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Checking Your Pockets

The *tzadik* Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz, zy'a, was known for his exalted sense of humor and frank, insightful observations. A dedicated *chasid* and attendant of the Chozeh of Lublin, the Ropshitzer was also a brilliant scholar and orator in his own right.

On the Shabbos preceding Pesach, the custom in *Klal Yisrael* is for rabbanim to share insights about the upcoming holiday and to encourage the community to provide for each other's Yom Tov needs by donating *maos chitin*, "money for wheat" to make matzos.

One Shabbos HaGadol Reb Naftali returned home from the shul and was greeted by his wife. "So *nu*, how did your *drasha* go?" "It was "fine," Reb Naftali responded, shrugging his shoulders. The Ropshitzer Rebbetzin frowned in surprise. "Fine?! It's one of your most important *drashos* of the year! How could it be just 'fine'? Was it successful or not?"

"What can I say?" sighed Reb Naftali, "I spoke from the heart, but am afraid that I was only half *matzliach* — yes, in fact, I was exactly fifty percent successful..."

"What do you mean? How can a *drasha* be 'fifty percent' *matzliach*?"

"Well, you see, I spoke about *maos chitim*. And *baruch Hashem*, I was successful in convincing the poor to *receive* tzedakah. The thing is, I was not successful in convincing the wealthy to *give* it..."

The Rema begins his commentary on the laws of Pesach by focusing our attention on providing for our neighbors:

ומנהג לקנות חטים לחלקן לעניים לצורך פסח.

"...There is a custom of buying and distributing wheat to provide for their Pesach needs." (*Orach Chayim*, 429:1)

Placing the act of kindness of *maos chitin* at the forefront of our holiday preparations not only focuses our priorities, but it gives us a visceral experience of the impact of Pesach. When we provide matzah and Pesach food to those who need assistance, we remember how we suffered, how we 'lacked provisions' as we left Mitzrayim. We develop a sensitivity to others, modeled after Hashem's sensitivity to us, and how He provided what we needed as we walked into the Desert.

The system of establishing *chagim* and *moadim* depends on our identifying and sanctifying the new moon: אֵלֶּה מוֹעֲדֵי ה' מִקְרָאֵי, קֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם בְּמוֹעֲדָם, "These are Hashem's appointed, *Mikra'ei Kodesh*, 'holy occasions', which you shall designate in their appointed times." (*Vayikra*, 23:4)

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (*Lekutei Moharan*, 2:4) explains that *Mikra'ei*

Kodesh, literally, “Declarations of Sanctity”, also means ‘callings to holiness’. This is because Hashem’s will is revealed through each of the Yamim Tovim, and each one ‘calls’ us toward the will of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, as it is manifest in that specific season and moment.

While sharing Torah with the *chevreh* in the House of Love and Prayer in San Francisco, on Erev Pesach of 1973, Reb Shlomo Carlebach, zy’a, shone his unique light on Rebbe Nachman’s teaching. He said it is as if Yom Tov is standing on the street corner, calling out to anyone in the world who will listen: ‘*Kodesh!* Hashem is beyond nature! There are holy miracles and signs of His presence all around us!’ The more clearly we hear this calling, the deeper we connect with and feel the transcendent joy of Yom Tov. On the other hand, if *chas v’shalom* our *simchas Yom Tov* is lacking, it means that we didn’t really hear those *Mikra’ei Kodesh*, those “calls of ‘*Kodesh!*’”

‘My sweetest friends, how do you get the ears to hear Yom Tov calling? By giving *tzedakah*, charity to the poor, before Pesach. When we train our ears to hear the crying of those in need, our ears become refined, and on Yom Tov we’ll be able to hear God calling out to us. But if our ears are not open to the crying of the poor, we will not hear God calling to us either.’

As we approach Pesach and invest much time and energy into *bedikas chometz*, we should know that halacha requires us to search *עד שיודו מנעת*, “just until where one’s hand reaches”. This means that places that are truly inaccessible need not be examined or cleaned.

A couple of days before Yom Tov, Rav Yehoshua Eizek Shapiro, zy’a, known as Rav Eizel Charif of Slonim, noticed a member of his community — an infamously wealthy miser — examining his pants pockets and emptying them of bits of *chametz*. Rav Eizel remarked, “Surely you are aware of the halachos of *bedikas chametz*....”

“Of course, Rabbi!” cried the miser, proud of his piety, “that’s why I’m digging out the crumbs in my pockets, so I’ll be ready for Pesach!”

“But my dear friend,” Rav Eizel said, “A person is only *mechuyav*, obligated, to search *עד שיודו מנעת*, ‘until where his hand reaches....’ You and I both know that when it comes to *tzedakah*, your hand does not reach all the way into your pockets. So don’t even bother, you have no obligation to check them!”

Even if we piously empty our pockets of crumbs, if we haven’t emptied our pockets for others, we won’t be ready for the true holiness of Yom Tov.

May we open our ears and hearts to the quiet ‘calls’ for assistance of our brothers and sisters — and in this way internalize 100% of the Ropshitzer’s Shabbos haGadol Drasha. May we heed the ‘calls’ of Yom Tov: ‘Please, come to holiness! Please give *maos chitin*. Dig deep into your pockets, and share a little bit of redemption with others!’ ■

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