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The Mitzvah of Mishloach Manos – Connecting Hearts

Rav Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz, the author of *Lecha Dodi*, wrote a commentary on Megillas Esther called *Menos HaLevi*. He explains that the miracle of Purim and the mitzvos of Purim express the importance of *achdus* and bringing the hearts of Jews together.

Esther said to Mordechai, “לך כנוס את כל היהודים הנמצאים בשושן” –
Go and gather all the Jews who are found in Shushan.”

My revered father (Rav Moshe Alkabetz) explained that the enemy began with the words *ישנו עם אחד מפוזר ומפורד* – *there is one nation that is scattered and separated* – describing the scattered state that is a dangerous sickness for them. **Therefore, Esther asked him to gather all the Jews.**

Later in his *peirush*, he explains,

The mitzvah of *mishloach manos* was instituted because it was with friendship and brotherhood that they came together and were saved, and not with disunity.

In his *sefer Yismach Yisrael* (Purim 3), the Alexander Rebbe explains that *pirud levavos*, separation of the hearts, was the foremost problem of the Jewish people at that time. Each Jew viewed himself as an independent being. They became distant and separated from their common root. Accordingly, *mishloach manos* is meant to bring Jews to love each other and become united.

To illustrate this, he cites a *mashal* from *Midrash Rabbah* (*Parshas Ki Sisa*):

The king's son returned home from school, and the king fed him from the bread that was in his own mouth, as an expression of his great love.

The *Yismach Yisrael* then explains that *mishloach manos* is meant to express that same kind of love. The child does not find it repulsive to receive the food that was in his father's mouth, because of his love and total *bitul* to his father. The same dynamic is at work when a well-to-do Yid receives a simple *mishloach manos* package with a smile.

In fact, the Gemara (*Megillah* 7) discourages sending overly elaborate *mishloach manos*, because *mishloach manos* are only meant to be an expression of the great love between two Jews. Once we understand this, even the wealthy person will be delighted by a simple *mishloach manos*. In other circumstances, he would find no pleasure and might even feel insulted by such a gift. **On Purim, the simplicity of the gift emphasizes that *mishloach manos* expresses love.** Exchanging these expressions of love on Purim brings Jews together.

Welcome Gifts

The Alshich *hakadosh* explains that although Chazal teach us (*Bava Basra* 15:27) that a person is allowed to say, "I do not accept gifts, because it is written in Mishlei (15:27), *ושונא מתנות יחיה* – *One who despises gifts will live*" – that does not apply on Purim. By instituting the mitzvah of *mishloach manos* on Purim, Mordechai guaranteed that no one will be harmed by accepting it.

One Purim, someone brought *mishloach manos* to the Brisker Rav, Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, just as the sun was setting. The Rav went out to his balcony to determine if the sun had set. He explained that **if it was after sunset, he did not want to receive gifts because *שונא מתנות יחיה***. However, if it was still Purim, he would accept *mishloach manos*.

The explanation of the *Yismach Yisrael* helps us understand the distinction. The point of *mishloach manos* is not to increase the wealth or possessions of the recipient. It is directly meant to form and strengthen bonds of love between the giver and the recipient. Clearly, this has nothing to do with the practice of *שונא מתנות יחיה*.

Giving by Accepting

A common explanation for שונוא מתנוות יחיה is that by giving, a person follows the ways of Hashem, Who constantly gives and never takes. The 'taker' is not emulating his Creator. We can easily observe that someone who devotes himself to giving is happy and vibrant, while someone who constantly hopes to get more and more from others usually ends up depressed and dispirited.

However, there are times when the greatest form of giving can be accomplished by accepting from others. For example, the Gemara (*Kiddushin* 7a) explains that if a woman gives a man a coin, and the man says, "You are *mekudeshes* to me with your enjoyment of my accepting your gift," she may be *mekudeshes* (halachically married). If the man is an important person, and the pleasure of his accepting her gift is worth a *prutah* to her, she is *mekudeshes*.

Chazal expect those who receive *mishloach manos* on Purim to "give back" to the sender by expressing joy and appreciation of the gift. In this way, both parties give to each other, increasing love and brotherhood among Jews. Clearly, someone who accepts *mishloach manos* in this way is not ignoring the principle of שונוא מתנוות יחיה.

A Halachic Dilemma

The Rema writes (*Orach Chaim* 695:4) that if a person sent *mishloach manos* to his friend, and the friend either refuses to accept it, or is *mochel* ("No, thanks, it's not necessary") – he has fulfilled the mitzvah of *mishloach manos*. The *Pri Chadash* (a commentary on *Shulchan Aruch*) finds this surprising and wonders from where the Rema derived it.

The Chasam Sofer explains that the Rema's *psak* is based on the reasons behind the mitzvah of *mishloach manos*:

According to the *Terumas Hadeshen*, *mishloach manos* comes to assist Jews who may not be able to afford the Purim *seudah*. Even if someone has plenty, perhaps the mitzvah was instituted in this way so as not to embarrass the person who doesn't have.

In that case, if someone who doesn't have enough is *mochel*, the mitzvah would not be fulfilled. Accordingly, someone who does have plenty should not be *mochel*, so as not to embarrass those who are needy.

However, according to the *Menos HaLevi*, the reason for *mishloach manos* is to increase *shalom* and friendship, the opposite of the enemy's slander that the Jews are "scattered and separated."

If so, it can be said that once a person has sent *mishloach manos* and demonstrated warmth toward the recipient, he has fulfilled his obligation, even if the recipient is *mochel*.

We also find a *teshuvah* from Maharam Schick (a close student of the Chasam Sofer), addressing the halachic question: Does the recipient have to eat the *mishloach manos* in order for the sender to fulfill his obligation? Maharam Schick says no. He explains: "The main point of the mitzvah is the sending, and the gratitude of the recipient. The recipient sees that the sender loves him, and he then loves the sender in return."

He goes on to explain that this is the basis of the Rema's *psak* (that the sender has fulfilled the mitzvah even if the receiver was *mochel*). "...For there is gratitude at least, and since he has sent *mishloach manos*, **the bonds of love between them have been strengthened; and this is the benefit of the *mishloach manos*.**"

Mishloach Manos to Your Enemy

Now that we have discovered that the primary goal of *mishloach manos* is to break down the walls that separate one Jew from another, let's reexamine the way we observe this mitzvah. We make a list of our friends, relatives, neighbors and associates, and prepare *mishloach manos* to be sent to each of them. Who doesn't appear on the list? Those we don't feel close to, and certainly, the people we don't like for one reason or another.

Based on the sources we examined above, it would seem that the opposite would be preferable. If one explains to close friends and relatives that he was not able to send them *mishloach manos* on Purim,

they will understand, and the relationship will not suffer. However, if he sends *mishloach manos* to people with whom he has had conflict during the year, he fulfills the mitzvah of *mishloach manos* on the highest possible level. **Mordechai's intention was for distance and coldness between Jews to be replaced by closeness and warmth**, as a result of *mishloach manos*. Then, Haman's toxic portrayal of Am Yisrael as "scattered and separated" will no longer be accurate.

Mishloach Manos to Hakadosh Baruch Hu

The *sefer Toras Elazar* relates: One year, someone did things that caused pain to Rav Aharon of Belz. As a result, Rav Aharon sent him a beautifully arranged *mishloach manos* that year, and every year after that. The tzaddik knew that the primary goal of *mishloach manos* is to eliminate divisions and bring hearts together.

A person should realize that when he sends *mishloach manos* to a person towards whom he harbors resentment, he is actually sending *mishloach manos* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Hashem wants to shower the Jewish people with all manner of goodness. However, Amalek – whose strength comes directly from the disunity of Klal Yisrael – prevents that desire from being fulfilled. **When any Jew repairs that disunity, he weakens the power of Amalek, and brings great nachas to Hashem.** This is the meaning of the *Midrash Tanchuma (Ki Seitzei)*, אין הכסא שלם ואין השם מלא עד שימחה זרעו, של עמלק – *The Throne and the Name of Hashem will not be complete until the descendants of Amalek are erased.*

Someone who helps bring about this reconciliation will experience the spiritual light of Purim in a much more powerful way. We access the light of a Yom Tov by fulfilling the mitzvos of the day, and when we fulfill those mitzvos in a way that reflects the original intention of the mitzvah, more of the Yom Tov's light illuminates our world.

More is Less

It has become fashionable to make *mishloach manos* as elaborate as possible by adding gifts of non-food items and all sorts of elaborate

decorations. People think that by sending exorbitant *mishloach manos* they fulfill the concept of *hiddur mitzvah* – performing a mitzvah in the most beautiful way. However, **the truth is that these exaggerated *mishloach manos* are actually less *mehudar* than simple ones.** The sender ends up becoming the *mekabel* (receiver), when his intention is to impress everyone with his or his family's wealth and/or talent.

Someone who wants to fulfill the mitzvah in the most *mehudar* way should think of people with whom he doesn't want to have a relationship – and send them *mishloach manos* in the hope of cultivating a relationship. Those *mishloach manos* can be as elaborate as he would like without diminishing from the *hiddur mitzvah*.

The *sefer Yesod Ha'avodah* (Vol. 1, 62) writes, **"It is impossible to wipe out the name of Amalek without the love of G-d-fearing friends among each other."** As we have learned, Amalek derives his strength from the division among Jews, and therefore, he must be defeated by togetherness. The *sefer Yismach Yisrael* writes that Am Yisrael's transgression of enjoying the feast of Achashverosh was also a result of discord. People who are divided lack the *chiyus*, the vitality, that comes from being connected to other Jews. The vacuum causes them to seek that "aliveness" from other sources, such as the hedonistic pleasures of a royal feast. Had they been in a state of *achdus*, they would have avoided the *seudah*, and would not have been persecuted by Haman.

The Hands of Moshe Rabbeinu

In *Maseches Rosh Hashanah* the Mishnah states,

וְהָיָה כִּפְאֹשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וְגִבֵּר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכַאֲשֶׁר יָנִיחַ יָדוֹ וְגִבֵּר עֲמָלֶק

And it was when Moshe raised his hands, Yisrael would strengthen, and when he rested his hand, Amalek would strengthen. (Shemos 17:11)

And did the hands of Moshe make the war or break the war? Rather, as long as Yisrael looked upwards and subjugated their hearts to their Father in heaven, they grew stronger...

The *Meor Va'shemesh* (*Parshas Tetzaveh*) wonders why the Mishnah mentions Am Yisrael looking upwards. It could have stated simply that when they subjugated their hearts to Hashem, they were victorious. Also, why even mention Moshe Rabbeinu's raised hands? What is the special significance of the stimulus that got them to look upwards?

He explains that Moshe Rabbeinu's *madreigah* was *anavah*, humility. The Torah explicitly states that he was a greater *anav* than anyone else on the face of the earth. (Bamidbar 12:3). From his perspective, everyone else was more important than he was. Therefore, his *avodah* as leader of Am Yisrael was to elevate them to this level of *anavah*. Then, if they were truly humble, each of them would look up to every other Jew and love their fellow Jews.

This is what the *pasuk* meant by *והיה כאשר ירים משה ידו* - 'his hand' refers to Moshe's particular power. **When Moshe Rabbeinu aroused his power of *anavah***, Am Yisrael also became humble and began to look up to those around them and appreciate their *maalos*. This led to love and unity among them, and hence to the defeat of Amalek. (The *gematria* of *עמלק* equals *רם*, 'raised up' - symbolizing Amalek's desire to infect Am Yisrael with arrogance.)

Mishloach Manos from Shamayim

It can be extremely difficult to send *mishloach manos* when we feel antagonism towards the recipient. However, that is exactly why such *mishloach manos* have such a powerful effect.

Just recently, people have been sharing the story that happened to a regular listener to our *shiurim*, R' Aharon Deutsch from Lakewood. He and his wife were blessed with their first child after eighteen years of marriage.

A friend of R' Aharon's was publicly humiliated by one of his *chaveirim*. That ended the friendship. Soon afterwards, R' Aharon's friend tried to convince him to travel to the *kever* of Rav Yeshaya'le

of Kerestir in Hungary and to *daven* for children. R' Aharon replied, "If you will make amends with the man who insulted you, I will travel with you to Kerestir."

The friend made peace with the one who had insulted him – a great achievement! – and then traveled with R' Aharon to Kerestir.

On the way, R' Aharon's friend told him, "I give you whatever *zechus* I've acquired by making peace with my former enemy." Nine months later, R' Aharon and his wife were blessed with the birth of a healthy child.

A great abundance of *shefa* is drawn down to the world when Jewish hearts come closer together. Chazal embedded this power in the very essence of Purim. The mitzvos of Purim unite us, which gives us the wealth of the day's potential, bringing about *yeshuos* and *refuos* to all who need.

In his *sefer Meir Einei Chachamim*, Rav Chaim Meir Yechiel of Ostrovtza writes that when Bnei Yisrael fulfill the mitzvah of *mishloach manos ish l're'eihu* correctly, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, who is called "*Ish*" – ה' איש מלחמה – sends *mishloach manos* to *re'eihu*, the Jewish people.



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