

HELPING WITH DIGNITY

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לימוד הדבר תורה לזכות ר' שלום מרדכי הלוי ש"י בן רבקה לגאולה קרובה מן המיצר אל המרחב

FULFILLING A RESPONSIBILITY

The Rambam writes: We are obligated to be careful with the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*, more than all other *mitzvos*, for it is a symbol of Avraham Avinu's descendants. All of *Yiddishkeit* is dependent on *tzedakah*, and the Yidden will be let out of *galus* only because of *tzedakah*.

One who has *rachmonus* on others, Hashem has *rachmanus* on him. Whoever is stingy and does not have *rachmanus*, there is reason to suspect his ancestry, for such a trait is only found by *goyim*. All Yidden are like brothers (as the Torah says), and if one brother will not have pity on another, then who will? Should the poor among the Yidden turn to the *goyim*, who hate us and persecute us, as their source of help?

One who turns away from giving *tzedakah* is called 'lawless,' like a worshiper of *avodah zara*, and he is called a *rasha* and sinner. Hashem listens closely to the outcry of the poor; therefore, one must be careful not to cause them anguish.

(רמב"ם הל' מתנות עניים פ"י הל' א-ג)

The Roman emperor Tornosufus asked Rabbi Akiva, "If Hashem truly loves the poor, why does he not provide them with *parnasa*?" "To save us from *gehinom*," replied Rabbi Akiva. The emperor countered, "On the contrary, giving *tzedakah* should send you to *gehinom*. Suppose a king imprisons his servant and commands that he not be served food or drink. If someone would disregard the king's bidding and give the prisoner to eat, wouldn't he get angry?!"

Rebbi Akiva explained, "Imagine a king imprisons his own son and commands that no food or drink be given to him, but despite his command someone brings the prince some sustenance. When the king hears about this, wouldn't he send this man a gift? Similarly, we are Hashem's children..."

(בבא בתרא י"ע"א)

At one *farbrengen*, the Rebbe Rashab expounded on the negativity of giving *tzedakah* in a manner where the receiver feels he is getting *tzedakah*. Indeed, the giver must feel his friend's need and this should cause him heartache. Yet, the satisfaction that his friend was helped thru him, and the coarse contentment from his being the provider, are inappropriate. This is completely contrary to the effect of *tzedakah*, as the Alter Rebbe says, *tzedakah* refines one's mind and heart a thousand fold.

(סו"ט תש"ג ע"י 10)

The Rebbe clarified that the English translation for *tzedakah*, charity, is inaccurate, for it implies that giving is a kindness. Truthfully, *tzedakah* is the proper thing to do (*tzedek*). The money one has, was originally intended for the pauper.

The chassidim of the Alter Rebbe would say, "In the *parnasa* Hashem gives us, your portion is also included."

(לקו"ש ח"ב ע' 410, סו"ט תש"ג ע"י 9)

THE WAY TO HELP

When Shlomo Hamelech was wandering in *galus* (after having been overthrown by Ashmadai, the king of the *sheidim*), he was once invited for a meal, where he was served the best delicacies. During the meal the host reminded the king of his days as ruler, causing Shlomo Hamelech to bemoan and cry all through the remainder of the meal.

The following day, when the king was invited by another man, he asked if he would be treated as he had been the other day. "I'm a poor person," said the man, "and I only have a few vegetables which I will serve you, if you will honor me with your presence." Agreeing, Shlomo Hamelech went to his home, where his face, hands, and feet were washed by the poor man and he was then served some greens. Comforting him, the poor man said, "Hashem swore to your father that he will never take away the kingdom from his descendants. This is just the way of Hashem; he rebukes and then comforts. Do not worry! Hashem will restore your kingship."

When Shlomo Hamelech's sovereignty was restored, he said, "A meal of greens is better than a stuffed ox with which the rich man reminded me of my painful plight."

(ילקוט שמעוני משלי ט"ו)

The *amora* Rav Yitzchok said: "Whoever gives money to the poor is *bentched* with six *brachos*, and one who appeases him is *bentched* with eleven *brachos*."

(בבא בתרא ט"ב)

The *tanna* Shammai said: "He who gave another all the gifts of the world, but did so sullenly and with a sour expression, it is as if he did not give anything. Yet, he who greets another with a shining countenance, even without giving anything, is considered to have given all the best presents in the world."

(אבות דרבי נתן יג)

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לע"נ שרה רבקה בת ר' יוסף ע"ה

Rebbi Yanai, upon seeing a man give a *zuz* (coin) to a poor person in public, said to him, "It would have been better not to have given him, than to give him as you did now, embarrassing him."

(חגיגה ע"א)

There was once a wealthy man, who upon meeting a pauper, said to him, 'Why don't you go to work?! You are strong and able!' Hashem said to the rich man, 'Not only did you not give him anything of your own, but you have even placed an *ayin hora* on what he has!'"

(ויקרא רבה פל"ד)

The Rambam writes: One who gives *tzedakah* to a pauper with an unpleasant expression, even if he gives him a thousand gold coins, he has lost his *zechus*. Instead, a person should give with a kind expression, sympathize with poor person in his pain and offer him comforting words.

It is forbidden to scream or use a raised voice when speaking to the poor, for his heart is already broken. Woe is to the person who embarrasses him! Rather, he should behave towards him as a father, both in action and in words.

(רמב"ם הל' מתנות עניים פ"י הל' ד-ה)

The Rambam writes: We are obligated to fill the needs of every poor person according to his previous state. When he does not want to accept *tzedakah*, we need to find some other means, such as presenting it as a gift or loan.

There are eight levels in giving *tzedakah*. In descending order, they are: Giving one a job so they are not reliant on others; giving without knowing who is the recipient and in a way that the receiver does not know who is the giver; only the receiver knows who the giver is; only the giver himself knows to whom he is giving; giving to the poor before being asked; giving after being asked; giving less than one is able to, yet with a smile; giving in an unhappy manner.

(רמב"ם הל' מתנות עניים פ"ז, פ"י הל' ח-יד)

HELPING WITH FEELING

The Baal Shem Tov said, "Even one who gives *tzeddaka* with an open hand, but lacks sympathy for the other, is considered to be "spilling blood."

(הוספות לכתר שם טוב סי' לו)

One of the chassidim of the Mittlerer Rebbe related: In a *maamer*, the Rebbe explained *chesed sheb'chesed* as doing *chesed* with feeling. Upon my return from Lubavitch, I repeated this *maamer* publicly and all those present were very moved from this explanation. "What are you excited about?" commented one of the elders. "In my youth, I was told a simple explanation for this: When you give a poor person an old pair of shoes, this is *chesed*; when you also give him a nail with which to fix it, that is *chesed sheb'chesed*." The chossid relating the story concluded, "Chassidus introduced relating to another person with inner feeling."

(אג"ק מוהרי"צ ח"ד ע' נ"ב)

The Alter Rebbe was very particular that all help and support should not be called "*tzedakah*", rather "a loan" or a "*gemilas chesed*". This was how the chassidim expressed themselves.

(אג"ק מוהרי"צ ח"ח ע' תר"ה)

The Friediker Rebbe relates: In the winter of תרנ"ח, my father (the Rebbe Rashab) received a letter from a chossid in Borisov about his woeful state of affairs. The chossid's home and shop had been destroyed by fire, and he was living in a rented apartment with no source of income. Concerned for his *parnasa*, and not knowing how he would repay his debts, he was unable to focus on his learning.

My father instructed me to write a letter to a chossid in Minsk, asking him to lend this unfortunate man three hundred rubles, and in addition, to offer that he come to Minsk where he will help him find *parnasa*.

About a month later, these two chassidim arrived in Lubavitch. The chossid from Minsk told me how immediately upon receiving the letter, he had sent a messenger to bring the chossid from Borisov to Minsk. He had assisted the chossid in opening a store, and was currently offering him partnership in a forest business he owns, advising the Borisover's, daughters to take over the store management.

The chossid from Borisov related to me how the chossid had lent him 400 rubles and had helped him open a store, and how he is Boruch Hashem beginning to see good *parnasa*. He expressed his shock that the chossid from Minsk came to his assistance with such generous spirit, for they were only slightly acquainted, having seen each other a few times in Lubavitch. The chossid concluded, "My own relative from Vitebsk was unwilling to lend me money to begin a new business, and this man expressed such dignified kindness with me!"

My father agreed to their new partnership and gave them his *bracha*.

Later my father told me, "The natural *middos tovos* of a Yid is the preface for understanding the explanations of Chassidus about the *neschama*."

(אג"ק מוהרי"צ ח"ח ע' ק"ט)

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