

SWEETENING LIFE THROUGH THE PIDYON



When life becomes difficult and presents us with challenges and hardships, wouldn't it be nice to have an option, other than becoming angry and frustrated – or simply being resigned to our fate? Everything that happens to us is not random, but rather a result of direct Divine supervision – not a detail escapes God's involvement. This knowledge, termed *Daat*, is a prerequisite for any improvement in our lives. It is our challenge to remember that God is the source of everything, even amidst hardship.

There is a Chassidic custom of bringing a *pidyon* – a monetary exchange for a spiritual redemption – to the Tzaddik. It is termed a "redemption" because it is connected with the heavenly court system, with spiritual dynamics that have consequences in this world. In addition to the constant, ongoing work of improving and refining our characters, bringing a *pidyon* to the Tzaddik is one practical step we can take to ease the pressure of difficult times in our lives. Bringing a *pidyon* offers two benefits: It facilitates a connection to the Tzaddik, and sweetens harsh heavenly decrees against a person.

Although the idea of "sweetening" judgments is not unique to Breslev, Rebbe Nachman spoke a great deal about its importance. This is why many people travel to his gravesite in Uman on Rosh HaShanah. This is the time and place most suited to sweetening any judgment at its source in the heavenly court system, well before it makes its way down into this world. This is the reason it is customary to give a *pidyon* on the eve of Rosh HaShanah (*Sichot HaRan* 214).

Rebbe Nachman considered this practice so beneficial that he said it was a very good thing to do all the time, whether or not one has a particular problem. We don't need to wait until Rosh HaShanah to bring a *pidyon*. He even said that if he knew of a Tzaddik who was on a level to make a redemption for him, he



would request one every day and every moment, since *pidyonot* are something very great (*Chayey Moharan* 539).

When a *pidyon* is brought to the Tzaddik, a heavenly transaction takes place on your behalf. According to Rebbe Nachman, there are twenty-four courts in the heavenly court system. He once commented on the complexity of the system and said, "I do not know how Tzaddikim make a redemption through a *pidyon*, since they need to know all twenty-four courts. When a *pidyon* is brought, he needs to know in which court the person is being judged. If the Tzaddik does not know this, he might bring the *pidyon* to one court, when the person is really being judged in another. Therefore, he needs to know in which court the person is being judged, and to know the type of redemption and 'sweetening' belonging to that particular court." He continued, "I know all twenty-four courts. I can make an appeal from one court to another, through all twenty-four courts. In other words, I can say that the judgment doesn't seem satisfactory to me in this particular court and I want the case to be judged in another court. Thus, I can proceed from court to court until I go through all of them, which is certainly beneficial, since no matter what the final outcome, the case is drawn out and pushed off. When it is drawn out like this, it is made easier, because meanwhile this same person does a mitzvah or some other good thing. And even if this does not help, I can send it directly to the King." (*Sichot HaRan* 175)

Sweetening judgments through the *pidyon* is deeply connected to the Exodus from Egypt, since the essence of any redemption, whether from Egypt or any other exile – physical or spiritual – is through sweetening judgments until they are nullified completely (*Likutey Halachot, Birkat HaShachar* 5). Not only does life get a little easier, but we are then free to exit from all forms of exile. ■

