



dedicated learning. dynamic leadership.

Purim:
Two Kinds of Gifts
Rabbi Jeffrey Fox
Rosh Yeshiva, Maharat

Rabbi Shimshon David Pinkus z”l, one of the more influential teachers and thinkers in the modern *charedi* community¹, has a beautiful approach to two of the central *mitzvot* of Purim משלוח מנות (gifts to friends) and מתנות לאביונים (gifts to the poor).

In the second essay in his short book on Purim he talks about two different kinds of gifts that exist in the world². One kind of gift is intended to fill the need of another my friend needs a pen, so I given them a pen. There is another type of gift that it is not simply meant to fill a need, but rather is an expression of love I bring home flowers on Friday afternoon to show my wife how I feel, not because we need more flowers at home.

Rav Pinkus goes on to apply the same distinction to the *mitzvot* of Purim. מינובאל תונתם are intended to fill the need of someone who does not have food to eat. משלוח מנות, on the other hand, is meant to be an expression of love to the one who receives them.

This may help to explain why מתנות לאביונים must be given to at least two people, while משלוח מנות need only be given to one person. There are many people who are in serious need of food. However, there are only a limited number of people with whom I can truly have the kind of relationship Rav Pinkus is imagining.

He then maps this analogy onto the relationship between people and the Creator of the World. God showers us with different kinds of *chesed*. Sometimes we are the recipients of things we really need food, clothing, shelter. However, as Rav Pinkus points out, there are some garments that we do not really need to have in our closets. No one needs to wear a tie in order to be safe and warm. No one needs another bridesmaid dress. And yet, we open our closets and our refrigerators and we are blessed by so many gifts from God that fill no need, but rather display divine love.

He says, “החולצה היא בגד מתנות לאביונים ואילו העניבה היא בגד משלוח מנות” - The shirt is in the category of *matanot la-eyyonim*, while the tie is in the category of *mishloach manot*.²

On a deeper level, the greatest gift that God gave to the Jewish People is of course the Torah, which we receive anew every year on Purim. The Torah represents a gift given out of pure love. It is through our observance of the *mitzvot* embedded within this gift that we express our

¹ Sadly, he was taken from this world together with his wife and daughter in a tragic car accident in 2001.

² See נפש שמשון on Purim published in 2003 in Jerusalem, “פורים – נס בתוך הטבע,” pages 22 - 23.



dedicated learning. dynamic leadership.

gratitude for a life filled with meaning.

This year, I encourage everyone to think carefully about to whom you send *mishloach manot* and *matanot la-evyonim*. Do not overlook those people who are part of your community and are struggling to put food on the table. Do not let economics stand in the way of those who want to be part of your shul.

Will you only send *mishloach manot* to people who expect to receive them from you or your family? Can you find someone to whom you can express a type of affection that can be created through the receipt of a gift? What about your nonreligious Jewish neighbor who might not know so much about Purim. Can you find a way to bring them close to the great gift of God's Torah?

May this Purim be filled with gifts.



Rabbi Jeffrey S. Fox, Rosh HaYeshiva of Maharat, was the first graduate of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah. Upon graduation he served as the Rabbi of Kehilat Keshet: The Community Synagogue of Tenafly and Englewood for seven years. In Rabbi Fox's tenure at Keshet, the community grew three-fold from thirty families to nearly one hundred. During that time Rabbi Fox also taught at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah as well as the Florence Melton Adult Education School in Bergen County. He also served on the board of the Synagogue Leadership Initiative of the UJA of NNJ. Rabbi Fox is a Senior Rabbinic Fellow of the Shalom Hartman Institute and has also been a member of the faculty of the Drisha Institute, the Florence Melton Adult Education School in Westchester County, and Hadar.