

Dvar Torah for Chanukah

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December 6, 2009

Based on Shivchei HaRan (Praises of Rebbe Nachman) #13

As a young child, [Rebbe Nachman] would often take several large coins and change them for small ones. Then he would slip into the synagogue, through the window or somehow. He would recite a Kabbalistic prayer that precedes the doing of a mitzvah and then take a coin and toss it in the charity box for anonymous donors.

Then he would pretend that his attention had been diverted. Then he would repeat the prayer and deposit another coin. He would again "be diverted," say the prayer and toss in a coin. The Rebbe would do this until he had placed every coin in the charity box, each time reciting the prayer. He did this so that he could do many mitzvot.

I recalled this episode the other morning as I was doing hitbodedut.

When I went to Shachris, I only had a five-shekel coin to give away to tzedakkah (charity). Knowing that Wednesdays are a busy day for collectors here in Yerushalayim, I realized that I would have to get change in order to maximize my giving. So I did.

Afterwards, mid-hitbodedut, I thanked our dear Creator for letting me give tzedakkah. And I made a calculation. Our Sages teach that giving tzedakkah is equivalent to performing all 613 mitzvot. Turning a five-shekel coin into ten half-shekels gave me 10×613 mitzvot. 6,130 mitzvot! In less than one hour! Made my day.

So I thought of the above episode from Rebbe Nachman's life which made me think of Chanukah. Chanukah is a time for giving

tzedakkah. “On Chanukah, we give more tzedakkah than usual because it is a propitious time for rectifying one’s soul through charity giving, especially if one provides support for indigent Torah scholars” (Kitzur Shulchan Arukh 139:1 [end]).

Our Sages teach that Yerushalayim will be redeemed only through tzedakkah (Shabbat 139a). Since Chanukah is a time when geulah (redemption) is literally in the air, it is a time to engage in activities which bring geulah (and the Geulah) closer. By giving tzedakkah we create an atmosphere of peace and friendship (Likutey Moharan I, Lesson 17:1), the opposite of the sinat chinam (baseless hatred) which caused and perpetuates our current exile. Because “Torah scholars increase peace in the world” (Berakhot 64a), supporting them gives an extra measure of peace.

Perhaps the Rebbe’s “childish” behavior can give us some ChiNuKh (education) for ChaNuKah. Even if our gifts seem limited (they are) we can still be creative and stretch them to get “more mileage” out of them. Not for the sake of reward, but for the sake of making within ourselves, and in the great wide world, a deeper, more powerful emunah (faith) and resolve to do more, better mitzvot, no matter what.

alichtege freilekhen Chanukah!

Chanukah sameach!

Happy Chanukah!

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