

DARCHAI NOAM

Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם

(Mishlei 3:17)

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Re'eh – The importance of tzedaka

This week's Parsha of Re'eh contains 55 of the 613 mitzvot, the 3rd highest number of mitzvot in the Torah. One of the mitzvot that we learn is the mitzvah of Tzedaka.

If there will be amongst you a poor person, from one of your brothers, in one of your cities in the land that Hashem has given you, you shall not harden your heart, and you shall not close your hand from your needy brother. Rather you shall surely open your hand to him and you shall lend him enough for his needs, according to what he is lacking. (Devarim 15:7-8)

The Torah tells us that we have to 'open our hand' to those in need. If we look at the palm of our hand as it opens and closes, we will notice something interesting¹. When our hand is closed, our fingers all look the same length. As we open our hand and stretch out our fingers, it becomes clear that the lengths of our fingers are different. When we open our hand to the poor, we should realise that just as our fingers do not have the same length, so too, the poor people that we encounter also have different needs. Some need extra money. Some need more time. Some need a drink of water or a bite to eat. Some need a listening ear. Instead of just handing over a standard amount of charity, we should put in the effort and try to ascertain the individual needs of each person.

What is tzedaka? It is giving to someone who is in need. That is precisely what Hashem does. He gives us everything that we need. In fact, the act of giving tzedaka is hinted at in the letters of Hashem's very name.² The small Yud of Hashem's name represents a coin. The first Heh represents the hand of the giver (the numerical value of Heh is 5, representing the 5 fingers of the hand). The long Vav represents the outstretched arm of the giver as they reach towards the recipient. And the final Heh represents the hand of the recipient, opened up to receive the coin. When we give tzedaka to a poor person, we are emulating Hashem.

There are 8 levels of tzedaka, each one greater than the next.³

- 1 Giving unwillingly
- 2 Giving inadequately, but gladly and with a smile
- 3 Giving after being asked
- 4 Giving directly to the poor person but before being asked
- 5 Giving without knowing to whom one gives
- 6 Giving without the recipient knowing your identity
- 7 Giving totally anonymously (eg putting money into a tzedaka box)
- 8 The highest level of tzedaka is giving a **loan** to a poor person, or entering into a **partnership** with them, or finding them a **job**, in order to strengthen their hand until they no longer need to be dependent on others.

Pay attention to the words that are in bold in the 8th level of tzedaka. They will be referred to again shortly.

¹ This idea was heard from Rabbi Yehuda Kohn.

² This idea was heard from Rabbi Dovid Tsap.

³ Rambam, Hilchot Matanot Aniyim (10:7-14).

Each elevated level of tzedaka represents a reduction in the likely level of the recipient's embarrassment. Thus the highest form of tzedaka is when we help someone to help themselves. They become self-reliant and independent rather than just relying on others. In that way they avoid feeling shame to the maximum extent possible.

We mentioned earlier that Hashem gives tzedaka and when we give tzedaka we are emulating Hashem. But what level of tzedaka does Hashem give? Where is Hashem holding (so to speak) in the 8 levels of tzedaka? To answer this question, we need to understand why Hashem created the world.⁴

Hashem didn't create the world for His own benefit because Hashem doesn't need anything. Hashem created the world for our benefit. Hashem wants to give us the greatest pleasure possible. Any pleasure that we enjoy in this physical world is limited. Hashem can offer us much greater pleasure than that. The greatest pleasure that we can attain is the pleasure of attaching ourselves to Hashem in the World to Come. This pleasure is limitless and eternal. However for such a pleasure to be as perfect as possible, we need to **earn** that pleasure ourselves. If we were to just receive that pleasure passively we would feel an element of shame.

According to our above discussion of the levels of tzedaka, by receiving Hashem's goodness on any level except the highest possible level, we would experience a corresponding sense of shame. When we work for something and earn it, we feel a sense of accomplishment and achievement. This provides us with an intrinsic feeling of pride and self-worth much more lasting than a superficial gift.

Therefore, in Hashem's wisdom, he created a physical world and he sends our neshamas down to this world. Hashem then:

- **lends** the neshama what it needs - ie a body (which needs to be returned after 120 years) plus everything that the body needs to function - food, clothes, oxygen, energy
- gives the neshama a **job** with a detailed job description - ie to keep the mitzvot and to fulfill our own tafkid (purpose) in the world
- makes each of us His **partner** - ie we 'help' Hashem to clothe the poor, care for the downtrodden etc.

After 120 years of struggle and hard work we reach the World to Come and have earned our reward. In this way we will not feel ashamed when we receive our reward in the World to Come.

Did you notice the words in bold? These words are all referred to in the 8th level of tzedaka discussed above. We see that Hashem's tzedaka is at the 8th and highest level. He loans us what we need, He gives us a job and He makes us His partner so that we can **earn** our reward and feel a sense of accomplishment rather than a sense of shame.

When we give tzedaka we are emulating Hashem. And when we give tzedaka at the highest level, we are emulating Hashem even more closely.

Let's try something this week:

1. When a needy person asks us for money, make the effort to work out what else they need. Try to use your intuition to determine whether they need to get something off their chest. Do they need a few minutes to sit down and rest? Ask them if they need a bite to eat.
2. Whenever someone asks you for help, try to help them to help themselves. It is often easier to just do the job yourself, but ideally we should try to help the person to support themselves and therefore to feel good about themselves.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

⁴ This is obviously a very broad topic and we will merely touch on it here. See the Ramchal's *Derech Hashem*, Chapter 2 for further details.

About Darchai Noam

The passuk in Mishlei (3:17) describes the Torah as follows: "Its ways are ways of pleasantness (Darchai Noam) and all its paths are peace". The Torah is our guidebook for life. It is packed full of good advice as to how we should live our lives.

The aim of the Darchai Noam weekly email is to examine an idea from the weekly parsha relating to good middot (character traits). It will focus particularly on treating each other with respect and how to interact with each other in a more peaceful and pleasant manner. It will also suggest some practical tips for implementing these ideas in our daily lives.

By learning together each week, and making an effort to regularly put the ideas into practice, with Hashem's help we can all gradually improve our character traits and our observance of 'v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho' – loving one's fellow as oneself.

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