

More Blessed to Give Rebbe Nachman on Charity

**by Chaim Kramer
Essay #19**

This week's Torah reading, VaYeishev, speaks about an unusual type of charity – an admission of guilt. Chapter 38 of Genesis recounts the story of Yehudah and Tamar. As the episode approached its climax, Yehudah, the local magistrate, issued a death penalty against Tamar for her seemingly wanton act. When Tamar provided evidence of Yehudah's participation in the act, he immediately acknowledged his involvement, saving the life of Tamar and her two as yet unborn children, Peretz and Zerach. Peretz was the ancestor of King David and the ultimate redeemer, Mashiach.

There are times when we do (or say) the wrong thing and then either refuse to admit it or are too embarrassed to acknowledge it. As illustrated in the story of Yehudah and Tamar, an admission of guilt may save lives! Granted, most of our errors never extend so far as to threaten someone's life. Too often, however, they leave an injured party who suffered undeservedly. Yet, with a simple, sincere apology we can clear the slate. What greater charitable act can there be than clearing up a misunderstanding, putting people at ease and heightening our awareness of another's self-worth by the simple act of admitting to one's wrongs?!

Having explained in the previous few essays Rebbe Nachman's teachings on the value of charity - that it enhances the supernal colors and thus reveals the pride that God takes in His nation - we will begin now to examine another lesson of the Rebbe. This lesson explores the connection between God's pride in the Jews, charity and the ideas of Chanukah. Rebbe Nachman teaches that giving charity leads to an atmosphere of peace and understanding, which reveals Godliness in this world. This allows potential converts to accept God. The following is adapted from the *Kitzur (Abridged) Likutey Moharan I*, Lesson #17.

- 1) The only way to receive fear and love of God is through the tzaddikim of the generation.
- 2) The tzaddik is constantly seeking and searching to reveal God's will. More specifically, the tzaddik strives to reveal the will that God had in creating the entire world, i.e. the overall will that motivated Him to create the world as a whole.

Furthermore, the tzaddik also strives to reveal God's will in creating each individual type of being in the creation, as well as in each detail of each of these beings. For every created thing is unique in its appearance, its strength, its nature and its behavior. In regard to the finer details, as well, each creature is unique and vastly different from other creatures with respect to its various limbs, etc. Among all types of created things - mineral, vegetable, animal and human - there are an infinite number of differences between each and every one. This is also true within each type of creature, in each of its particulars. This is a result of God's will, i.e., He willed one thing to be one way and another, another way.

The tzaddik is constantly searching for this will. He perceives it and finds it through the

pride and beauty which he finds in the Jewish people as a group, as individuals and in every particular of each individual Jew. For the entire world was created because God foresaw the pride and delight that He would receive from the Jewish People as a whole; and the particulars of the creation were created for the pride that God would take in each individual Jew. Similarly, the variations existing in the details of each creature were created in accordance with the pride that God would take in each particular of each individual Jew - that is, from each good deed and movement of every Jew.

So the tzaddik constantly searches and seeks, and he finds the pride and the beauty which is in the Jewish people as a group, as individuals and in their particular characteristics. The tzaddik then knows and comprehends the will that God had in the creation as a whole, as well as His will in creating its various creatures and in all of the details of all of these creatures. When the tzaddik shows the pride that God takes in the Jewish people fear and love are revealed.

3) The explanation for the tzaddik being able to reveal fear and love of God is as follows: It is a fact that people are afraid and tremble in the presence of the king. Nonetheless, when the king dons his most beautiful garments (lit. "his clothes of pride"), as when he wishes to make a public appearance, e.g., on his birthday, this fear is then revealed all the more; since actually seeing something effects a person more deeply than merely knowing it. The revelation of pride, which is also the revelation of fear, leads in turn to the revelation of will, or love.

For it is the way of the king that when he dons his "garments of pride," a great fear seizes everyone and they tremble before him. Subsequently though, the king reveals his will and favor to each and every person by distributing gifts to each one of them. An individual's gift depends on his status and the king's will and love for him. Initially, when the king's pride and splendor are revealed, everyone is seized by fear and awe. Afterwards though, when the people see the goodwill of the king and the closeness that he feels for every person, they draw close to him and love him.

When the tzaddik reveals the pride that God takes in the Jewish People, this is analogous to the birthday of the king, i.e., the birth of God's kingship over man. When the tzaddik reveals this pride, he also reveals God's will in each and every thing. It thus emerges that fear and love are elicited by the tzaddik who reveals this pride.

[Before we go further] it is necessary to know that God takes pride even in the most inferior Jew. Even a Jewish sinner, as long as he is still proud to be a Jew, still has his own individual beauty through which God takes pride in him. It is therefore forbidden for a person to ever despair of God, even if he has committed very great wrong and has caused tremendous damage, God forbid. For God's affection is still upon him and thus he can still return to God. The most important thing is becoming attached to men of truth, since they are able to find the good and the beauty in even the most inferior Jew and they can return everything to God.

4) When fear and love [of God] are eclipsed for a person, it is because the light of the tzaddik from whom one receives [this] fear and love has grown dark for him. So that even though the tzaddik is radiating light in all the worlds, and most of all in this world; nonetheless, the tzaddik does not shine for this person at all due to the great darkness which

encompasses him. Even though he may be in the presence of the tzaddik and sitting right there with him, he is still unable to taste and understand and see the tzaddik's great light through which he would be able to come to the ultimate, eternal good.

5) All this is a consequence of the person's evil deeds by which his mind has become darkened with foolishness or, more specifically, with specious false opinions. He, however, believes himself to be wise and he harbors questions about the true tzaddik. All these false opinions, questions and convoluted ideas are really nothing but fatuity and utter folly. It is just that the impurity of his deeds has darkened his mind with this foolishness. Consequently, the light of the tzaddik is eclipsed and the individual does not possess fear and love.

6) By eating properly, i.e. slowly and moderately, and by not hurriedly gulping down one's food, the faculties of the mind are enhanced and fatuity is suppressed. Eating like a glutton, however, blunts the mind causing the light of the tzaddik to become eclipsed. One is therefore unable to receive fear and love. Blemished eating corresponds to the blemished Altar, upon which the sacrifices were brought. The explanation is as follows: The Altar is compared to a person's table (*Berakhot* 55a). Rectified eating, i.e., eating in holiness, corresponds to a sacrifice offered and accepted upon the Altar. By inference, blemished eating represents a blemished Altar, upon which sacrifices are unacceptable.

7) Drawing converts to recognize and serve God is a rectification of the Altar. Idolatry is rooted in the blemishes in parts of the Altar, i.e. from the holy sparks of the Altar which fell to that idolatrous place (see *Zohar* II, 139a). When each convert casts off his own faith and follows the Jewish faith, he thereby subjugates idolatry which derives from the blemishes in the Altar, and the sparks from parts of the Altar return to the realm of holiness. Thus, converts are an essential catalyst for rectifying the blemished Altar.

Briefly, the Rebbe teaches that fear and love of God can be attained through the tzaddik and his teachings because the tzaddik reveals the pride God has from each and every Jew. The Jew, when he begins to glimpse how much God loves him and desires his devotions, begins to feel closer to God, which results in the revelation of God's pride, in the world in general and in its particulars. The reason a person doesn't feel the fear and awe revealed by the tzaddik is because he has blemished his intellect through blemished eating. How can one rectify blemished eating (which resembles a blemished Altar)? By making converts. This is because idolatry stems from a blemished Altar; instead of serving God, one abandoned God, which is idolatry. But, by making converts, one draws closer to God, to faith in Him, negating idolatry.

8) How can one make converts? Charity given to true tzaddikim and to the righteous poor brings converts. This rectifies the damage done by eating impurely. The mind is thereby brought to perfection and rectified. Thus one merits seeing the light of the tzaddik and receive from him fear and love.

Additionally, charity one gives to true tzaddikim is considered giving charity to many, many Jewish souls (for the tzaddik teaches many people and draws them close to God). The reason is that charity given to a true Torah scholar greatly increases and extends the body of "clear and tranquil air." When one gives charity he spreads goodwill, thereby creating an atmosphere of tranquility and peace. The more charity given, the greater the area of tranquility.

Unlike a storm wind, in which it is difficult to hear and one must shout hoping he will be heard, tranquil air allows the spoken word to go further. One hears because the letters of speech "cut the air" when spoken. This air strikes other air which strikes yet other air until the letters reach the ear of the listener [i.e., sound waves]. Therefore, when the air is calm, placid and clear, speech can be heard at a distance. However, when a gale wind is blowing, it is impossible to hear even the sound of another person's voice, let alone his actual words.

Likewise, when love reigns between people - the concept of "calm and tranquil air" - and there is harmony between them, their words are heard at a distance. This holds true both on an individual and on a universal level. On the individual level, the good words of one person are heard by his friend. On a larger scale, the holy, true words of the genuine tzaddik may be heard and accepted even at very great distances (as alluded to in the verse, "his fame went out into all the provinces" [*Esther* 9:4]), to the point that even those who are very far away draw close to God as converts or *baalei teshuvah* (penitents).

If, God forbid, enmity exists among people, then a "storm wind" exists among them, an evil wind which divides them. As a result, the air becomes turbulent until speech can not be heard even in his immediate proximity to the speaker and certainly not at a distance. The primary means of creating "calm and tranquil air" is by giving charity to true tzaddikim and to righteous poor people.

9) When the air is tranquil and one who knows how to speak "Jewish speech" (holy speech) talks, the words he utters are "written and carved out" in the air [waves which resonate with his words]. His words go forth and are heard at a distance. These words become inscribed in the books of the non-Jews. Subsequently, the gentiles find in their own books things which contradict their own faith. Consequently, they convert to Judaism. Many proselytes were converted because of the contradictions found in their faith.

10) Why is it, though, that these particular individuals find contradiction to their faith and come to recognize Judaism, while others do not? It is because of the good, i.e. the parts of Jewish souls, which are held captive by the gentiles. For as a result of the nations' anti-Jewish decrees, unfair taxes and so on, they withhold good from the Jewish people by preventing them from performing God's commandments. This good which they kept from coming into existence is "held captive" in their domain.

For a time this good remembers that it comes from a very high and exalted place. Subsequently, however, it is overpowered and suppressed, until it is caught and bound within the realm of the gentiles, forgetting its true exalted level. When "Jewish speech" goes forth and is written in the gentiles' books, this good rediscovers its level in the form of ideas contradicting the gentiles' faith. Then this good remembers its true level and how it came from an extremely holy and exalted place.

For this good consists of parts of Jewish souls for whose sake all the worlds were created. In addition, the Blessed Holy One conferred with the souls of Israel to create the world and the souls of Israel are above all the worlds. Now, though, a soul is held captive in exile and may face annihilation and perdition, God forbid. At that time, this good begins to feel pain, to yearn and to pity itself for having fallen to such depths from so lofty a place. As a result it

returns and reverts back to holiness. All this is effected through the charity given to a true Torah scholar.

11) Furthermore, at the time this good starts returning to its place it is still closely attached and bound to the gentiles. Consequently, when it leaves, it tears off some of their evil. This phenomenon manifests itself in the form of non-Jewish proselytes who come to convert. They too become part of that evil which was torn off with the good, when the good returned to its place. For it is impossible for the good to return by itself, due to the great bond by which it is attached and cleaves there. Therefore, it is inevitable that it will also tear off some of the evil, and this evil returns to the realm of holiness by means of the converts.

12) From this one can readily understand how very much he needs to take pity on himself, when he remembers the tremendous exaltedness of his innate spiritual root. He might say to himself, "I am from the seed of the Jewish people who are above all the worlds and who were God's 'first thought' when He set out to create the world. What a degraded state I am in now! And, God forbid, God forbid, who knows what is in store for me in the future? For the Evil One wants to destroy me, God forbid." In this way a person will take pity on himself and strive to return to God, ultimately attaining fear and love of God.

In review: In order to perceive the tzaddik's light and attain fear and love of God, one must rectify his blemished eating, the blemished Altar. To rectify one's blemished Altar one needs to make converts. How can we make converts, people who would recognize and serve God? By giving charity. This is because giving charity creates an atmosphere of peace and tranquility. Then the spoken words of the tzaddik can reach "distant" places - even idolaters who are very distant from God - and remind them of Godliness, drawing those sparks of holiness back into the realm of holiness.

13) Know, however, that sometimes when the evil sees that the good is yearning and straining, that it wants to return to its place, they subsequently tighten their grip upon the good even more and the evil brings it into even greater concealment. More specifically, the evil brings the good further into the inner recesses of its thoughts. In other words, it begins to think thoughts about this good, thereby concealing more deeply in its mind.

Subsequently this good then comes out in the form of the children that they beget. For this good is hidden away and concealed in the inner recesses of its thoughts and mind. The brain is the origin of the process of reproduction [The Zohar teaches that the seed originates in the brain and then descends to the reproductive organs]. This good then comes out in the generative seed, and the evil in their offspring does not have the strength to overpower the good within them. Thus the good emerges through these offspring and they become converts. [This is why we find converts who are descendents of Nazis and other terrible evildoers! The good that was imprisoned under their reign has been released from captivity by their generative seed.]

14) The revelation of the light of the tzaddik by which one merits knowing about him, understanding, tasting and seeing his great light, depends upon the level of perfection of one's deeds and the clearness of one's mind. The main factor responsible for a clouded mind and intellect is the improper use of one's "instruments of action," since improper deeds debilitate and ruin the mind, God forbid. The primary way of rectifying the instruments of action is giving charity, which depends upon "action," as alluded to in the verse, "And the

action of charity brings peace" (*Isaiah* 32:17). The light of the intellect is then perfected too, and one merits seeing the light of the tzaddik and receiving from him fear and love.

As Friday night this week begins the festival of Chanukah, we will just conclude this part of this lesson with Reb Noson's observation. The lights of the menorah represent the light of the tzaddik. The oil used to light the menorah represents charity and the converts, because oil is symbolic of the tranquil air and the peaceful atmosphere, as is written (*Psalms* 133:1-2), "How good and pleasant it is to dwell together. Like fine oil upon the head...." (*Likutey Halakhot, Beheimah v'Chayah Tehorah* 4:30).

Next week, God willing, we will explore more about Chanukah, the menorah and the ideas of how charity and converts are so closely intertwined. Best wishes,
Chaim

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