



From the President's Corner

The following story is an adaptation of that found on the following Chabad web site:

http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/45939/jewish/The-Rusty-Penny.htm

A beloved and esteemed Rabbi was raising money on behalf of the Jewish community in which he lived. His first thought was to approach a man in the community who was well known to be a miser. It seems that this stingy man, despite his considerable wealth, hated to share his blessings, no matter how worthy or urgent the cause. Beggars avoided his home. Anyone who did unwittingly end up on his doorstep was offered a single rusty copper coin, which even the most desperate pauper would promptly refuse.

When the Rebbe announced to the elders of the community that he wanted to visit the house of the miser and wanted two elders to accompany him, he was met with serious resistance. The Rebbe was adamant, however, and, they finally acquiesced and gave him the escort he requested.

The next afternoon the three of them were standing in front of the miser's mansion. Before knocking on the door, the Rebbe turned to his companions and requested that they not utter a word, no matter what they hear or see. Several moments later they were sitting in the luxurious front room and the owner was returning from his safe with a small velvet money pouch.

"Yes," said the rich man. "A touching story indeed! The community in need! Ah, the suffering of the Jewish people! When will it all end? Here Rabbi, take my humble donation."

To the miser's surprise, the Rebbe seemed pleased by the gift. He was actually smiling at him warmly as he put the coin into his pocket and said, "Thank you Mister Solomons, may G-d bless and protect you always." The Rebbe then proceeded to write him a receipt, adding all sorts of blessings in a most beautiful script.

"Thank you again, my friend," said the Rebbe as he stood and warmly shook the man's hand looking him deeply in the eyes with admiration. "And now," he added, turning to his two companions, "we must be on our way. We have a lot of collecting to do tonight."

As the three men walked to the door, the Rebbe turned and bade his host yet another warm farewell. "You should have thrown it back in his face," hissed one of the elders after they heard the door close behind them.

"Don't turn around and don't say a word," whispered the Rebbe as they walked down the path to the front gate. Suddenly they heard the door opening behind them and the miser calling: "Rabbi, gentlemen, please come back for a minute. Hello, hello, please, I must speak to you, please... please come back in."

In a few minutes they were again sitting in the warm, plush drawing room, but this time the rich man was pacing back and forth restlessly. He stopped for an instant and turned to the Rebbe. "Exactly how much money do you need for the Jewish community?"

"About five thousand rubles," the Rebbe replied.

"Well here is one thousand... I have decided to give one thousand rubles, you may count it if you want," said the miser as he took a tightly bound stack of bills from his jacket pocket and laid it on the table. The elders were astounded. They stared at the money and were even afraid to look up at the miser, lest he change his mind. But the Rebbe again shook Mr. Solomons' hand, warmly thanking him, and wrote him a beautiful receipt replete with blessings and praises, exactly like the first time.

"That was a miracle!" whispered one of the elders to the Rebbe as they left the house and were again walking toward the gate. Once more the Rebbe signaled him to be still. Suddenly the door of the house again opened behind them. "Rabbi, please I have changed my mind, please come in once more. I want to speak with you," Mr. Solomons called out.

They entered the house for a third time as the miser turned to them and said, "I have decided to give the entire sum needed. Here it is, please count it to see that I have not made a mistake."

"What is the meaning of this?" wondered the Rebbe's astonished companions after they had left the rich man's home for the third time that evening. "How did you get that notorious miser to give 5000 rubles?"

"That man is no miser," said Rabbi Schneur Zalman. "No Jewish soul truly is. But how could he desire to give, if he never in his life experienced the joy of giving? Everyone to whom he gave that rusty penny of his threw it back in his face."

During the High Holidays we daven in our machzor that "Teshuvah (repentance), Tefillah (prayer) and **Tzedakah** can change the severity of G-d's judgment." Tzedakah is seen as one of the three acts upon which forgiveness is granted! In fact, the Talmud teaches us that tzedakah outweighs all other commandments!! But what is tzedakah?!

The Torah teaches that it is incumbent upon each and every one of us to give Tzedekah, the expectation being *at least* 10% of our earnings. We are even taught that the poor person who himself depends on tzedakah should also be performing the mitzvah of tzedakah. Here at B'nai Jacob, you may not realize that according to our dues structure, we have only asked that you give 1 to 2% for Tzedekah to the synagogue. We therefore once again ask you, and in fact implore you, to not only fulfill your dues obligation to B'nai Jacob but also seriously reflect on giving additional contributions beyond the 1-2% through donations to our variety of funds.

I am occasionally asked how the money is used. Let me ensure you that the synagogue leadership and its Board of Directors choose very carefully, and I believe very wisely, where the monies go. Your dues are used to maintain our beautiful synagogue and the adjacent parsonage house. Very recently, funds were used to fix some holes that a woodpecker created on the outside of our building. Monies will soon be needed for a future paving of the parking lot and for installment of a new roof. There also have been leaks and water damage throughout the synagogue building that must be soon addressed.

But your Tzedakah does not only go into so-called brick and mortar and physical maintenance. We are very fortunate to be able to provide our children and grandchildren a very sound Jewish education in our Religious School. I would argue that the religious school education we provide would match up very well with that found in Jewish communities significantly larger than ours. If you wish to see Conservative Judaism remain in northeast Indiana, it is crucial that we have the funds to sustain our Religious School. Maimonides teaches us "that we are obligated to be more careful to fulfill the commandment of tzedakah than any other commandment because it is the sign of a righteous person, the descendant of Abraham our forefather of whom G-d said, "he (Abraham) will command his children and his household after him to keep the way of Hashem by doing tzedakah...(Genesis 18:19)." I am struck here by the revelation that the mitzvah of tzedakah has come down through the generations to us here today. Our ancestors before us gave money to help sustain this Congregation; is it not incumbent upon us to continue this heritage?!

Tzedekah has also been used to help replenish the Torah Fund which has then made sure that our Torahs are kosher. How magnificent and spiritually moving it is to be able to see, upon opening the ark on the High Holidays, nine Torahs adorned in white.

We ask you to pay Sisterhood dues and to help sponsor Shabbat luncheons by contributing to the Kiddush Fund... and then it would be wonderful to see you here at Shabbat enjoying the luncheon that you helped to sponsor.

This is but a sampling of how your Tzedekah is used. Do you not wish to see the doors of Congregation B'nai Jacob remain open for the future generations? How many of you are aware that tzedakah is based on the Hebrew word for justice? I am not asking you for charity, but for tzedakah; to do what is just or right for the existence of our congregation that will be celebrating its 100th anniversary next year!! It simply is our obligation and responsibility!!

I conclude by wishing you the joy of giving and may you be moved, inspired and fulfilled, as the miser who became a mensch in our story, to generously give Tzedekah to our congregation.

G'mar Chatima Tova.