



Adapted from the sefer חמין במוצאי שבת a collection of maamarim on
תנא דבי אליהו given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Melave Malka

Melave Malka Parshas Behar 5760

The Midrash Raba in our parsha clarifies our obligation to help the poor, by referring us to Sefer Tehillim. Dovid Hamelech says, "אשרי משכיל אל" (Fortunate is one who understands the poor, Hashem will save him on a day of difficulty). (תהילים מ"א, ב"). In order to help someone who is דל, you must first be משכיל, and understand him.

Once, while I accompanied הרב"ק הפני מנחם זי"ע, an elderly gentleman passed by, and the Rebbe greeted him. The man needed assistance, and The Rebbe did all that he could to help him. When he completed this holy Avoda, he explained a פסוק in Tehillim (ל"ד, י"ט). קרוב ה' לנשברי לב ואת (Hashem is close to the broken hearted, and will save those who are depressed).

"Years ago," said the Rebbe, "I wondered how the closeness described in the beginning of the פסוק, benefits the poor man. It says that Hashem is close to the broken hearted, but that isn't the act of saving him. The second part of the פסוק - ואת דכאי לב יושיע, describes Hashem saving the broken hearted. How does the closeness help him, if his problems have not been solved?"

The Rebbe explained. "When we observe the average person, it's usually possible to identify his needs. We can then estimate what he can deal with himself, and what requires our assistance. However, when someone is broken and depressed, it's extremely difficult to access the hidden, inner world of his suffering. Sometimes people try to help him. However, since they don't really know the source of his pain, their efforts may inadvertently hurt or humiliate him. "



“Think about the following משל. Someone wants to help a suffering Jew, and buys him a stereo, so that he can listen to nigunim that will raise his spirits. Unfortunately, he didn’t notice that the man is deaf. Despite the donor’s good intentions, this “gift” only increases the recipient’s humiliation and depression.

“This is the message of the פסוק. Since Hashem is קרוב לנשברי לב, he knows their true needs and can save them from their suffering. Someone who wants to help others first has to draw close to them. Only from that vantage point will he truly be able to help them.”

The Midrash in our Parsha relates a story that illustrates this principle. “In the days of R. Tanchuma, Am Yisroel desperately needed rain. R. Tanchuma urged everyone to give tzedakah. One man who heard R. Tanchuma’s request, went to distribute money to the poor. On the way, he met his ex-wife. She asked for money, telling him that since their divorce she had not had a single good day. He responded to her plight with great mercy, and gave her all the money that he had. Someone observed this interaction and suspected the man of maintaining a forbidden relationship with his ex-wife. He went to inform R. Tanchuma of what he saw.

R. Tanchuma summoned the man and said, ‘בני, you know that the world and it’s inhabitants are suffering. How can you behave this way at such a time?’”

“The man proceeded to clarify that when he heard his ex-wife describe her plight, he understood her need, and felt great rachamim for her. This was the true and only reason that he gave her a large sum of money. R. Tanchuma turned his face heavenward and said, ‘Ribono shel Olam, flesh and blood human beings tend to be cruel. This man, who had no obligation to support his ex-wife, had mercy on her and helped her. We are the children of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, and you are obligated



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to support us. Shouldn't you have even more mercy on us?' At that moment it began to rain, ending the drought."

If this man had not been a משכיל אל דל, he could have ignored her plea, either out of hatred, or out of fear that observers may suspect him of immoral behavior. As we see from the story, this was not a baseless concern. His focus on her need and pain, aroused his רחמים, thereby awakening רחמי שמים for Am Yisroel.

R. Tanchuma's behavior also exemplifies משכיל אל דל. A person who is suspected of improper behavior is also a דל. R. Tanchuma didn't scream at the man, or threaten to put him in חרם. He drew him close by prefacing his question with the word בני, my son.

These פסוקים teach us to be משכיל אל דל, and to follow in Hashem's ways of קרוב ה' לנשברי לב. This closeness will encourage those in need to speak openly about their painful situations, enabling us to help them more effectively. If we relate to the broken-hearted in this way, we can hope that, even if we have sinned greatly and repeatedly, Hashem will nonetheless draw us close to him, אכי"ר.



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