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The mitzva to give tzedaka [charity] appears twice in this week's Torah reading, Re'ei. Significantly, each time the Torah mentions this commandment, the verb it uses is "doubled." The first commandment is "You shall surely open your hand to your brother," which in Hebrew means literally "Open, you shall open your hand to your brother." The second commandment is "You shall surely give him," the literal meaning of which is "Give, you shall give him."

Our Sages deduced from this double phraseology that the obligation to give tzedaka is not limited to one occasion. Rather, a Jew must give again and again, throughout his life. On the words "You shall surely open your hand" Rashi, the foremost Torah commentator, notes, "even several times." On the words "You shall surely give him" he comments, "even 100 times."

In fact, the two verses refer to two different aspects of the mitzva of tzedaka. The first verse is directed to the giver. The Torah appeals to him, "You shall not harden your heart or shut your hand from your needy brother...You shall surely open your hand." The person giving the tzedaka must work on overcoming his Evil Inclination.

The second verse, however, concerns the act of giving itself. The emphasis here is on the poor man's needs, and the obligation to provide him with whatever is necessary. This helps explain why, in one instance, Rashi comments "even several times," while in the other he observes "even 100 times":

A specific number can only be suggested for an act that is measurable. It is meaningless to assign a number to how many times a person must attempt to overcome his Evil Inclination, as it is an ongoing, life-long struggle. In this case, "even several times" is specific enough. By contrast, "even 100 times" implies that the poor man's needs are varied and many.

On a deeper level, there are two ways a person can fulfil the mitzva of tzedaka. The first involves battling the temptations of the Evil Inclination. The second consists of just doing it, pure and simple. However, there is an advantage in the first method, as the struggle against the Evil Inclination serves to arouse the soul's vast and unlimited powers. Choosing to do good, in spite of one's natural inclinations, reveals the G-dly soul's infinite strength and capacities.

By giving tzedaka, particularly during the coming month of Elul, when it is customary to give more than usual, every Jew will merit to be inscribed in the Book of the Righteous, leading to the Final Redemption, as "Israel will only be redeemed through tzedaka." (Adapted from Likutei Sichot, Vol 34, L'Chaim 5759 #580)

"See! This day I place before you blessing..." (11:26) The blessing in this verse does not refer to anything specific. It is a comprehensive statement which includes all the blessings which the Almighty confers upon every Jew. First and foremost, therefore, it refers also to the blessing of the ultimate and complete redemption which Moshiach will bring about.

The Torah is empathetic in using here an expression of "SEE! This means that the Messianic redemption is not something theoretical or academic that we could suffice with merely listening to, or learning and understanding about. It is something we must see with our eyes.

The redemption must be visible to our physical eyes, in the most literal sense! One must declare and publicize everywhere, in a most sincere way, that even this very day the Almighty continuously proclaims to every member of the Jewish people, through his faithful prophets: "See! This day I place before you blessing!(www.moshiach.com)

Shabbos Mevorchim Elul

This Shabbat we bless the month of Elul, the final month of the year before Rosh Hashana. One of the most fundamental principles in Judaism is that a person can always change for the good. Regardless of one's past actions, the only requirements are remorse for misdeeds, the resolve not to repeat them, and a sincere desire to draw closer to G-d.

This process of returning to one's true, inner nature (which is essentially good in the Jew) is known as teshuva, to which the entire month of Elul is dedicated.

Unfortunately, the concept of teshuva is sometimes misconstrued. "Becoming a baal teshuva" is not just for Jews who were never exposed to Torah and never had a chance to learn the basics. The greatest rabbis and scholars are also obligated to "do teshuva," for when it comes to levels of holiness and purity, there is no end to up. Only G-d can assess what is in a person's heart, ignoring the externals. On the contrary, a person who was raised in a religious home is better equipped to "do teshuva," armed with the benefit of a Jewish education to guide him.

The story is told of a teacher in a "baal teshuva" yeshiva who, in the course of an audience with a certain Chasidic Rebbe in Israel, described how wonderful his school was. In the midst of the conversation, he felt a sudden need to clarify that he himself "was not a baal teshuva."

"And why aren't you a baal teshuva?" the Rebbe gently chided him.

"Doing teshuva" is not a one-shot deal. A Jew doesn't become a "baal teshuva" by beginning to perform mitzvot and assuming that he's made it. The initial turning toward G-d may be revolutionary, but teshuva is an ongoing process. Every day we are faced with choices; every day is a new opportunity to elevate and refine ourselves. And the coming month of Elul is a particularly good time to renew our resolve...

"Live a life of hardship" (Pirkei Avos Chapt. 6 Mishna 4)

Do not read this as tichye (live), but techaye (give life). As is well-known, sparks of holiness fell into the realms of evil, and as long as they remain there, they are in a state of great distress - "hardship". Every person must have the intention of giving them life - by extracting them from evil and raising them to the level of holiness. (Maggid of Mezritch's Ramzei HaTorah p.101d, Pirkei Avos in the Light of Chassidus by Yekuti'el Green www.ascent.org.il)

THERE MUST BE AVODA BY ONE'S OWN EFFORTS.
SUPERIOR HEIGHTS ARE ATTAINED WHEN ONE IS TAKEN BY THE HAND AND LED; IT IS MORE PRECIOUS THOUGH,
WHEN IT IS BY ONE'S OWN STRENGTH. (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM, MENACHEM AV 29)

The previous Rebbe said that beginning with Shabbos Mevorchim Elul, one could sense the "Elul Air" in Lubavich. Just as each day has its own unique type of G-dly service, so too each of the 12 months. The unique aspect of Elul can be seen in halachah, where the Tur states, "Beginning Rosh Chodesh Elul, one recites many selichos and Tachanunim... to request mercy." (Ch. 581).

G-d's blessings are given "measure for measure," I.e. they correspond to the person's actions. Therefore, when we have mercy on someone else, this arouses G-d's mercy towards us.

- The Rebbe