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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

## LET ME HELP YOU!

### PARSHAS KI SAVO

*I read a story about two friends, we can call them Reuven and Shimon, who were caught in a terrible blizzard. They huddled together for warmth. Shimon was starting to feel drowsy. Reuven knew that falling asleep during a blizzard was extremely dangerous and could be fatal. Drowsiness was a key warning sign that one's body's core temperature was dropping to a life-threatening level. Reuven quickly started massaging Shimon to keep him awake. Reuven was successful in keeping Shimon awake for a few hours, until they were rescued. Reuven and Shimon were both taken to a nearby hospital. The doctor checked Reuven, and said that he was okay. Then the doctor checked Shimon. Unfortunately, the doctor had to amputate Shimon's toes due to terrible frostbite. When the doctor told Reuven about Shimon's condition, Reuven said that at least he was able to save Shimon's life. The doctor turned to Reuven and told him that Shimon had saved his life! Reuven had a quizzical look on his face. The doctor explained that because Reuven had massaged Shimon, Reuven kept the blood flowing in his own limbs. His limbs and his life were saved.*

Reuven thought that he was saving Shimon but in essence he was saving his own life. **When we do a chesed, an act of kindness for another person, we think that we are doing them a favor. In reality, we are doing a favor for ourselves.**

*In the 1920's Moshe lived in Yugoslavia and ran a successful business. One day his friend asked him to cosign on a large bank loan that he needed for his own business. Moshe agreed. Soon after, his friend's business failed. Because he could not repay the loan, the bank turned to Moshe to pay it. Moshe could not and his own business was taken from him. Left without a livelihood, Moshe immigrated to America. Moshe succeeded in starting a business which became very successful. When Moshe passed away, he had 109 grandchildren. Moshe's hometown in Yugoslavia had been wiped out during the Holocaust. Moshe's move to America saved his life. (Living Emunah 6 by Rabbi David Ashear)*

Moshe thought that he was doing a chesed for a friend. It turned out that he was the beneficiary of the chesed. I have heard many rabbis say that the time of Moshiach's arrival is getting ever closer. We should increase our efforts in two areas to "protect" ourselves from the "birth pangs" that will proceed

*"Avraham journeyed to the land of the Negev, and he lived between Kadesh and Shur. He lived for a while in Gerar (Bereishis 20:1)."*

Moshiach's arrival. We should increase the amount of Torah that we learn. We should also increase our acts of chesed that we do for others.

**Rabbeinu Yonah** (Sha'arei Teshuvah, First Gate, paragraph 47) says that even after we repent from our sins, certain sins need to be cleansed by **yisurin**,

afflictions. However, acts of chesed protect one from these afflictions. The acts of chesed take the place of the afflictions.

**Rav Yisroel Salanter** says when you are asked to do a chesed you should imagine that it is more difficult to do than it actually is. You should think that you would still do this act of chesed even under these difficult circumstances. If you do that, **Rav Yisroel** says that Hashem rewards you as if you had actually done the more difficult chesed!

The **Ralbag** (Bereishis 24:19) says that a person who does everything that he is asked is a person who does chesed. However, he is not considered the ultimate doer-of-chesed. The ultimate doer-of-chesed is one who notices or anticipates a person's needs before he is asked. One who is alert to the needs of others even before being asked and then helps is the one who is the ultimate doer-of-chesed.

Our forefather, Avraham, exhibited this totality of chesed. *“Avraham journeyed to the land of the Negev, and he lived between Kadesh and Shur. He lived for a while in Gerar (Bereishis 20:1).”* Why did Avraham move away from the area around Sodom? **Rashi** says that Avraham left when he observed that the cities had been destroyed and there were no more travelers passing through. The **Midrash Rabbah** (52:1) says that Avraham said, “What, shall I allow the practice of benevolence to cease from my house?” Therefore, he went and pitched a tent in Gerar.

At this time Avimelech and his general Phichol said to Avraham, *“Hashem is with you in all that you do. (Bereishis 21:22)”* Why did Avimelech go to Avraham at this point? The **Midrash Rabbah** (54:2) says that they were impressed that Avraham moved to a different location after Sodom was destroyed, and passersby ceased from traveling the road.

**Rav Henach Leibowitz** zt”l commented that it was strange that Avimelech should single out this act of chesed as defining Avraham’s greatness and of

showing that Hashem was with him. After all, Avraham was well-known for his gracious hospitality. Yet, Avimelech could not be sure that Hashem was totally with Avraham until Avraham ran to do more chesed. Avraham actively moved to search for more chesed. This proved to Avimelech that Avraham was totally involved in chesed in all the fiber of his being. Thus, Hashem, who loved chesed, was surely with him.

**Obviously, we should try to do as many acts of chesed as we can. Even so, we should strive to raise our level of chesed by emulating our forefather Avraham who actively searched for opportunities to do chesed.**

A few examples that come to mind are noticing and helping someone carrying heavy packages, opening the door for someone, offering a seat to an older person, offering a ride, inviting others to a meal, calling someone who is sick or lonely, showing friendship to a new neighbor or a new student in class or someone living away from home. Obviously, there are many other opportunities to do chesed if we look for them.

**The acts of chesed that we do for others help them but benefit us the most!**

**Now, more than ever, is the time to increase our acts of chesed!**

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*Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.*

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