

COUNT THE OMER

5782



Netzach – Generosity

By Alan Morinis, Founder, The Mussar Institute

INTRODUCTION TO WEEK FOUR

Tomer Devorah says:

Behold, first of all, it is necessary to help students of the Torah and to support them either with money or deeds, so as to provide them with the things they require for their work, to prepare their food, and to fulfill all their desires, so that they do not cease in the study of the Torah And one should provide them with books with which to work and with a house of study. All such aid and support to those who study the Torah depends on these qualities; each person should do all they can, whether little or much.

Netzach has the meaning of endurance or continuity and refers to the expression of God's immanence into a mundane world. We imitate God by being generous to others... and in this way we ensure continuity and a bright future.

The Torah commands that we be generous, most explicitly in Deuteronomy (15:7-10).

When there is a destitute person among you, any of your brothers, in one of your settlements in your land that the Lord, your God, is giving to you, you shall not harden your heart and you shall not shut your hand against your destitute brother. Rather, you shall generously open your **hand** to him, and extend to him any credit necessary for providing that which he lacks.... You shall surely give to him, and let your heart not feel bad when you give to him, because for this the Lord, your God, will bless you in all of your deeds and in all of your endeavors.

When the Temple stood in Jerusalem, the *kuppah* – or collection box – was a central feature of Jewish welfare for the community. When the Temple was destroyed and the Jews dispersed throughout Europe and Asia, the *kuppah* went with them. The communal collection was the safety net as Jews throughout the centuries ensured that the basic needs of the poorest members of the community were met. This financial safety net ensured the endurance of the community.

Thus, some 800 years ago, Maimonides wrote: "We have never seen or heard of a Jewish community that does not have a *kuppah*."

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Jewish law compels generosity and the Mussar masters teach that how we practice generosity is also significant. They call on us to be sensitive to the *manner in which* we give. Giving alone is not sufficient to cultivate the trait of generosity nor does it necessarily reflect a balanced *middah of nedivut* (generosity). Of course, we must give to be generous, but we must strive to give in the best possible way, for the sake of the dignity of the recipient but also for the sake of the wholeness and elevation of the giver's own soul.

Regarding *how one gives*, *Orchot Tzaddikim* mentions three important characteristics that can elevate the act of generosity:

Be pro-active. Do not wait to be asked.

1. Give with a pleasant countenance and demeanor.
2. Give secretly and with minimal shame to the recipient.

Another idea that the Mussar masters stress is that actions affect us most deeply when they are connected to proper intent. The full force of positive actions is realized when one's mind is aligned with one's actions. What enhances and elevates an act of giving is concentrating on the intended act and consciously seeking out and then removing any selfish motivations that may be infiltrating the impending generous act.

We should aspire to do the action with the purest of motivations – to help the other. And then, paradoxically, the giver benefits. “It was taught in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua: The poor person [standing at the door] does more for the householder than the householder does for the poor person.”^[1] Caring for the needs of others is a crucial way to care for the needs of our own souls, as Rabbi Yisrael Salanter said:

A pious Jew is not one who worries about another person's soul and their own stomach; a pious Jew worries about another person's stomach and their own soul.

[1] *Leviticus Rabbah* 34:8.