

Dvar Torah for Parshat VaYishlach

written by breslov.org

December 4, 2009

Based on Likutey Moharan II, Lesson 4:10

Yaakov said [to Esav], "Please don't [refuse my gift]. If I have found favor in your eyes, take my offering...For me, seeing your face is like seeing the face of an angel; and you have received me favorably"

(Genesis 33:10).

Said Rebbe Elazar, "When the Temple stood, a person would donate his [annual] shekel and be forgiven. Now that the Temple is not standing, if he gives charity, fine. If not, gentiles will come and take it by force. Nonetheless, it will be considered as if he gave charity, as the verse says (Isaiah 60:17), '[Instead of] your creditors, charity'

(Baba Batra 9a).

I don't know if this is 100% true, but it's pretty close, "Nothing is certain but death and taxes." It's human nature to want to maximize income and making legitimate, legal use of tax loopholes is as natural in Beijing as it is in Brooklyn. (Do I have to say that hiding income and cheating the government may be counter to halakhah, and may also lead to chillul Hashem [disgrace of God's name]? There—I've said it.)

Even though we often see "our tax dollars at work" on various public projects (like fixing traffic lights), we don't like to pay taxes because we feel that it is money wasted. Well, I hope the following will make you feel a little better, even if it doesn't save you any money.

The taxes you pay have, to some degree, the same positive effects as giving tzedakkah (charity). Such as? Such as

opening the doors to kedushah (holiness). Whatever particular emphasis or improvement you want to make in your Jewishness—stronger faith or more clarity in your Torah study, for example—giving tzedakkah will make it easier, more accessible. In particular, Rebbe Nachman teaches that giving tzedakkah has the strength to fix (and undo) our misguided notion that things happen “naturally,” automatically. Giving tzedakkah increases our belief in God’s ratzon (will), that everything that happens in life is only because God wants it so.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that the real work of tzedakkah requires overcoming one’s greed (a form of cruelty) with generosity (a form of compassion). The Parparot l’Chokhmah explains that though paying taxes requires no victory of compassion over heartlessness, nonetheless paying taxes puts Jews in a nicer light, creating a degree of compassion that at least somewhat tempers potential anti-Semitism a host government may be wont to have.

agutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!

(Giving tzedakkah also brings one to a greater understanding of the paradox of the challal hapanui [the Vacated Space in which Creation exists], where God is simultaneously absent and present. Giving tzedakkah is also paradoxical—you give money away yet end up not lacking. See Likutey Halakhot, Tolaim 4:10.)

© Copyright 2009 Breslov Research Institute