

DATA of Plano

Parshas Vayeira | 20 Cheshvan, 5781 | November 7, 2020

Mincha: 5:12

Candle lighting: 5:12

Shacharis: 9:00

Latest time for Shema: 9:30

Mincha: 4:50

Shalosh Seudos at home

Sunset: 5:30

Shabbos ends: 6:16

Maariv: 6:20

Maariv during the week: 8:00

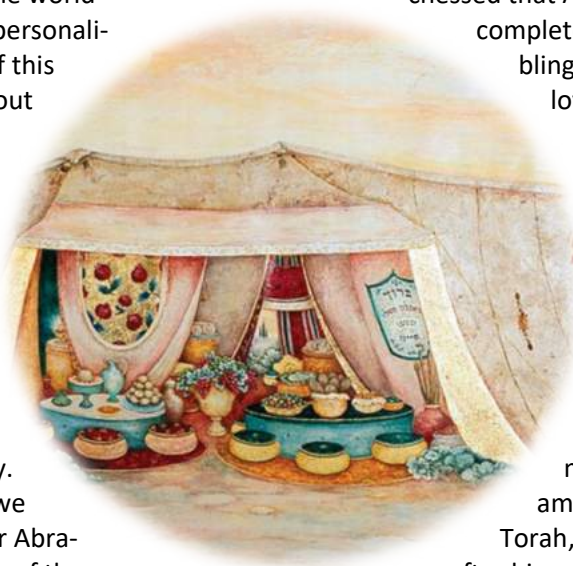
Giving to Nobody

By Rabbi Eli Nissel



The character trait that is most strongly associated with Abraham is chessed, kindness. The Torah portrays him as having perfected the ability to perform altruistic kindness, one of the three pillars on which the world stands. This aspect of Abraham's personality is introduced at the beginning of this week's Torah portion. We hear about the fact that he was anxiously waiting to host when there were no guests to be had, his four-doored tent positioned to allow access to travelers from any direction, and his eagerness and meticulousness with which he served guests when they arrived.

This introduction to Abraham's character is an interesting anomaly. The very first act of kindness that we hear about, which sets the tone for Abraham's role in shaping the character of the Jewish people, was in fact a non-chessed. Abraham waited at the entrance to his tent for some passers-by to serve, and none were in sight. Seeing his misery at his inability to perform chessed, Hashem sent angels acting as travelers to pass by Abraham's tent. Abraham prepared food for them,



and they made it look like they were eating. When in Rome, do as the Romans, and for angels they say "When on Earth, do as the earthlings." Thus, this cornerstone act of chessed that Abraham performed was in fact a complete illusion. It seems somewhat troubling that our national destiny for being lovers of chessed would be shaped by an act that was unnecessary, a kindness that contained no benefit for the recipient.

The mitzvah of chessed comes in large measure from the mitzvah to emulate Hashem. The Torah begins and ends with chessed that Hashem performs. One of the first interactions between Hashem and man was that of Hashem clothing Adam and Eve. In the last exchange in the Torah, Hashem personally buried Moses after his passing.

In fact, Hashem's performance of chessed predates the world. Ramchal famously writes that the reason that the world was created in the first place was because of Hashem's core identity as a Benefactor. To express this



IN A WORLD WHERE YOU CAN BE ANYTHING, BE KIND.

idea, King David wrote the mantra of “Olam chessed yi-baneh – the world was built on the foundation of kindness.” However, this too was an unnecessary act of chessed. No void existed that prompted Hashem to create. Nobody was there with a need that He was reacting to.

Hashem, as the embodiment of Good, wants to share and dispense kindness. Regardless of the needs of others, His role is to proactively perform kindness.

Abraham too embodied this ideal, as illustrated in this episode with the angels. Abraham was performing a higher level of kindness than just patching up someone else’s need. He had an inherent urge to give, even if no need existed.

Iyov, the troubled character described in his eponymous writings, also performed much kindness. We find a fascinating contrast depicted in the Medrash between Iyov’s methods of benevolence and those of Abraham. Both had four-doored tents to attract guest from all directions. Iyov would inquire as to a guest’s preferred cuisine and immediately prepare that food. Abraham, on the other hand, would likewise inquire what the traveler preferred to eat, but he would then suggest something else, an upgraded meal.

“You said you enjoy tuna. Have you ever enjoyed a fresh fillet of salmon?”

“You asked for some Coke. Have you ever tasted the Merlot that I personally aged?”

Abraham, describes the Talmud, would not sit in his tent as Iyov did, awaiting visitors. He would travel the perimeter of his locale, scouting out potential benefactors of his chessed.

In other words, whereas Iyov perfected the ability to perform chessed in the sense that it fills people’s needs, Abraham was on a higher plane of giving- his desire to give was *unrelated* to the need that existed.

We would all do well to strive for Iyov’s level of chessed- to perceive the needs of those around us and act upon them. However, the Jewish people are described as “Lovers of Kindness.” The difference between someone who performs chessed and one who *loves* chessed is vast. This exalted level of chessed is something to strive toward.

Imagine you’re coming home from a long day at work (back when there was something called a commute to work). You pull up in front of your house, and before you exit the car, you see a bedraggled beggar ringing your doorbell, attempting to collect alms. Nobody else is home, and after a while, the beggar gives up and moves on to the next house. What do you do? Any normal person would feel a certain sense of relief, wait until the beggar moves on, and peacefully enter the house. And there is nothing wrong with that sentiment.

But not the lover of chessed. Someone who gets an adrenaline rush out of performing kindness, someone to whom bestowing good onto others is at the core of their existence, would see an opportunity slipping away. He would rush out of the car before the beggar has a chance to leave and see how he could help. To him, the beggar is not representative of an important, albeit slightly annoying, mitzvah, but it is an exciting opportunity to better himself, become more G-dly and help someone get back on his feet while doing so.

A venerated Torah scholar once visited a successful businessman for a fundraising appointment on behalf of his yeshiva. It was a rainy, muddy evening, and the rosh yeshiva knew that the fellow’s front hallway was bedecked with an expensive oriental rug. He circled around back and knocked on the back door, where the mudroom was. As the donor answered the door, the rabbi noticed a perceptible frown on his face. After pleasantries, he inquired of the businessman as to the sour face. “Honored rabbi,” the fellow answered, “I have young children at home whom I am attempting to inculcate the value of chessed and giving. I am pained by the fact that you used the back door and didn’t muddy my front hallway. I would have preferred that my children learn the lesson that giving tzedaka and supporting Torah is far more important than an expensive rug.”

When considering our attitude toward others, it’s important to keep this perspective in mind. While any level of kindness is of course commendable and crucial to our national identity, our ultimate goal is to personify the character with which Abraham and Hashem himself are described, lovers of chessed, performing chessed to benefit ourselves even more than the recipient.



A Weekly Mitzvah

Honoring Parents



The mitzvah of honoring parents is one of the few mitzvos about which the Torah tells us a specific reward for its performance. In this instance, it's long life. Honoring our parents is a mitzvah that is central to our values as Jews for a few reasons. It trains us in the important character trait of gratitude. The word Jew, Yehudi, comes from the Hebrew root of "lehodot", to be thankful. The most obvious people that a given person has to be thankful to is parents; they are responsible for his very life. More specifically, the mitzvah is designed in a way that we can grow from it to have a deeper appreciation to Hashem Himself as the source of everything in our life.

As a subsidiary of this mitzvah, the Torah also demands that we respect our grandparents, and even our older siblings, under certain circumstances.

What specific actions does this mitzvah include? It

includes performing acts that benefit our parents such as fulfilling their requests and providing for their needs and wants. After a parent passes on, a son or daughter can continue to ascribe honor through performing mitzvos that garner merit for their soul.

A separate but related mitzvah is the attitude of reverence we are supposed to have toward our parents.

Whereas the mitzvah of honoring them focuses on physically benefitting them and tending to their needs, this mitzvah is about holding them in a position of veneration. Included in this mitzvah are things like not directly contradicting a parent, speaking respectfully toward them, not referring to them on a first name basis, not sitting in their designated seat, and other actions that show that you hold them in high esteem.

The One Minute Mitzvah is a project of DATA of Plano in which audio clips are disseminated online containing a daily mitzvah lesson in one to two minutes.

To subscribe, visit www.theoneminutemitzvah.com, or email mitzvah@dataofplano.org.



When G-d told Abraham of His plans to destroy the city of Sodom, Abraham immediately petitioned Him to reconsider.

However, when Abraham was informed of the directive to slaughter his son, he did not pray that G-d renege on the decision. Why not?

On Thursday evening after maariv, there will be an advanced Talmudic class presented by Rabbi Avi Pekier, Head of School at Torah Day School of Dallas.

He will present thoughts on the topic of "Shome'ah K'oneh" in halacha.



Wednesday, November 18th will be DATA of Plano's 36-hour fundraising campaign. It's a great way to get involved on behalf of the Plano community.

To form a fundraising team, or for volunteer opportunities, please contact Rabbi Nissel.