

Rabbi Dovid Sears – The Seven Beggars’ Wondrous Gifts – Part 2

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In Rabbi Nachman’s story of the Seven Beggars, each one of the wandering holy men gives the young bride and groom his most essential quality as a wedding present, this being his most fitting empowerment. If our hypothesis is correct (see Part I of this posting), each gift is an aspect of the fully-realized state of being that is the tachlis, or ultimate spiritual goal. Together, these qualities paint a symbolic portrait of what Rabbi Nachman calls the “tzaddik emes,” the perfected human being.

1. The Blind Beggar

The blessing of the Blind Beggar is: “You should be old like me; that is, you should have a long life, like mine. You think that I’m blind, but actually, I’m not blind at all. It is just that for me, the entire duration of the world’s existence doesn’t amount to even the blink of an eye . . . I am extremely old, but I am extremely young. In fact, I have not yet begun to live – but nevertheless, I am very old.” He goes on to describe a contest with other sages about whose memory is the greatest. The Blind Beggar alone remembers the primal Nothingness (Yiddish: “Ich gedenk gohr-nisht!”) that altogether precedes creation. (He is therefore the “Elder on the Side of Holiness” and the “Elder of Elders”; see Chayei Moharan 123 and 272, citing an expression of the Zohar.) And this sublime realization is his gift to the newlyweds – and to us all when we reach the hour of “finding” or spiritual discovery, the unification that is comparable to a wedding. (In Likkutei Moharan I, 65, the tachlis is related to the

paradigm of closed eyes, which can perceive the transcendental reality and not be distracted by worldly illusion.)

2. The Deaf Beggar

The blessing of the Deaf Beggar is: "You should be like me; that is, you should live a good life, like mine. You think that I'm deaf, but actually, I'm not deaf at all. It is just that the entire world does not amount to anything to me, that I should listen to its deficiencies. All sounds come from deficiencies, since everyone cries out about what he is lacking. Even the world's joys are due to deficiencies, since one only rejoices when his lack is filled . . . However, I have a good life in which nothing is lacking." In the story he tells as proof of his claim, he alone is capable of saving a mythical Land of Wealth, once perfect in its delights, but now corrupted by an evil king and his emissaries. The Deaf Beggar guides the populace to purify themselves of the three poisons of profane speech, which had ruined the sense of taste; bribery, which had ruined the sense of sight; and sexual immorality, which had ruined the sense of smell. Purged of these evils, the ill-tended garden in the midst of the land reverts to its former Eden-like state, and the lost gardener, who had been taken for a madman, is discovered and restored to his former position. Implicit in this sub-plot is the idea that the "good life," which is the spiritual life, may be experienced through our very senses, if only we would purify ourselves of these toxins.

3. The Beggar With a Speech Defect

The blessing of the Beggar With a Speech Defect is: "You should be like me. You think that I have a speech defect. I don't have a speech defect at all. Rather, all the words in the world that do not praise God lack perfection. [Therefore, I seem to have a speech defect, since I cannot speak such imperfect words.] But actually, I don't have a speech impediment at all. Quite the contrary, I am a wonderful orator

and speaker. I can speak in parables and verses that are so wonderful that no created thing in the world doesn't want to hear me. For the parables and lyrics that I know contain all wisdom." In the course of the tale he tells to "prove" his claims, the Deaf Beggar indicates that his parables and verses sustain the entire universe – and they reflect the animating wisdom of all seven days of creation, which was brought into being through the divine speech. (In Likkutei Moharan I, 65, the tachlis is also related to the perfection of speech, in the Rebbe's description of "making echad / unity of the words of prayer" in the course of davenning.)

4. The Beggar With a Crooked Neck

The blessing of the Beggar With a Crooked Neck is: "You should be like me. You think I have a crooked neck, but actually, my neck isn't crooked at all. Quite the contrary, it is very straight. I have a most beautiful neck. However, there are vapors in the world, and I don't want to exhale and add to these vain vapors. [This is why my neck seems to be crooked: I twisted my neck to avoid exhaling into the atmosphere of the world.] But in fact, I have a most beautiful, wonderful neck, since I have a wonderful voice. There are many sounds in the world that are unrelated to speech. I have such a wonderful neck and voice that I can mimic any of these sounds." In the extremely obscure tale that the Beggar With a Crooked Neck goes on to relate, this power seems to be the root of all music and prophecy. This is suggested by the symbolism of the two estranged birds that the Beggar With a Crooked Neck reunites, which allude to the two K'ruvim, or winged angelic forms that hovered over the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy Temple and, according to Chazal, served as the channel for prophecy. The Rebbe also implies that this power brings about the spiritual unification associated with the Messianic Redemption.

5. The Beggar With a Hunchback

The blessing of the Beggar With a Hunchback is: "You should be like me. I am not a hunchback at all. Quite the contrary, I have broad shoulders (Yiddish: breiter pleitzes, which also means the ability bear difficult responsibilities). My shoulders are an example of the 'little that holds much' (a concept found in the Midrash)." Reb Noson later adds: "The hunchback was on the level of the intermediate zone between space and that which is beyond space. He possessed the highest possible concept of the 'little that holds much,' at the very end of space, beyond which the term 'space' no longer applies . . . Therefore, he could carry [his companions] from within space to a dimension that transcends space." In the tale the Beggar With a Hunchback tells to prove his point, this dimension is symbolized by the wondrous "Tree That Stands Beyond Space," evocative of the biblical Tree of Life, in the branches of which all beings find repose and peace.

6. The Beggar Without Hands

The blessing of the Beggar Without Hands is: "[You think there is something wrong with my hands.] Actually, there is nothing wrong with my hands. I have vast power in my hands – but I do not use the power of my hands in this physical world, since I need it for something else." In the course of the story he tells, this other purpose turns out to be the healing of the Queen's Daughter – another symbol of the collectivity of souls. This healing is accomplished through the Ten Types of Song, corresponding to the Ten Types of Charity, Ten Types of Pulse (mentioned in the Tikkunei Zohar – which seem to be a little different than those used in Chinese medicine), and the beggar's ten invisible fingers. Then he tells the newlyweds, "And I am giving this power to you as a wedding present."

7. The Beggar Without Feet

The blessing of the Beggar Without Feet remains a mystery. This final section of the story remains untold until the Mashiach – who in kabbalistic symbology is associated with the

feet – arrives and reveals it to us, may it be speedily in our days!

To sum everything up, the gifts of the Seven Beggars are: long life / transcendence of time (eyes); good life / transcendence of need and desire (ears); oratory that contains all wisdom / transcendent speech (mouth); wondrous voice that can produce all sounds / transcendent sound or cosmic music (neck); ultimate degree of “the small that contains the great” / transcendence of space (shoulders); miraculous healing power / transcendence of mortality and sadness (hands); and presumably either perfect faith, or kingship, or joy (all of which are aspects of Malkhus / Kingship), corresponding to transcendence of self, or ego (feet). They make up one structure, just as the parts of the human anatomy to which they correspond form one structure. Acquiring these sublime powers through the grace of the tzaddikim enables one to reach the tachlis at the individual spiritual level.

This is supported by a few more descriptions of the ultimate goal in the Rebbe’s teachings. In Likkutei Moharan I, 18, the tachlis equals the “primordial thought,” or divine intention that underlies all of creation. This primordial thought is revealed only at end of the process it sets into motion, and is the aspect of “ayin lo ra’asah / no eye has seen it” (another hint to the symbolism of the Blind Beggar in our story). (Cf. Likkutei Moharan I, 8, citing Berakhos 34b, where this phrase indicates Chokhmah and the non-dualistic level. This is supported by the principle that “He and what He enlivens are one, He and what He causes are one – in the ten sefiros of Atzilus / World of Emanation” [Tikkunei Zohar, Introduction, 3b], the realm which corresponds to Chokhmah; see the explanation of this in Sefer Ha-Tanya, Iggeres Ha-Kodesh 20).

In Likkutei Moharan II, 83, the tachlis is related to the paradigm of “Mekomo shel Olam / Place of the World” – the ohr makkif (encompassing light) or “supra-domain” of creation

altogether. And in Likkutei Moharan II, 39, the tachlis is related to Shabbos, the olam ha-neshamos / world of souls, and at the experiential level, the lucid perception of God. This may correspond to the "Tree That Stands Beyond Space" in the tale of the Beggar With a Hunchback.

The qualities that the Seven Beggars confer upon the bride and groom are various expressions of being rooted in the "whole" – the transcendent Divine Unity – and not being stranded in the "part," the illusion of creation as something autonomous, hopelessly conflicted, separate from God. The preeminent tzaddikim represented by the beggars in the Rebbe's story are those who have fully attained this wholeness and who have seen through worldly illusion. Therefore, they are uniquely capable of correcting our confusions and elevating us from the spiritual quagmire, so that we, too, may reach the luminous goal for which we were created.

Afterthought

In Likkutei Moharan (quoted above), the Rebbe teaches that we must engage in the avodah of Torah study, performance of the mitzvos, prayer (especially hisbodedus) and self-improvement in order to reach the tachlis. However, in the story of the Seven Beggars, the main factor seems to be the tzaddikim who bestow their wondrous gifts upon the newlyweds. Is there a correspondence between what the Rebbe is saying in each body of work, or not?

Maybe we can read avodas atzmo, personal spiritual work, into two elements of the story. First, the children must attain maturity before their companions escort them to the chuppah and beg leftovers from the royal banquet in order to put together a wedding feast. Maybe this maturation process equals personal avodah, which elevates one from a lower level to a higher level. Second, the bride and groom express their yearning for each beggar to join them before the desired guest miraculously appears. This yearning is a key factor, too. We

must make what the Zohar calls an “isarusa de-le’sata / awakening from below” before we can experience a reciprocal “isarusa de-le’eila / awakening from above.” The longing for the beggars on the part of the bride and groom indicates hiskashrus le-tzaddikim, creating a spiritual bond, which is up to us, as well. These two factors are the prerequisites for our ability to receive the greatest gifts of the tzaddikim: to become “just like them mamash.”