

## צדקה-Tzedakah, The Jewish Way of giving

1. There must be more to life than having everything. *Maurice Sendak*

חֲזִקוּ יָדַיִם רַפּוֹת וּבְרָכִים כְּשֵׁלוֹת אֲמָצוֹ:  
אָמְרוּ לְנַמְהָרֵי־לֵב הֲזִקוּ אֶל־תִּירָאוּ...

2. Strengthen the hands that have become weak; Stabilize shaking knees!  
Say to those whose hearts are anxious, “Be strong, fear not;..” *Isaiah 35:3-4*

דצדקה אילנא דחי" הוא

3. Tzedakah is the Tree of Life. *Zohar, Leviticus 111a*

4. Shrouds have no pockets. *Yiddish proverb*

דרש רב עוירא' זימנן א"ל משמיה דרב אמ' וזימנן אמר לה משמיה דרב אסי'...  
אם רואה אדם שמזונותיו מצומצמין יעשה מהן צדקה וכ"ש כשהן מרובין.

5. Rabbi Avira taught — sometimes in the name of Rabbi Ammi and sometimes in the name of Rabbi Assi:...  
If a person sees that his or her [financial] resources are limited, he or she should use them for Tzedakah, and so much the more so when he or she has great [financial] resources. *Gittin 7a*

מרגלא בפומיה דרבא תכלית חכמה תשובה ומעשים טובים

6. Rava used to say: The ultimate purpose of wisdom is Teshuvah and doing good. *Berachot 17a*

שאין שם שמחה גדולה ומפוארה אלא לשמח לב עניים ויתומים ואלמנות וגרים

7. There is no greater or more glorious joy than to bring joy to the hearts of poor people, orphans, widows, and strangers. *Rambam, Hilchot Megillah VeChanukkah 2:17*

## Will You Find “The Meaning Of Life” By Doing Tzedakah?

*I am convinced that the sense of meaning grows not by spectacular acts but by quiet deeds day by day. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, ז"ל*

You might.

Many people have.

What is certain, however, is that you will know that there *is* meaning in your life when you have fed a hungry person that very day or for a week or a month into the future.

And that this person — for any one of a number of reasons — cannot afford to feed himself or herself.

And that the meals you are providing are tasty according to *their* own personal tastes, nutritious, and Menschlich.

There is no doubt that your act of Tzedakah has given vital sustenance to someone who might otherwise have wasted away. That Mitzvah you have done should also shift your own sense of what it means to be a human being into some higher realm. *You*, an “anybody” on the earth, used your money and saved a life. *That* is amazing, awesome. You have become more than just #2,476,551 in a census, or a tax paying-resident of Cook County, Illinois, or the sister of Jacob Levinson. You are *really* someone.

The same is true when you subsidize a dozen therapy sessions for someone whose life is unbearable.

I would think this act of Tzedakah has profound significance for that other person who now has some hope...and unquestionably this means so much *to you*.

*You* made it happen.

*You* changed the world by changing the life of one individual.

It is possible that you will build on these individual acts.

Because of what you have done, you may find yourself seeing things in a new light. What may happen is bi-directional, namely: (1) If you are now thinking constantly about Tzedakah, you may find yourself looking for new opportunities to do Good Things, and (2) as you gauge your daily — even mundane — activities, you will notice how many more of them can be tied into acts of Tzedakah. What happens may be a gradual process, or it may come in a sudden flash of insight. The end result *could* lead you to a general sense of spiritual serenity and wellbeing.

I believe that the search for The Meaning of Life is a good thing. I would never belittle the search nor minimize the need to search. I believe it is a most worthwhile human endeavor. However, I also believe that engaging in Tzedakah *during* the search may appreciably ease the restlessness and anxiety of the entire process.

Human beings want to feel that this thing, this gift called Life has depth, breadth, and a “feel” of awe-inspiring value. Jewish tradition teaches that money *can* become the ideal instrument for finding true, deep significance. This is particularly curious, since money is so commonly maligned as the tool of greed and egocentricity.

Yes, you might possibly find The Meaning of Life through your Tzedakah. At the very least you will find more meaning in your own life.

One last thought: Will you find The Meaning of Happiness and at the same time *be* happy?

You will.

Most certainly you will.

## Will Your Personality Change If You Do More Tzedakah?

רב אמר לא נתנו מצוות אלא לצרופי בהן את הבריות

*Rav said: Mitzvahs were given in order to refine human beings.*

Leviticus Rabba 13:3 (Margoliot Edition)

### **The Pocket**

Will your personality change if you do more Tzedakah?

It might.

It has for many people.

The Talmud records an interesting passage that addresses human personality:

אמר רבי אילעאי: בשלשה דברים אדם ניכרבכוסו ובכיסו ובכעסו.

*Rabbi Ila'i said:*

*A person's personality may be sensed by three indicators —*

*The cup [how the person handles alcohol],*

*The pocket [how the person uses money],*

*Anger [what kinds of things anger the person].*

Eruvin 65b

“The pocket” — Rabbi Ila'i teaches that one sure way to know a person is to observe how a person uses money both for personal needs and for Tzedakah.

Many things make you feel good about yourself. But there really is something special about the *specific* good feeling that you have when you demonstrate how much you care for others. There is something extraordinarily attractive about alleviating another's worries, pain, or despair. What words are there, really, to describe how you feel when *you* have taken people whose sadness has overwhelmed them and caused them to feel better for a moment, for a day, a week, or permanently?

### ***One Mitzvah and Then Another and Another***

Furthermore, Tzedakah has the power to drive you to do even more Tzedakah. It is, in many ways, addictive in a most positive sense. Almost 2,000 years ago, the brilliant Ben Azzai stated it beautifully and succinctly: **שמצוה גוררת מצוה** — One Mitzvah exerts a pull on another. (Pirkay Avot 4:2) A friend taught me the same principle in more realistic terms. She explained, "Doing Tzedakah is like eating potato chips. Just as you can't eat only one chip, so, too, with acts of Tzedakah. Doing one Mitzvah gives you a craving for the next." Either way, in Real Life, when you pay for home care aides to take care of Elders so that they won't have to go into a nursing home, that very act of Tzedakah may give you a profound sensation of wanting to do more earthshaking miracles. When you use your money to make a fine Passover meal for a new immigrant, buy life-saving medicine for a widow living on a pittance in Moscow, endow a special needs Torah study program in a day school — it becomes difficult to even think you want to slow down or stop. Just consider what it means to pay for birthday parties for kids somewhere who never had one...boys and girls you will never meet because you want them to know that *somewhere, someone really* cares about them.

### ***At Your Own Pace***

Because everyone by nature is different, the power of Tzedakah can influence and shape people at different rates and at different times in their lives. People respond in various ways, and you would do well not to make comparisons with how others may have changed. For some, Tzedakah's intense attraction is like simple addition: one Mitzvah-money-generated deed generates another. Others may move exponentially: Buying three pairs of shoes for people whose own shoes are tattered may lead them to  $3^3$  — 27 more pairs. There are no guarantees, but most likely you will find yourself somewhere within that range.

You may possibly be someone who feels that you have some rough edges that cause irritation, embarrassment, or dismay in others. (I certainly do.) This may make you uncomfortable, and you find yourself living with a poor self-image. Or, you may be troubled that you have acquired a reputation for being condescending or abrasive. Consider one example: arrogance. At first glance, the awesome *power* of Tzedakah and *humility* would appear to be a classic contradiction in terms. And yet, since the essence of Tzedakah is both the Life-force and the spiritual affirmation of Life, you might feel humbled by this human gift. In theological terms, you would express gratitude to the Giver of Life for being allowed to spend your days doing Tikkun Olam.

### ***Many Ways to Acquire a Sterling Soul***

In the world of personality refinement, there are, of course, abundant and diverse methods to repair an injured psyche. Engaging in more Tzedakah is one such method which you may wish to keep in mind. As it has benefited others, it may also work well for you. Possibly, it will even work wonders for your Self. If you *do* feel a certain disappointment about the way you have treated others (and yourself), doing more Tzedakah can serve as a constant reminder that you *are* capable of being a deeply caring, even noble, human being. You can assure yourself that *ultimately* this is the kind of person you are.

To repeat the question: *Will my personality change if I do more Tzedakah?* Not *necessarily* and certainly not *automatically*. But you have changed the odds, and you have changed them far better than you might have expected. Tzedakah does not operate by the same rules as mathematics. Still, even though no precise "ratio of Tzedakah to positive change in personality" exists, you may very well find yourself kinder, more understanding, patient, and gentle than you were before.

## תשובה-Teshuvah, The Jewish Way of Repenting/ Turning Our Lives Around

1. Living is not a private affair of the individual.

Living is what man does with God's time,  
what man does with God's world. *Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, 5"ז*

2. The Kotzker Rebbe put it succinctly when he said that a person should have a piece of paper in both side pockets. On one should be written, "The whole world was created (just) for me". On the other, "I am but dust and ashes". The trick in life, says the Rebbe, is to know when to take out which piece of paper!

[I am but dust and ashes=עפר ואפר, *Genesis 19: 27.*  
The whole world was created (just) for me=העולם נברא בשבילי, *Sanhedrin 37b.*]

המקלל עצמו וחברו...עובר בלא תעשה

3. One who curses oneself or another person...transgresses a negative commandment.

*Shevu'ot 35a*

4. He who has done ill and talks about it and thinks about it all the time does not cast the base thing he did out of his thoughts, and whatever he thinks, therein one is, one's soul is wholly and utterly in what one thinks and so he dwells in baseness. He will certainly not be able to turn, for his spirit will grow coarse and his heart stubborn, and in addition to this he may be overcome by gloom. What would you? Rake the muck this way, rake the muck that way — it will always be muck. Have I sinned, or have I not sinned — what does Heaven get out of it? In the time I am brooding over it, I could be stringing pearls for the delight of Heaven. This is why it is written: "Depart from evil and do good" — turn wholly away from evil, do not dwell upon it, and do good. You have done wrong? Then counteract it by doing right.

*The Gerer Rebbe,  
[From Martin Buber's The Way of Man]*

אייר לוי...

כל מי שהוא ישן על מיטתו בלילה ומתחשב בלבו ואומר  
למחר אני משכים ועושה טובה עם פלוני

עתיד לשמה עם הצדיקים בגן עדן לעתיד לבא שנאמר וליועצי שלום שמחה

5. Rabbi Levi said,

Whoever thinks to himself or herself before going to sleep at night and says,

"When I wake up tomorrow, I will do good things for Ploni" —

that person will ultimately share great joy with The Good People

in the Future, in the Next World,

as the verse states, "...For those who plan good, there is joy." (Proverbs 12:20)

*Midrash Mishlay (Proverbs) 12:1, Visitzky text [Ploni=Mr. X, Ms. Y, Joe Smith]*

רב אמר, לא נתנו מצוות אלא לצרופי בהן את הבריות

6. Mitzvahs were given in order to refine human beings. *Leviticus Rabba 13:3 (Margoliot)*

לא ישתמש אדם בפניו ידיו ורגליו אלא לכבוד קונו

7. One should use one's face, hands, and feet only to honor one's Creator. *Tosefta Berachot 4:1*

תניא היה רבי מאיר אומר חייב אדם לברך מאה ברכות בכל יום

8. It was taught: Rabbi Meir says,

"Everyone is required to make 100 Berachot-blessings every day." *Menachot 43b*

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7...

## 9. Ask Yourself The Four Questions

1. What am I good at?
2. What do I like to do?
3. What bothers me so much about what is wrong in the world that I weep or scream in anger and frustration, or am speechless at the horror of it?
4. Who are my heroes and what is it about them I admire?
5. Whom do I know?
6. Why not?
7. What can I do right now?
8. What am I not good at, but might do anyway because it would make a big difference in someone else's life?

### 10a. THE Questions: Part I

פתחו לי שערי צדק לעולם הבא אמרו לו לאדם מה היה מלאכתך  
וזהו אומר מאכיל רעבים הייתי  
וזהם יאמרו לו זה השער לה, מאכיל רעבים הכנס בו  
משקה צמאים הייתי והם אומרים לו זה השער לה, משקה צמאים הכנס בו  
מלביש ערומים הייתי והם אומרים לו זה השער לה, מלביש ערומים הכנס בו  
וכן מגדל יתומים וכן עושי צדקה וכן גומלי חסדים

“Open the Gates of Righteousness [Justice, Victory] for me...” (Psalm 118:19)

[At the Time of Judgment] in the Future World,

everyone will be asked, “What was your occupation?”

If the person answers, “I used to feed hungry people,” they will say to that person,

“This is God’s gate, you, who fed hungry people, may enter.”...

“I used to give water to thirsty people,” they will say to that person,

“This is God’s gate, you, who gave water to those who were thirsty may enter.”...

“I used to give clothing to those who needed clothing,” they will say to that person,

“This is God’s gate, you, who gave clothing to those who needed clothing, may enter.”...

and, similarly, those who raised orphans, and who performed the Mitzvah of Tzedakah, and who performed acts of caring, loving kindness. *Midrash on Psalms, 118:17*

### 10b. THE Questions: Part II

אמר רבא בשעה שמכניסין אדם לדין אומרים לו נשאת ונתת באמונה קבעת עתים לתורה  
עסקת בפריה ורבייה צפית לישועה פלפלת בחכמה הבנת דבר מתוך דבר

Rava said: When a person is brought to Final Judgment, he or she will be asked,

“Were you honest in business?

Did you have fixed times for Torah study? Did you have children?

Did you expect the world’s problems to be worked out?

Did you use all the mental abilities to achieve wisdom?

Did you make creative use of your intellectual powers [for the right purposes]?” *Shabbat 31a*

## 11. Life, Being, Being With The Great Ones

אמר ליה ר, טרפון עקיבא כל הפורש ממך כפורש מן החיים

11a. Rabbi Tarfon said,

“Akiva, being too far away from you is like being too distant from life itself.” *Kiddushin 66b*

אמר לו עקיבא כל הפורש ממך כפורש מחייו

11b. [Rabbi Tarfon] said,

“Akiva, being too far away from you

is like being too distant from the meaning of one’s own life.” *Zevachim 13a*

מעשה בר, עקיבא שעשה משתה לבנו על כל חבית וחבית שפתח [אומר  
חמרא לחיי רבנא ולחיי תלמידיהון]

**11c.** Rabbi Akiva once made a feast in honor of his son. Every time he opened a barrel of wine, [he would recite the following toast, “This wine — Here’s to the lives of our teachers and here’s to the lives of their students.”] *Tosefta Shabbat 8:3*

רבי חייא בר ווא מצלי יהי רצון מלפניך ה, אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו שתתן בלבינו לעשות תשובה שלימה לפניך  
**12.** Rabbi Chiyya bar Vo prayed [used to pray]:  
May it be Your will, O God and God of our ancestors,  
That You put in our hearts to do complete Teshuvah in Your Presence.

*Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot 4:2*

...וחוזרין בתשובה והאלהים בכל שנה סולח לעונותיהם ומחדש לבם ליראתו  
שנאמר (יחזקאל לו) ונתתי לכם לב חדש

**13.** ...when they do Teshuvah every year, [God] forgives their sins and **gives them a new heart** to remain in awe of God, as the verse says, “And I shall give them a new heart.”

*Exodus Rabba 15:6, Ezekiel 36:26*

ואוכלים ושמחים במוצאי יה"כ דהוי קצת יו"ט (טור ומהרי"ו וא"ז)

**14.** And we eat and drink after Yom Kippur because it is “a bit of” a holiday.

*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 624:5*

## תפילה-Tefillah, Jewish Prayer

טוב ליתן צדקה קודם תפילה

1a. It is good to give Tzedakah before praying. (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 92:10*)

**An extremely partial list of items to bring before Kol Nidray to be donated to appropriate places for individuals who may be in need of them (some items new, others gently-used):**

*Food, including “fun food”; infant car seats and other baby items; old cellphones and chargers; pretty things to make someone happy; toiletries feminine hygiene, and other personal care items; gift cards to grocery stores and department stores; board games, jigsaw puzzles; Legos™, Lincoln Logs, and toys; kids’ pajamas, underwear, long underwear, and socks; sweaters, sweatshirts, and overcoats; suits, dresses, skirts, blouses for job interviews; books and videos/DVD’s for children and adults of all ages; crayons and other school supplies – including backpacks; mah jongg sets and plants for residents of eldercare facilities; dog and cat food; tickets to movies, concerts, shows, sporting events; blankets, comforters, sheets, pillowcases, and towels.*

**Right away:** Donate a variety of magnifying glasses to be placed on a table outside the sanctuary. Individuals who find large print Siddurim and Machzorim too cumbersome would find this a beneficial alternative and would allow them to participate more fully in the service.

וַיִּבְקְשׁוּ פָנַי הֲרֵי צְדָקָה' כְּמֹד"א (תהלים יז) אֲנִי בְצִדְקַת אַחֲזָה פָנֶיךָ  
1b. “And they search for My face” — this refers to Tzedakah,  
As the verse says, “By means of an act of צדק/Tzedek-righteousness, I shall see Your face.”  
*Genesis Rabba 44:12, II Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 17:15*

דרש רבי דוסתאי ברבי ינאי...  
אדם נותן פרוטה לעני זוכה ומקבל פני שכינה שנאמר  
אֲנִי בְצִדְקַת אַחֲזָה פָנֶיךָ אֲשַׁבְּעָה בְּהַקְיִין תְּמוֹנֶתְךָ

1c. Rabbi Dosta'i the son of Rabbi Yannai explained in a sermon:...

If a person gives even a *perutah* (the smallest coin),  
that person is privileged to sense God's Intimate Presence,  
as the verse (Psalms 17:15) states:

I, through just-and-righteous acts, will see Your face;  
awake, I am filled with the vision of You. *Bava Batra 10a*

רבי אלעזר יהיב פרוטה לעני והדר מצלי' אמר' דכתיב: אֲנִי בְצִדְקַת אַחֲזָה פָנֶיךָ  
1d. Rabbi Elazar used to give a *pruta* to a poor person  
And *then* pray, saying:  
It is written, “I, by means of an act of צדק/Tzedek-righteousness will see Your face”.  
*Bava Batra 10a, Psalm 17:15*

2. מי יחיה ומי ימות? -Who shall live, and who shall die? *The Machzor*

אם התחיל אחד מהעשרה להתפלל לבדו  
ואינו יכול לענות עמם או שהוא ישן  
אפילו הכי מצטרף עמם

3. If one person of the ten [in a Minyan] began to pray by himself/herself, and is unable to answer “Amen” or is asleep — even in situations like those, that person is counted.

*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 55:6 [Laws of Kaddish]*

אמר אבוי לעולם לשתף אינש נפשיה בהדי צבורא

4. Abaye said: You should always associate yourself with the community [by reciting prayers in the plural.] *Berachot 29b-30a*

רב אמר לא נתנו המצות לישראל אלא לצרף בהן את הבריות

5. Mitzvahs were given in order to tie God's creatures together. *Leviticus Rabba 13:3*

אמר רבי חייא בר אבא לעולם יתפלל אדם בבית שיש בו חלונות

6. Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan:  
One should always pray in a place where there are windows. *Berachot 34b*

7a. Upon seeing a good friend whom you have not seen or been in touch with for 30 days, recite: Blessed are You, O God, who has kept us alive (שהחיינו-shehecheyanu) and allowed us to reach this most significant moment. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 225:1*

תני רבי ישמעאל...שהמקבל פני חברו כילו מקבל פני שכינה.

7b. Rabbi Yishmael taught:...one who greets a friend, it is as if that person has greeted [seen the Face of] God. *Jerusalem Talmud, Eruvin 5:1*

הקדוש ברוך הוא ליבא בעי

8. The Holy One wants your heart. *Sanhedrin 106b*

הנכנס לבית הכסא אומר

התכבדו מכובדים קדושים משרתי עליון תנו כבוד לאלהי ישראל  
הרפו ממני עד שאכנס ואעשה רצוני ואבא אליכם

9. When a person goes into the bathroom, the person should recite:  
Be honored, O honored ones, holy ones, servants of the Most High. Give honor to the God of Israel— leave me until I go in, do what needs to be done, then return to you. *Berachot 60b*

רבי אלעזר בתר דמסיים צלותיה אמר הכי

יהי רצון מלפניך ה', אלהינו שתשכן בפורינו אהבה ואחוה ושלוש וריעות'  
ותרבה גבולנו בתלמידים' ותצליח סופנו אחרית ותקודה' ותשים חלקנו בגן עדן'  
ותקנונו בחבר טוב ויצר טוב בעולמך'  
ונשכים ונמצא יחול לבבנו ליראה את שמך'  
ותבא לפניך קורת נפשנו לטובה.

10. After he would finish the Amidah, Rabbi Elazar would recite:

May it be Your will, O God, our God,  
to grace our lives with love and friendship and peace,  
and a feeling of the intimacy with all humanity  
and may the borders of our lives overflow with students,  
and may our end be exceptionally hopeful  
and may our ultimate place be in Paradise,  
and arrange things so that, in this, Your world,  
we will have good friends and have the disposition to do good,  
and allow us to awaken with our yearnings fulfilled to be in awe of Your Name,  
and may our happiness be pleasing in Your Presence.

*Berachot 16b*

## A Prayer of Responsibility for Children

We pray for children who put chocolate fingers everywhere, who like to be tickled, who stomp in puddles and ruin their new pants, who sneak popsicles before supper, who erase holes in math workbooks, who can never find their shoes...

And we pray for those who stare at photographers from behind barbed wire, who can't bound down the street in a new pair of sneakers, who never "counted potatoes", who are born in places in which we wouldn't be caught dead, who never go to the circus, who live in an X-rated world.

We pray for children who bring us sticky kisses and fistfuls of dandelions, who sleep with the dog and bury goldfish, who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money, who cover themselves with Band-aids and sing off key, who squeeze toothpaste all over the sink, who slurp their soup.

And we pray for those who never get dessert, who have no safe blanket to drag behind them, who watch their parents watch them die, who can't find any bread to steal, who don't have any rooms to clean up, whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser, whose monsters are real...

We pray for children who spend all their allowance before Tuesday, who throw tantrums in the grocery store and pick their food, who like ghost stories, who shove dirty clothes under the bed and never rinse out the tub, who love visits from the tooth fairy, who don't like to be kissed in front of the school bus, who squirm in church or temple and scream in the phone...

And we pray for those whose nightmares come in the daytime, who will eat anything, who have never seen a dentist, who aren't spoiled by anybody, who go to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep, who live and move and have no being.

We pray for children who want to be carried and for those who must, for those we never give up on and for those who will grab the hand of anyone kind enough to offer it.

Hear our cries, Adonai, and listen to our prayers. Amen.

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## ***Various Prayers (by Danny Siegel)***

### **The Hurt**

Whether the pain is real or not,  
it is real for us.  
Soothe us. Heal us.

my favorite uncle,  
lost when I was yet an infant.

*Forgive me,  
for I am weak.*

### **Personal Prayer**

Let me be some ways worthy in your sight,  
In Your humanity, bend, but only slightly,  
for my sake.

O Great God —  
when I create a sorrow  
I think of You as a friend  
telling tales of bears and clever foxes,  
singing stories and drying tears.

### **Community**

Do not heal *me*.  
In the plural of our human selves  
is relief and restoration.  
Heal *all of us*,  
and *I* will be healed.

*Forgive me,  
I am human.*

### **Psalm 20, When I Am Lonely**

O Great and Gracious God —  
when I am lonely,  
I imagine You to be

My Gracious God —  
when I consider death,  
I call to mind a kid,  
a cat, a dog, a stick,  
unto the eyes  
of Your most certain angel —  
and Your promises forever.  
*Love me, God;  
I am a child.*

### **As the Sun and The Rain**

As the sun in its rising (Your divine creation)  
gives us hope — give us hope.

*As the rain in due season (Your handiwork)  
gives us sustenance — sustain us, O God.  
Give us confidence and faith  
as Noah when he saw the rainbow  
You set in the Heavens, touching the earth  
after the storm.*

As, in Your wisdom, You have given us the rose,  
the iris, blossom of cherry trees and plum —  
give us beauty in our lives.

*And as the sun in its setting (by Your word)  
give us peace of mind and healing.  
Set us free from pain and doubt.*

As the waves rise and fall — set in motion by Your will —  
restore our strength to share Your vision.

*As of old, renew our hearts so we may serve You  
as You would wish.*