a famine year he sowed Philistine fields to help feed the starving people. He also dug wells of water for them. These wells had been previously dug by his father Avraham. Yitzchak had to re-open these wells because the Philistines intentionally clogged them. Yitzchak reopened his father's wells. Each time he did the Philistines claimed ownership of the well.

The Torah is teaching us to perform charitable acts even towards our enemies! Let us return to the lesson we introduced last week (*Likutey Moharan I, Lesson #25*) in which Rebbe Nachman spoke of subduing one's illusory powers and ascending to one's intellect. As explained, this can be accomplished by giving charity - which reveals God's greatness - and through joy.

The *parshah* speaks of the battles between Yaakov and Esav. These began even before they were born, while they were still in their mother Rivkah's womb. Rebbe Nachman explains that this battle is the war between the intellect and the heart's desires, the imagination (*Likutey Moharan I, Lesson #1*). The Rebbe teaches that one must utilize his intellect in finding the Godliness found in each and every item of Creation. Otherwise, one may find himself falling prey to his heart's desires. By making an honest effort in one's study of Torah, one is able to attach himself to intellect and rise above materialistic cravings. It is this effort that strengthens one's good desires for intellect, the insight to discern the Godliness in more and more of Creation, while opposing, and eventually subduing, one's evil desires.

This was the battle between Yaakov, who sought intellect, and Esav who demanded material sustenance. We find that Yaakov sought the birthright, which alludes to intellect, while Esav despised it and wanted "the good life." The same battle played itself out again later, when Yaakov and Esav sought their father Yitzchak's blessings. However, Yaakov sought these blessings for spiritual attainments, whereas Esav wanted them to fulfill his dreams of world conquest and domination over the material life.

As the Rebbe explained in Lesson #25, charity reveals the beauty of one's wealth, thereby revealing Godliness in the world. The more charity one gives, the more the Supernal Colors will illuminate his money. This is evidenced by what happened with Yitzchak. After providing food for the Philistines during a famine (as above), his wealth began to shine. As Rashi comments, people began to say, "Better the dung of Yitzchak's mules than the silver and gold of Avimelekh [the Philistine king]" (*Genesis 26:13*)! This was because whatever Yitzchak owned had the illumination of the Supernal Colors. The Philistines were embarrassed and jealous of Yitzchak, so they banished him.

Yitzchak began digging the wells and here the Philistines found a way to take them away from him - by disputing his ownership. What goal did the Philistines want to accomplish by claiming the wells? They had more manpower and land than Yitzchak. They could easily have dug many more wells. Why fight over Yitzchak's two wells? The answer is, the Philistines saw the illumination of Yitzchak's possessions and sought to take whatever was his! Only Yitzchak's persistence led to the eventual peace agreement between him and the Philistines.

It wasn't that the Philistines needed Yitzchak's well or water. They wanted what was his, they craved his wealth because of the illumination of the Supernal Beauty that shone from Yitzchak's possessions. This is why they were not satisfied by taking the first well. For as soon as rectified wealth leaves the hands of the charity-giving Jew, its gleam leaves as well. Thus they challenged Yitzchak over the second well he dug.

This, too, was the battle between Yaakov and Esav, between intellect and illusion. Esav's sole reason for wanting the blessings of Yitzchak was to be empowered to rule the material world, so that he could live his fantasy, his illusions, all the while neglecting any spiritual connection. Yitzchak originally wanted Esav to have these blessings, reckoning that with such great wealth Esav would gladly support Yaakov's spiritual endeavors. This would bring Esav spiritual illumination and help his spiritual growth. Yet, Esav rejected any form of spirituality, as Rivkah knew he would. Thus she encouraged Yaakov to enter his father's presence in order to receive the blessings.

Reb Noson writes that the power of a gift to charity is not only the breaking of one's illusions and ascending into spirituality. It also represents the breaking of false beliefs and misconceptions which are part of or synonymous with illusions. Furthermore, by giving charity one merits attaining a greater level of faith in God, a faith which is true intellect! Reb Noson adds that this was Yosef's intent in feeding his father and brothers in Egypt. He was modeling for them the way to withstand the Egyptian exile and to cultivate faith in God, namely, by engaging in charitable deeds.

The bitter bondage of Egyptian exile consisted in part of the Jews building the cities of Pitom and Ramses. These cities were built on sand and thus always sank (see *Sotah* 11a). Their work was useless and was only forced upon them to keep them enslaved. This is what one's illusions do to him; they make him work for nothing, so that all his time is spent on wasted effort.

Charity can rectify this. This is why prior to the Exodus, the Jews took the wealth of Egypt. This was done in order to elevate the wealth that had been taken from the realm of holiness (when the Egyptians enslaved the Jews) and lost its sheen, and bring it back into holiness, so its Supernal Colors and lights would shine again.

This was also the reason the Jews received the mitzvah to donate to the building of the desert Mishkan (Sanctuary) after having made the golden calf. Contributing gold to make the calf blemished their wealth; they were now able to rectify it by giving charity. Different types of metal and multi-colored cloths were asked for, in order to bring forth the illumination of the Supernal Colors. (In the beginning of Lesson #25, Rebbe Nachman notes that the intellect is synonymous with the Holy Temple, where the revelation of Godliness took place. This was true also of the Sanctuary [see *Likutey Halakhot, Avodat Elilim* 3].)

Thus, we see that by giving charity we are able to do battle with the Esavs and illusions of this world, and work towards building our intellect, through which we can merit the building of the Temple, the revelation of Godliness.

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[Home](#) | [Blessed to Give Table of Contents](#) | [Chapter #15](#) | [Chapter #17](#)