

A Holiday Gift from G-d

Category: Holidays, Sukkot

Each holiday, men are obligated to buy gifts for their wives to enhance their holiday joy. There is also a spiritual side: there are spiritual gifts we can give to G-d as well.

Make Your Wife Happy

You know, our Sages of old tell us many times in halachah, Jewish law, that in honor of the Jewish holidays, husbands must buy their wives gifts, either clothes or jewelry. And the reason is cited by the Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law, as being connected to the simchah, the happiness, of the holiday:

“How do you make them happy? For the womenfolk, one buys for them clothing and jewelry as his money allows,” the Shulchan Aruch tells us.

But tell this rule to a Jewish guy’s face and watch it fall. For the wives, however, even just talking about what their husbands will be giving them gives them holiday joy.

To Paths to Serve G-d

In the lives led by our tzadikim, our holiest rabbis and leaders, throughout the generations of our history, we find two kinds of behavior.

There were tzadikim who divorced themselves from the world and who lived with profound reservation. They barely had a table, a bed and a lamp. They made do with the minimum. On the other hand, there were tzadikim who went out of the way to live abundantly and affluently.

These two approaches were seen among the seven Rebbes of Chabad themselves.

There were Chabad Rebbes who lived very modestly. Their homes were made of simple wood. They didn’t even let anyone paint the furniture. On the other hand, there were Chabad Rebbes who lived in prosperity.

We find these two extremes most particularly with the Tzemach Tzedek (the 3rd Lubavitcher Rebbe) and his son, the Rebbe Maharash (the 4th Lubavitcher Rebbe).

The Tzemach Tzedek lived in a very limited lifestyle his entire life. There were times that a Chosid would bring him a present made of silver or gold, and he would say that he has no need for it—but that they could give it to his son, the Maharash, who lived quite affluently.

About Rabbi Shmuel, the Maharash, it is said that all his cutlery and kitchenware were made of gold. He had not one but two gold watches, a golden pen and a golden snuffbox.

So there were tzadikim who held that the material world stood in contradiction to the service of G-d—and so they distanced themselves from any form of materialism.

On the other hand, there were tzadikim who held the complete opposite—that we need to use as much material things as possible for the service of G-d; that everything that G-d created in His universe was created only for His glory. And thus, we specifically need to use everything in the world towards G-d's glory—and if we don't use it, then it's as if we're allowing it to have been created for nothing, G-d forbid.

The Rebbe Maharash's Wife

The story is told about the Rebbe Maharash that as part of his affluent lifestyle, he would purchase gifts and jewelry for his wife with a broad hand. And since he used to travel out of the country frequently, his custom was that every time he left the house, he would leave his wife, the Rebbetzin, with enough money for all her household needs until his return.

Now, the Rebbe Maharash would many times suggest to his wife that she join him and accompany him on his trips. But the Rebbetzin would always politely refuse the trip, telling her husband the Rebbe that instead of spending the money on the trip, he should give her the money instead and she would know what to do with it already.

Rebbetzin Rivkah, the Rebbe Maharash's wife, was famous for being a good-hearted woman who would help anyone in need. Anyone with a bitter heart could come to her to dump her woes out, and she would help however she was able.

So when the Rebbe Maharash would travel abroad or out of the country, the Rebbetzin was accustomed to taking the money that the Rebbe had left her for household expenses and distributing it to the poor, to orphaned bridegrooms, and so on. Additionally, Rebbetzin Rivkah would pawn her jewelry so as to get even more money for the poor.

When her husband, the Rebbe, would return home from his trips after being away for a while, he would customarily bring her a piece of jewelry as a gift—at which point he would discover that all her jewelry had disappeared and that he now had to redeem all the pieces that the Rebbetzin had pawned.

Spiritual Gifts

So now we get back to our subject at hand: giving holiday gifts to the wives. And as always, there is a spiritual component to this law.

As we've mentioned a number of times in the past, the Jewish People are symbolically considered G-d's "wife." And just like a husband needs to give his wife jewelry or gifts, so too did G-d give His wife jewelry with which she can bedeck herself.

These, my friends, are the mitzvos.

Just like jewelry is what makes a woman appear more beautiful and be more cherished and charming in her husband's eyes, so too when a Jew keeps a mitzvah, he or she is found more desirable in G-d's Eyes.

A beautiful Jew is a Jew who does mitzvos. So when a Jew puts on tefillin, that's his jewelry—with his tefillin, he finds more charm in G-d's Eyes.

But it sometimes happens that the wife takes the jewelry and instead of wearing it, she chooses to pawn it to help another Jew. And in mitzvos, you have the same idea: Sometimes you have to compromise on doing a mitzvah in the most beautiful manner so as to help another Jew.

You see, sometimes people complain that there's a lot of noise during services in the synagogue. There are a lot of people talking. And people complain that it bothers them from concentrating on their prayers. They feel that their prayers are not real prayers, and so they ask the rabbi why he is not bothered by the whole matter.

And there are two answers.

For starters, not too long ago, there were sections of restaurants and even airplanes that were designated for smokers, with all other sections being "non-smoking." And likewise with synagogues, there are the sections in which people talk and the section (usually in the front near the Rabbi) in which are seated all those who want to daven with proper concentration and without any disturbances.

Secondly, and most importantly, Jews who come to shul and talk during services will stop coming to shul if you forbid them to talk and you constantly berate them about talking. And so, the one thing that will keep them coming back is the opportunity to socialize with friends, even though it is in the middle of services.

And so sometimes it's worth taking the beautiful piece of jewelry that you want to wear before G-d, meaning, prayer with decorum, and pawn it off as "spiritual charity" for the good of another Jew. And then, we can be sure that G-d, the Husband of the Jewish Nation, will ultimately redeem these "pieces of jewelry" that we apparently had "lost" in helping another Jew.

And when G-d redeems these jewels, we will realize that not only did we not lose the mitzvah, but the very fact that we compromised for another Jew renders this "sin" precious in G-d's Eyes more than the mitzvah which we wanted to do for ourselves.

So let us hope and pray that as we do mitzvos, "buying jewelry" for G-d or even exchanging our gifts to Him to help other Jews, we inspire G-d to give us the ultimate gift of all—the coming of Moshiach, speedily in our days, amen!