

More Blessed to Give Rebbe Nachman on Charity

by Chaim Kramer
Essay #20

Parshat Miketz tells the story of Yosef's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams and the subsequent years of plenty and famine. It details the debates between Yosef and his brothers who sold him into slavery and the attempts of the brothers to try to redeem him. It concludes with Yosef having his aide-de-camp plant his goblet in the brothers' packs and later on accusing them of stealing it! But this too was a strategic act of charity (see Rashi, *Genesis* 42:8), for Yosef was testing the sincerity of their regrets over their former deeds. This too is considered a great charitable act in that getting a person to act with awareness, intellect and intelligence – i.e., *daat* – is, perhaps, the greatest act of compassion that exists. With *daat*, being aware of one's status and acting responsibly, a person is considered human being. Acting without *daat* and awareness of one's deeds and responsibilities, then the person is considered an "animal in a human cloak" (*Likutey Moharan* II, 7:2). Here is a brief review of the lesson cited in last week's essay.

A person should draw close to the tzaddik because the tzaddik is the means through which fear and love of God is revealed, for the tzaddik reveals the pride God has in the Jews.

However, the tzaddik's light can be obscured by foolishness, which is a result of blemished eating. Blemished eating is akin to the blemishing of the Altar of the Temple. The Altar represents the spread of Godliness for a person's foolish act of sin was forgiven via his sacrifice that was burnt upon the Altar. Hence it is our duty to rectify the blemishes brought about by foolishness and blemished eating.

We can accomplish this by giving charity. Charity spreads an air of tranquility which allows for those distant from God to hear about Him and draw close to Him. This includes even idolaters, who can begin to heed the call of spirituality. Why is it that only specific people hear this call? This is a result of the nations' anti-Jewish decrees which prevented Jews from performing God's mitzvot. This potential good was "held captive" in the nations' domain.

When one gives charity an area of tranquil air is created. The tranquil air allows the potential good to hear the call of Godliness. When one gives charity to the tzaddik (whose soul comprises all the souls who adhere to his teachings) a greater area of tranquility is created. Thus more people are enabled to hear that call. The good that had been held in captivity begins to return to its source, the Jewish people who recognize God. When that good emerges it also tears off some of the nations to whom it had been attached.

Reb Noson explains how this lesson relates to Chanukah. The Greek oppressors decreed that the Jews should not fulfill the Torah. All that potential good went into captivity under the Greeks. The Greeks even went so far as to attempt offering swine as a sacrifice (blemished eating at its worst)! When the Chashmonaim (Hasmoneans) defeated the Greeks, they rededicated the Temple and the Altar (and, of course, the Menorah). This represented removing the good that was held captive under Greek sway. This is why the Sages of that generation instituted the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah lights. The light of Chanukah represents the light and beauty of the Jews which had been captured and subsequently

redeemed by the tzaddikim, i.e., the Chashmonaim. These tzaddikim revealed the light and pride of God that He has in the Jews. They were therefore able to spread Godliness by rededicating the Temple.

The most preferred way of performing the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah light is for each person in the household to kindle the Chanukah lights and each night kindle an additional light. Why is this? A single lamp represents the light, joy and pride that God has in each individual. Therefore each individual must light the lamps. Still, the person must know, at all times, that there is much more good hidden within him. Thus the additional lights of Chanukah (representative of the tzaddik for it was they who instituted this mitzvah) represent the additional pride and light found in each and every Jew.

In addition, the most favorable way to fulfill mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah menorah is to use oil, in commemoration of the Menorah of the Temple. Oil represents royalty and greatness, exemplifying the pride of God in the Jews. The Greeks polluted and made impure all the oil they found, i.e., they debased the Jews and the royal character of the Jews. The miracle of Chanukah was the finding of a tiny vial of pure oil still sealed with the stamp of the High Priest. The unbroken seal proved that the oil within was untouched by the impure Greeks. Though it was enough to last but a day, still, it lasted for eight long winter nights!

This was because the High Priest represents chessed, acts of kindness and charity. (Kabbalistically, the Kohein-priest represents the *sefirah* Chessed; the Levite represents the *sefirah* Gevurah [Judgments] and Yisrael, the common Jew, represents the *sefirah* Tiferet [Beauty]). As we have learned in our lesson, acts of charity bring forth the good that was debased and/or held captive among the nations. By giving charity, we create an atmosphere of peace and tranquility, enabling good and beauty to be elevated to their source. Thus the High Priest represents the tzaddik who can reveal the pride and good found even in a sinner. Time, as we know it, is comprised in a seven day cycle. The miracle of the oil lasting eight days alludes to the fact that the good, the beauty and the pride found in the Jews are timeless, namely, these traits transcend time and can always be found, even in difficult and dark moments (*Likutey Halakhot, To'ain v'Nitan, 5:1-13*).

Reb Noson also mentions that charity given on Chanukah has extra strength, for these eight days are propitious for rectifying the blemishes of one's soul (*Mishnah Berurah 670:1; Kitzur Shulchan Arukh 139:1*). As the Rebbe explains, charity creates a tranquil atmosphere which allows one to hear the call of spirituality. Reb Noson notes that Avraham was the first true convert and he was very adept at spreading the word of God [see Rashi, *Genesis 24:7*]. Avraham was the paradigm of Chessed and it was his multitude of charitable deeds that were the catalyst for making people aware of God's Presence, despite their idolatrous surroundings (*Likutey Halakhot, Lulav v'Etrog 2:5*). Thus, charity has enormous power to reveal Godliness, even in the darkest moments, even during the present Greek oppression - symbolized by philosophy, egoism and the rejection of faith, bequeathed to the world by Greek predecessors.

We can experience a miracle of Chanukah even today. We can light our lamps of pride, we can give charity and spread an air of peace and tranquility. We have to but WANT to. We have to want to be released from the "captivity of Greek culture" and rectify the blemished Altar to reveal God. If we just begin to give a bit more charity.

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