

I have been thinking all morning about the distinction between Tzedakah (charity) and Chesed (kindness), which appears in Sukkah 49b. There are many obvious, almost trivial, expansions on the gemarah. Kindness is available to all no matter their means; we can offer kindness but not charity to animals; we speak of good deeds within a family as kindness but not charity.

Perhaps a more important difference is that Tzedakah—much like teshuvah and tefillah—is a human activity. We pray to H'Shem for Chesed and Rachamim, but we don't pray for H'Shem to give us Tzedakah. If goodness and fortune come our way even when we are destitute, we attribute it to H'Shem's kindness and mercy, not His charity. Kindness and mercy are G-d-like.

In contrast, teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah are human, not really activities of H'Shem. Maimonides even placed in a hierarchy different categories of tzedakah, (depending on anonymity, etc.) a rating system that can only be applied to human endeavor and not to the works of H'Shem.

While these human activities are bounded, they are important. They are aspirational of an all-too human and flawed person trying to be better, trying to improve. In Elul and the Chaggim, we are not encouraged to engage in Chesed and Rachamim but rather in all too human teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah. It is to H'shem that we pray for Chesed and Rachamim.

Tzedakah and Chesed are both important. While Chesed is perhaps loftier and more universal than tzedakah, we need both.

-Harold Furchtgott-Roth

I always find it amazing that a topic discussed in the Daf Yomi is from (or connected to) the weekly Parsha. The Lubavitcher Rebbe famously said that no matter when (in our history) we are reading the Parsha – there is a lesson that can and should be learned from that specific Torah Portion!

So, when we were studying Daf 47 in Mesechet Sukka earlier this week, the gemara was trying to discern that Rabbi Yehuda's opinion is that the 8th day of Sukkoth (known to us as Shmini Atzeret) is a holiday by its own merit. Rabbi Yehuda has an argument with the other sages about this, and one of the proofs that the gemara brings to question his opinion is from a *baraita* (an “external” mishna) that says that the verse: “and you shall turn in the morning and go unto your tents” (Deuteronomy 16:7) must mean that it is to exclude the 8th day?!

The gemara rejects this: No, it comes to exclude the second Pesach, which is similar to the first Pesach in terms of its offering, and it teaches that since it is not followed by the observance of six days there is no obligation to stay overnight.

The gemara says: So too, it is reasonable to say that Rabbi Yehuda is excluding the second Pesach, as we learned in a mishna: The first fruits require:

1. a peace offering to be brought with them,
2. a song unique to the occasion, sung by the Levites,
3. waving, and
4. staying overnight.

Whom did you hear who said that first fruits require waving? It is Rabbi Yehuda, and the mishna is saying that first fruits require staying overnight. Apparently, Rabbi Yehuda excludes only the second Pesach from the requirement of staying overnight. Rabbi Yehuda holds that first fruits require waving, as it was taught in a *baraita*: Rabbi Yehuda says that it is stated with regard to first fruits: “And you shall set it down before the Lord your God,” (Deuteronomy 26:10), and this is referring to waving before the altar the basket containing the first fruits. Do you say that this is referring to waving, or perhaps it is referring only to actually setting it down adjacent to the altar? When the Torah says: “And the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 26:4), setting it down is already stated. How, then, do I establish the meaning of the verse: “And you shall set it down”? This is referring to waving.

So, the proper procedure for bringing the first fruit (which is mentioned only in this week's Parsha, Ki Tavo) is as follows: the Israelite (farmer) brings the basket with the first fruit in it to the Priest in the Temple, with it, he brings also a *Shlamim* (peace offering); while the animal is being slaughtered and the blood sprinkled on the Altar – the Levites sing a special song, from *Tehillim* (Book of Psalms) and the priest waves the basket upwards, as if giving it to Hashem, and then he places it beside the altar, to be taken by him at the end of the day.

Just one cute idea that I was never aware of: the mishna in Mesechet Bikkurim says that the baskets were part of the gift to the kohen. Therefore, the mishna mentions that the richer the farmer was – the material of which the basket was made of was more expensive – even gold! The Sefardi Jews (to this day) have the custom on Purim to make the dish/basket of the *Shalach Manos* part of the gift, and are terribly insulted if you return it!

May we merit to fulfill the mitzvah of Bikkurim speedily in our days, Amen!

-Rabbi Yosef Goldman