

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

CHARITY AND LOVINGKINDNESS

Dear Friends,

We are done with Rabbi Akiba and it's time to move on. I'd like to explore some of the more wonderful nuggets of material to be found in the Bavli and consider why they're linked to certain mishnayot. Enjoy!

In tractate Sukkah, mishnah 4:9, the details of the water drawing ceremony of Sukkot are detailed. This was such an important ceremony that when one priest performed it incorrectly he was pelted with citrons. Food fights are apparently a timeless phenomenon. What is interesting here is that a "nugget" of material is contained in the Gemara to this mishnah.

Rabbi Elazar stated, "Greater is he who performs charity than [he who offers] all the sacrifices, for it is said, "To do charity and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice (Proverbs 21:3)"

Rabbi Elazar further stated, "Deeds of lovingkindness are greater than charity for it is said, 'Sow according to your charity but reap according to your kindness. (Hosea 10:12)'. If a man sows, it is doubtful whether he will eat [the harvest] or not, but when a man reaps, he will certainly eat.

Rabbi Elazar further stated, "The reward of charity depends entirely upon the extent of the kindness in it, for it is said, 'Sow according to your charity but reap according to your kindness. (Hosea 10:12)'. (B. Sukkot 49b)

Giving of oneself in Judaism is broken down into two basic categories: charity (tsedakah) and deeds of loving kindness (gemilut chasadim). Charity involves only monetary aid. Deeds of loving kindness include visiting the sick, personally helping those in need and so forth.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why would Rabbi Elazar say that deeds of lovingkindness are more important than charity? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
2. Why do you think this material is placed in conjunction with this mishnah? What do prayers for rain have to do with charity and kindness?
3. Which of Rabbi Elazar's statements do you believe to be most important, according to their position in this sugya? Why?