

Cruelty to Compassion

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One of the main *mitzvot* of Purim is to give gifts to the poor. Breslover *chassidim* would point out that Rebbe Nachman taught that giving charity is an *avodah*, it's a form of Divine service that requires an investment of effort, at all times. (*Likutei Moharan* II:4) It's the door that opens all doors in Divine service, and needs to be undertaken with focused attention. This obviously applies even more on Purim when we have an obligation to give at least some charity to two deserving parties, even if we don't have much resources of our own.

A certain Breslover *chassid* was feeling resentful about always being approached to donate to supposedly worthy causes, so he turned to a friend for advice on how to give charity with a more open heart. The friend answered, "Rebbe Nachman explained that whenever something gets us angry we need to transform our

cruelty to compassion. If you start to put yourself into the position of the poor—if you'll really identify with their pains and struggles—you'll feel real compassion for them. And then you'll find that you're certain to do whatever you can to help them in any way possible."

Reb Mordechai Barbinitzer was a very wealthy man who gave large amounts of charity to the poor. Everybody loved him; his heart was wide open to anyone who needed his assistance. Although he was very well-to-do, when Reb Mordechai arrived in Uman he wouldn't hire a wagon to carry him from the train station to the *kloyz*—the Breslover synagogue. It was a sizable distance and people naturally wondered why he didn't take a wagon as the wealthy usually do.

Reb Mordechai answered, "How can I take a wagon when poor people must walk this distance? If I take a wagon it will be very difficult for me to empathize with how hard it is for them. I therefore walk to see how they feel and make sure to open my heart and purse to support them."

Reb Mordechai owned a factory that manufactured soap. Once, a few drops of a caustic chemical dripped on his hand, and he came away with a nasty burn. He turned to Reb Levi Yitzchak Bender, who was present just then, and said, "Look how hard we work, even burning our hands! But we're willing to do all this to earn more and more money, so that we'll be able to provide for the poor!"