

## Take one young bull and two rams, unblemished, with unleavened breads. (29:1)

There are good people, and there are people who perform good deeds. A good person is consistent in his acts of goodness. He does not take a vacation from performing good deeds. It is part of his DNA. His counterpart might have a “good” day during which he acts appropriately. For him “good” just happens upon occasion. It is not a way of life. Having said this, we will segue into the commentary of the *Baalei Tosfos* to the above *pasuk*. “The *par*, ox, was sacrificed in the merit of Avraham *Avinu*, regarding about whom it is written, *v’el habakar ratz Avraham*, ‘and Avraham ran to (get) the cattle’ (*Bereishis* 18:7). The *erim*, rams, were in the merit of Yitzchak *Avinu* and Yaakov *Avinu*, the *lechem*, bread, in the merit of Sarah *Imeinu* and Hagar whom Avraham instructed to quickly prepare loaves for dinner to feed those Arabs that appeared in the tent.”

The Torah does not mention Hagar’s involvement in serving Avraham’s guests. Likewise, Yishmael, who is alluded to by the term *naar*, youth, *va’yitein el ha’naar laasoso*, “He (Avraham) gave it to the youth to prepare” (*Bereishis* 18:7). *Rashi* comments the *naar* was Yishmael whom Avraham was training in *mitzvah* performance. Both Hagar and Yishmael acted appropriately, helping to prepare the meal for Avraham’s visitors. Apparently, they received incredible reward for their endeavor. So, why are their names not mentioned? Unless one is aware of the *Baalei Tosfos* commentary, we do not know that Hagar participated. Yishmael’s name is not mentioned. Why is the Torah writing covertly concerning Hagar and Yishmael?

*Horav Chaim Zaithcik, zl*, suggests that, on the one hand, we see that no good act goes unrequited. On the other hand, we note that, if the reward will go to someone’s head; if they will not properly appreciate the reward, the Torah will give it to them without the accompanying publicity. They will use their reward as a way of glorifying themselves over the Jews. Hashem rewards those who deserve it and respect it. The reward does not go to their head. Instead, they maintain a sense of gratitude for being the fortunate beneficiaries.

Furthermore, *Klal Yisrael* are good people. Hagar and Yishmael symbolize the individuals who perform good deeds, despite having base characters, and inappropriate moral postures. As soon as Hagar conceived Yishmael, she immediately slandered Sarah *Imeinu*, claiming that she was not really righteous. After all, she had been married to Avraham *Avinu* for years and had yet to conceive, while she, Hagar, was with him one time and immediately conceived. Yishmael was no different, demanding distinction because he was circumcised. Hashem told him that, although he was circumcised, since it took place when he was eight days old, his connection with Hashem was limited in this world.

When good people carry out good deeds, it is the result of their good heart’s motivation, unlike those who act kindly for the attention they receive or as the result of pressure. It is important that anyone in a position of serious leadership (not one who manipulates his feelings for personal

reasons), a caring parent, a *rebbe* who cares about the students, should often praise those who deserve his praise. Nonetheless, he should be careful when praise is due to someone who is far from “good,” who will use the praise to lord over and hurt others. Under such circumstances, the praise can ultimately be the cause of the student’s downfall in life. Perhaps, had someone held back in rendering praise to those whose *middos*, character traits, were deficient, they might today be good people – not just going through the motions for attention.

What defines a good person? How can we tell when a person is truly good? The other day, I came across a Torah thought from *Horav Yitzchak David Grossman, Shlita*, Rav of Migdal HaEmek. He relates that, during *Pesach Seder* 2002, in a hotel in Netanya, an Arab terrorist took the lives of thirty Jews. This followed a series of terrorist attacks in the area. As a result, it was not high on the “must visit” list of the cities in *Eretz Yisrael*. A close friend of his from New York contacted him concerning putting together a *minyán*, quorum, at the cemetery in Netanya for his mother’s first *yahrtzeit*. Due to the heightened terrorist activities in the area, his family did not allow him to travel there. *Rav* Grossman agreed.

That Friday was the *yahrtzeit*, and they were able to assemble nine men. They were missing the proverbial tenth man. They looked around and saw, in the distance, at another end of the cemetery, that a Jew was standing at the side of a grave. They approached and asked if he could join them. At first it was difficult to have a conversation with the man, as he spoke only French and *Rav* Grossman spoke only *Ivrit*, but he soon understood what they needed. As soon as *Kaddish* was recited, the “tenth” man asked if the group could join him at his father’s gravesite. He never expected a *minyán* at the cemetery on this day, which happened also to be the day of his father’s *yahrtzeit*.

During the service, *Rav* Grossman noticed the inscription on the tombstone. The deceased had been the head of the *chevra kaddisha*, Jewish Burial Society, in Tunisia for sixty years! His son added, “My father was devoted to this position all of the time – day or night. Whenever he was needed, he would drop whatever he was doing to attend to the needs of the deceased.” *Rav* Grossman mused, “His outstanding devotion was rewarded that a *minyán* assembled by his grave on the day of his *yahrtzeit*.”

*Rav* Grossman continued, “We know that the kindness we perform with the dead is called *chesed shel emes*, kindness of truth. *Rashi* explains that one who addresses the needs of the deceased – *eino metzapeh l’tashlum gemul*, “does not look forward to repayment.” Yaakov *Avinu* asked Yosef to perform for him *chesed shel emes*. *Rashi* explains: Yaakov told Yosef – you attend to my burial; in return, I grant you a place in *Eretz Yisrael* where you will be buried. Furthermore, Moshe *Rabbeinu*, who attended to Yosef’s coffin the entire forty years that the nation journeyed in the wilderness, was rewarded by having *Hashem Yisborach* Himself attend to his burial.

“We see from here that one does not immediately receive reward for *chesed shel emes*; he receives it after his own demise. Our *niftar*, the deceased head of the *chevra kaddisha*, received a

reward to which he did not look forward, since it is a posthumous reward.”

Returning to our question: What denotes a good person? I think an individual who acts consistently, who carries acts of kindness regularly without fanfare, is a good person. Furthermore, he acts selflessly, not for remuneration or praise. He neither looks for reward, nor expects it. He acts out of the kindness of his heart.

One's focus with regard to acts of kindness (be it inward, towards oneself, or outward toward others) might be analogized with a parable attributed to *Horav Yosef Yoizel Horowitz, zl*, the *Alter, m'Novardok*. An individual traveled to a far off country to spend one day in that country. He went for a specific purpose, which should have been achieved in one day. During his stay, circumstances arose which prevented his return home for twenty years! Every day he packed, called Uber and was about to leave; something, however, always came up to prevent his return home. This went on for twenty years. Now, despite the fact that this man spent twenty years in the country, as far as he was concerned, in his mind he had been there for one day! His mind never accustomed itself to his residency in the country.

Another man traveled to that same country for the express purpose of relocating. His plans were to stay with no intentions to return home – at least not in the near future. For various reasons, he was compelled to leave after one day! Now, that one day that he spent in that country, he spent as a resident who had moved there for the purpose of relocation. Although he returned home after one day, he considers himself to be a citizen of that country. Two men: one spent a day which was considered in his eyes as a lifetime; the other man spent a lifetime there, but, in his mind, it was only one day. The lesson to be derived is that it is all about mental consistency, focus on a specific idea, purpose or goal. Just as in Torah study, success is achieved by he who is unfailingly persistent, never deviating from his goal, diligently devoted to his Torah study, so, too, consistent focus on acts of *chesed* define a person as good. Acts of kindness performed irregularly, inconsistently, are still acts of kindness for which we offer gratitude, but they do not necessarily define the benefactor as being “good.”