

THERE IS SOMETHING surprising I have not yet heard anyone point out (and certainly, I have not seen people actually doing so on a constant basis):

There is an age-old practice among Jews that whenever we need to avert an evil decree or prevent a misfortune, we ask and encourage for Tehillim to be said.

There is another strategy that is especially effective in averting calamity—to give tzedakah. This is because the underlying cause of any negative occurrence is our sins, and giving tzedakah cancels their effect, as the possuk states, “Your sin can be redeemed with charity” (as explained in Igeres Hateshuvah and Igeres Hakodesh).

Furthermore, the Alter Rebbe explains in Tanya⁴ that the mitzvah of tzedakah equals all the other mitzvos put together. This is because through giving tzedakah, our very life and energy (which we invested in earning the money) is being elevated to Hashem. (Even if you are in a position where you do not need to toil for a livelihood, since you could have used the money to buy food and other basic necessities, when you give it to tzedakah instead, you are giving your very life to Hashem.)

In light of this, I highly recommend that whenever Tehillim is recited to avert an evil decree, it should be complemented with tzedakah. In fact, this should be done whenever Tehillim is recited, including for joyous and positive reasons (for example, to fulfill the [Friediker] Rebbe’s directive to recite a portion of Tehillim each day as it is split according to the days of the month, and to add an additional three kapitlach of Tehillim each day of Elul.)

(Of course, this should only be done on days when money may be handled.)

In past generations, people would suffice with reciting Tehillim, without the added element of giving tzedakah. Why is this so?

The reason is simple:

It used to be that announcements to recite Tehillim to avert evil decrees were primarily made in shul on Shabbos, when many people would be present. (This is consistent with the halachah that one may address public matters on Shabbos.) At such times, no one was able to give tzedakah.

Even more significantly, in the past, especially in other countries, many Jews were poverty-stricken. In such a situation, giving tzedakah liberally didn’t just mean you were giving money you could have used to purchase essentials. It meant you were literally giving away your very life; you were taking away from the little bit you and your family had to eat and drink.

Another point to keep in mind is that it is forbidden to shame someone who has nothing to give.

Therefore, people would suffice with giving tzedakah at set times, in the amounts specified in Shulchan Aruch (e.g., a tenth or a fifth). Appeals to give tzedakah (generously) were limited to certain unique situations.

For this reason, it was out of place to institute an established practice to give tzedakah whenever Tehillim was being recited.

(Even if the commitment to give tzedakah would be bli neder, people are uncomfortable when they cannot give what they pledged, and we should not make a habit out of causing Jews to feel bad.)

In our times, however, Hashem has given us the good fortune and success to live without such abject poverty.

Therefore, I suggest starting a trend to give tzedakah abundantly on a permanent basis. Whenever Tehillim is recited on a weekday—whether to prevent misfortune or for positive reasons—it should be complemented with tzedakah.

Moreover, the Alter Rebbe writes in Igeres Hateshuvah that “in our times, all those who revere Hashem’s words give tzedakah abundantly” (to atone for our

many imperfections).

May it be Hashem’s will that this heartfelt proposal coming from the core of the soul will be accepted gladly and will circulate everywhere. May people give tzedakah in abundance joyfully and easily, as well as doing gemilus chassidim (which can also be done to the wealthy).

Tzedakah is especially relevant to our generation, the final generation before the coming of Moshiach. Our avodah is to demand “Ad Mosai!?” We want Moshiach, and we want him now! This can be accomplished through giving tzedakah, which brings and hastens the geulah, may it take place immediately!

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