

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

**by Chaim Kramer  
Essay #18**

Parshat Vayishlach speaks about the reunion between the brothers, Yaakov and Esav. Yaakov seeks reconciliation and hopes to meet in a peaceful setting. Esav, as expected, sets out with 400 warriors to battle his brother. The Torah presents us with an elaborate description of Yaakov's gift to Esav. This gift was, in effect, a bribe to keep Esav happy and at bay. This bribe served as the precedent for all the bribery the Jews gave while in exile in Esav's lands (cf. *Bereishis Rabbah* 76:8).

Rebbe Nachman mentioned in our lesson (*Likutey Moharan* I, Lesson #25) that the money of a Jew who gives charity shines with an illumination of the Supernal Colors. This is why the nations were - and still are - obsessed with Jewish wealth and money. They see in it that great supernal light and crave it. However, as the Rebbe taught, as soon as that money is delivered into their hands, it loses its sheen. Rebbe Nachman taught:

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...The 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...But know! no sooner does the non-Jew receive the money of Israel, than the grace and splendor immediately disappear...Because of this, the non-Jew is always demanding further money from the Jews...

Now, by virtue of the charity which [the Jew] gives from his money, he rectifies all his money so that the Colors are revealed and shine. His money takes on the aspect of, "Mine is the silver, Mine is the gold..." And 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).

The Rebbe mentions taxes and we have added "forcibly and unfairly" as an explanation. The *Shulchan Arukh* (Code of Jewish Law) is clear that everyone has an obligation to pay his fair share of taxes which is to be used to benefit the community. By paying taxes one contributes to water supplies, maintaining sanitary conditions for citizens' health, street lighting, road maintenance and all the other necessities of running a city, state and country. However, it was common in years past (and still has some contemporary application) for government officials and feudal lords of Christian Europe and the Islamic Middle East to tax the Jews over and over again for their personal coffers. These taxes, whether demanded as protection money to save the Jews from the local populace, imposed as ransom, or collected for the benefit of the local satrap, were not only unfair and unjust - they were downright wicked.

Nonetheless all of these "taxes" are considered charity. Certainly the first type of tax, a necessary charge

which benefits the township and its dwellers, can be understood as a "charity," for everyone benefits from it. Yet, even the second type of tax, an unfair imposition upon the innocent and the suffering, is also considered a type of charity. The Talmud (*Bava Batra* 9a) teaches, "When the Temple stood, a person brought his shekels (contribution) and was forgiven. Now that the Temple is gone, a person gives his gifts to the poor and is forgiven. If he does *not* give charity, the government will take it away from him [instead]. However, this too will be considered charity as is written, 'and your taskmasters, charity'" (*Isaiah* 60:17). The Maharsha (*loc. cit.*, s.v. *v'hayah*) explains that this scenario speaks of those forced to give charity. If they won't give their money to charity, the authorities take it away anyway. However, one who willingly gives charity merits the secure that comes with knowing that he will not be scrutinized by governmental or tax authorities. Furthermore, the verse from Isaiah cited speaks of the Messianic era. Then all will be peace; oppression will not exist: "Your officers will be peace and your taskmasters charity."

The Talmud's teaching offers a very uplifting thought. Even now, though you are obligated to give charity, if you don't, you will still be credited with some reward. The reason is that somehow, somewhere, though your intentions weren't pure, someone was helped, or will eventually be helped, by your forced taxation.

Yet, there is a frightening aspect to it, as well. The Talmudic teaching obviously focuses upon our giving a certain amount of money, or at least volunteering our time, to charity. This is because we need forgiveness, but cannot go to the Temple in Jerusalem with our shekels to attain that forgiveness. We recall the Rebbe's opening statements, that the Temple refers to the intellect, which ought to be utilized instead of the imagination. The charity we give leads us to a revelation of God, hence charity is compared to the Temple, where Godliness was manifest. However, having succumbed to our illusions, we no longer have the intellect, i.e., the Temple, wherein we can seek forgiveness and purification. Therefore, charity is a must. We have to contribute to the deserving poor ([essay #15](#)), for then we arouse the Supernal Colors – the greatness of God becomes manifest for all.

If our minds are impaired by illusions and we are lax in contributing to charity, the money will anyway be taken from us, and lose its sheen. This happens if we do not give charity and are forced to give charity; forced charity is handed to the nations, where the money loses its light. Thus, we should strive to elevate our wealth, by putting it in the realm of holiness. We elevate our money by elevating our giving - by willingly giving charity - and this causes the greatness of God to be revealed. This, in turn, causes the forces of evil to flee. On the other hand, if we have to be taxed, it is an indication we have not yet rectified our wealth.

This is the lesson of Yaakov and Esav. Esav was a needy person; he wanted, desired and craved materialism. Yaakov, who gained his wealth from another illusory person, "uncle" Lavan, also had to rectify his wealth. Some he used for holiness, but some of that wealth was tainted by Lavan and coveted by Esav. That part of his wealth Yaakov gifted to Esav.

Yet, as always, the power of good prevails. How many nations, countries, governments and individuals, have tax, overtaxed, re-taxed and then again overtaxed us throughout the millennia of exile. In the end, "You have done charity and righteousness in Yaakov" (*Psalms* 99:4). The charity of Yaakov will prevail. We will overcome our illusions, the Esavs and Lavans that have plagued us for generations, and bring forth the light of the Supernal Colors, the light of God, which will be spread throughout the world by our charity.

As the Rebbe concludes in the lesson, joy also reveals Godliness. This is especially so in light of the Maharsha's interpretation, whether we give charity willingly or are forced to give. If we give willingly, more than likely we do so in a joyous frame of mind. If we are forced to give to charity, then this illustrates a lack of happiness on our part when performing the mitzvah. So, it's best if we redirect our attitude toward serving God, specifically when giving charity. The more we engage in performing good deeds with joy, especially giving charity, the greater our ability to subdue our allusions and attain the acquired intellect, Daat.

Next week, we will, God willing, look into a different lesson of Rebbe Nachman, one that was given on Chanukah and relates to that festival, along with insights on the effect of charity, a tranquil atmosphere at home, in the office and indeed all over the world, and the impact of charity on converts!

Have a good one,  
Chaim

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