

BUT I DON'T WANT TO CROSS THE STREET!

PARSHAS BEHAR-BECHUKOSAI

A Boy Scout was determined to help a little old lady cross the street. After several attempts, he finally picked her up and carried her to the other side of the street. He put her down on the sidewalk and left. He felt good about himself that he had done a good deed. The only problem was that the lady had no interest in getting to the other side. She had wanted to stay right where she was!

It says in **Pirkei Avos** (1:2), "The world rests upon three things: Torah study, Divine service (i.e. prayer and sacrifices), and the practice of chesed."

The **Talmud** (Yevamos 79A) quotes King David who says, "There are three characteristics that distinguish the Jewish People: they are merciful, bashful, and do many great acts of kindness."

Sefer Hamitzvos (Mitzvas Asei #8) says that we are commanded to emulate Hashem, as it is written, "And you shall go in His ways..."

The **Talmud** (Sotah 14A) says that the Torah begins and ends with acts of chesed, kindness. In the beginning, Hashem acted with chesed for Adam and Chava when He made clothing for them. And at the end of the Torah, Hashem acted with chesed when He buried Moshe Rabbeinu.

Rabbeinu Yonah (Sha'arei Teshuvah 3:13) says that one of man's main tasks in life is helping others.

Midrash Rabba (Vayikra 34:8) teaches us the importance of doing chesed. It lists 4 categories of chesed. The first is doing chesed for someone who does not need it. Even though he does not need your favor, you are benefiting by growing spiritually when you do the act of kindness. The example that the Midrash gives is when our forefather Avraham welcomed his guests, who were, in reality, angels. Avraham served them food. Angels don't eat; They made it appear as if they were eating. In essence, Avraham, indeed, did a chesed. However, the recipients did not receive a chesed. Under the circumstances, was Avraham's action special? It certainly was!! For Avraham's acting with selflessness, Hashem rewarded his children, the Jewish People, when they were in the desert. Hashem provided them with the manna, the miraculous food that they received daily. In addition, Hashem gave them a miraculous well that provided them with water. Over 3 million people and their animals drank from that well! Hashem sent them quails to

"If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand (assets) become shaky among you, you must support him [so too] the proselyte and the sojourner, [so] that he shall live with you." (Vayikra 25:36)

eat. Hashem also provided them with the Clouds of Glory that surrounded them and protected them as well as the cloud that led them. Hashem gave all this reward for Avraham's act of chesed even though the recipient did not need and did not benefit from his kindness! The Midrash says that one can imagine how great the

reward will be when one does an act of chesed for another person who truly needs that chesed!!

The second category is one who does not do chesed for one who does not need it. After the Jews were redeemed from Egypt, they traveled through the desert. Common courtesy dictates that if you see someone going through the desert, you offer them food and water. The nations of Amon and Moav did not show that courtesy. One would think that it was not so important since the Jewish People did not need anything. They had sufficient food and water. However, since the nations of Amon and Moav did not act with chesed, they were forbidden, FOREVER, from marrying a Jew, even if they would convert to Judaism. Clearly, not doing a chesed when courtesy dictates it, is bad and is punishable. For example, a wealthy stranger passing through a town does not need to be invited for a meal, but he would appreciate it if he was.

The third category is to do an act of chesed for someone for whom you are obligated to do so. For example, if someone did you a favor, the law of gratitude dictates that you must show him appreciation and kindness. Moshe rescued Yisro's daughters from the shepherds who were at the well. Then he watered their flock. Yisro invited Moshe to a meal. That was an obvious obligation on Yisro's part to show appreciation to Moshe for what he had done. Furthermore, Yisro's intentions were far from noble. He was hoping Moshe would agree to marry one of his daughters. Yet, 300 years later Yisro's descendants were rewarded for his act of

by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

chesed. King Shaul forewarned Yisro's descendants to disperse from amidst the Amalek people before the battle that was about to take place. King Shaul voiced that the courtesy was due to Yisro's chesed many years earlier. We see from this that you are rewarded even when you do a chesed for someone to whom you are obligated to do so. Imagine the reward you receive for doing a chesed for someone to whom you are not obliged!

The fourth category is doing even a small chesed to someone who needs a chesed. Rus came, along with the other poor people, to collect grain on Boaz's field. The **Midrash** (Midrash Rabba Rus 5:6) says that Boaz gave her a small amount of toasted grain. Boaz only did a small chesed for Rus who needed a chesed. Yet he was richly rewarded, meriting to bring about the seed of Moshiach. One should not say it is not worth offering help to others if I can only help a little bit or if I can only offer a small amount. That small amount is significant!

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe (*Alei Shur*, Vol. I, p. 93) says that even the small things count. Even a nice word or a smile can give new life to someone who has given up on himself! A word of

encouragement can bring joy. These are such small things. Yet they are so significant! In general, there are so many acts of chesed that we can easily do if we look to notice what is needed!

The first bracha of Shmoneh Esrei ends, "זוכר חסדי אבות ומביא גואל לבני בניהם למען שמו באהבה".

"[Hashem] remembers the kindnesses of the fathers and brings the redeemer to their descendant for the sake of His Name, with love". The simple meaning of these words is that Hashem remembers the acts of kindness performed by our forefathers, and in that merit, Hashem will bring the redemption for their descendants. The **Meshech Chochmah** has another beautiful explanation. When one bestows kindness on another, he often continues to maintain an interest in that person's wellbeing. He may perform additional acts of kindness to ensure that his initial kindness will not be in vain. Similarly, Hashem "remembers the kindnesses of the fathers," i.e. *the kindnesses that He bestowed upon the forefathers*. Hashem will continually protect and ultimately redeem their descendants so that those initial kindnesses will not be for naught.

We are supposed to emulate Hashem. We should take the opportunity to do acts of kindness for others, keeping in mind all 4 categories of chesed. Then, like Hashem, let's do additional acts of kindness to ensure that our initial kindness will not be in vain.

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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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