

And they will say about the inhabitants of the Land, “They have heard that You, Hashem are in the midst of this people... and that Your cloud stands over them, and that in a pillar of cloud You go before them by day, and in a pillar of fire at night.” (14:14)

The above *pasuk* underscores Hashem's overwhelming love for the Jewish People, as perceived by the gentile nations. While it is unquestionably true, their perception of His love is interestingly based on a vision of *chesed*, kindness, which, albeit impressive, requires elucidation. “You, Hashem, are in the midst of this people”: The nations are impacted by Hashem's close relationship with us. How do they see this closeness? What unique manifestation of love impacts them most? “That Your cloud stands over them, and that in a pillar of cloud You go before them”: The *Ananei HaKavod*, Clouds of Glory, protected the Jews and accompanied them throughout their wilderness journey.

Horav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel, zl, observes that such earth-shattering miracles as *manna*, the Heavenly Bread which nourished them for forty years, and the *Be'irah shel Miriam*, Well of Miriam, which accompanied them and, until the end of their sojourn, provided sustenance, are not included. These were wondrous miracles that, although designed for the Jews, nonetheless also benefitted their gentile neighbors. The leftover *manna* would dissolve and become rivulets, which was later drunk by gazelles and deer. The gentile nations would trap and eat them, tasting in them the taste of the *manna*, realizing thereby the laudatory level achieved by *Klal Yisrael*, for whom the *manna* was initially designated. Likewise, the Well of Miriam and a host of other miracles which benefitted *Klal Yisrael* all seem to pale in comparison with the protection accorded to them by the Pillar of Cloud. Apparently, the Cloud was the apex of Hashem's love for our people. Why?

The *Bach* (*Ohr HaChaim* 625) wonders why *Succos* was selected as the Festival for remembering the Clouds of Glory, rather than the *manna* or Well of Miriam. Rav Eliyahu Baruch explains that it was the Clouds of Glory that demonstrate Hashem's love for us, and this takes precedence over everything else. This, however, does not explain “why” the Cloud is so special.

Rav Eliyahu Baruch cites the *Talmud Bava Metzia* 86a, which attributes each of the three Heavenly gifts – *manna*, Well, Cloud – to Avraham *Avinu*'s actions in reaching out to the Heavenly guests, disguised as Arab wayfarers, who visited him. In the merit of “butter and milk” which he gave them, we received the *manna*; for hovering over them to see what they might possibly need, they merited the Cloud; for bringing the water, Avraham's descendants merited the Well of Miriam. Thus, *Klal Yisrael* were the beneficiaries of Avraham's incredible hospitality to others.

The entire *Chazal* is interesting. Avraham *Avinu* showed his incredible hospitality in other ways. For example, he (although sick and in extreme pain) personally ran to slaughter three calves, to

provide his guests with fresh meat and tongue. His personal dignity meant nothing to him when he assisted others. Nor were the financial expenditures involved an issue if he was in the process of providing hospitality. Nevertheless, the most significant aspect of his actions was the fact that he stood there – at attention, in anticipation, in total negation of his selfhood – just so that he could provide for them. This is considered the most noble, most meritorious of his deeds on behalf of others. This indicates that it is not necessarily what one does that matters most; it is how and with what attitude one executes his kindness to others. Avraham's "hanging around," waiting, hovering over them, demonstrated that he really cared, he really wanted to perform kindness for them.

What an important lesson for those who are "caregivers," "kindness givers," *baalei chesed*. It is not what you do, but how you do it that makes the difference. To perform a *chesed* as if one is being forced is not a *chesed*. To give *tzedakah*, charity, as if one's teeth are being pulled is not *tzedakah*. True, the poor man, beneficiary, is receiving aid, but one's negative attitude undermines his goodness. We either do it correctly, or we are not doing it. There really is no other way.