

## Hashem remembered Avraham; so He sent Lot from amidst the upheaval. (19:29)

Avraham *Avinu* was a *baal chesed*, master of kindness. Indeed, the Torah goes to great lengths in describing his devotion to the wayfarer, and how he exerted himself to make sure that whoever came into his home had a pleasurable and satisfying experience. Lot, Avraham's nephew, also acted with *chesed*. He moved to Sodom and became a distinguished member of this ignominious community. He moved there because he was into money and everything one can achieve with material bounty. He did, however, retain some of the good qualities that he learned under the influence of his uncle. When the Angels visited Sodom, Lot risked his life on their behalf. One would think that it was due to Lot's *middah*, attribute, of *chesed*, that he was spared from the destruction of Sodom.

In commenting on the above *pasuk*, *Rashi* gives a different reason for Lot's rescue from the annihilation of Sodom. "Hashem remembered." What did He remember (about Avraham concerning Lot)? Hashem remembered that Lot was aware that Sarah *Imeinu* was Avraham's wife (and not his sister, as he had asserted to the Egyptians), but Lot did not reveal the truth about Sarah, out of pity for Avraham. Therefore, Hashem took pity on him. Measure for measure. Lot "ignored" his memory regarding Sarah; Hashem remembered this and spared Lot. The question is obvious: Why was Lot not spared as a result of his devotion to the *middah* of *chesed*? Surely, positive action trumps his remaining silent and not negatively revealing a secret that would have cost Avraham his life. Furthermore, the sin that catalyzed Sodom's destruction was the people's opposition to *chesed*. To them, kindness to others was an anathema. Thus, Lot, who fought against them, whose actions were the antithesis of what Sodom stood for, specifically deserved to be saved.

*Horav Aharon Kotler, zl*, quotes the *Alter, zl, m'Slabodka*, who says that Lot emulated Avraham's actions. Everything Lot did was imitation. Lot's *middas ha'chesed* was not part of his essence. It was an extrinsic activity performed to copy Avraham. After a while, he became accustomed to acting with *chesed*, but it was not part of his character – it did not define Lot. One can perform acts of kindness, but it does not mean that he is a kind person. Lot performed *chesed*, but he was not a *baal*, master, of *chesed*.

We may add that this concept applies to all *middos*. Just because a person acts humbly does not mean that he is a humble person. Some individuals present themselves as refined and humble until they are ignored or slighted. Then, their true selves comes to the fore. Perhaps the best way to describe this is as *Rebbetzin Shulamit Eizrachi* describes her father, *Chevroner Mashgiach, Horav Meir Chodosh, zl*. "His life was an open book, exposed to all eyes, day by day, and hour by hour. It served as an example and model for anyone who wished to learn from it. The students saw before them, day after day, the image of a man whose every action, speech, behavior and smallest gesture were all thought out."

*Horav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, zl*, was a *gadol* in Torah as well as *chesed*. His *rebbetzin*, the daughter of *Rav Yaakov Yosef Herman, zl*, was witness to *chesed* at its apex. Her home was the address for anyone who was in need of kindness. When the Hermans moved to *Eretz Yisrael*, their *Shabbos* table was the place where one could find any person who just needed a “place.” To them, everyone was family. As I was perusing through a biography of *Rav Scheinberg*, I came across many stories of his extraordinary empathy for others. His acts of *chesed* were directed to anyone in need, be it: a *yeshivah* student; *kollel* fellow and his wife; members of the Jewish community; or the drunk and the homeless who were laying in the gutter on a cold winter night. (He would bring them hot soup which his *rebbetzin* prepared.)

One story particularly inspires me. I preface this with the notion that *chesed* does not only involve material benevolence. Emotional support is equally (and, in some situations, more) important. We can find *chesed* in Torah, helping someone who is in need of a boost in his Torah learning. The greatest *chesed* (in my opinion) is reaching out to someone who is floundering in his *Yiddishkeit*, whose religious observance is becoming more and more borderline. It is critical that one assesses the situation, find out the cause, and offer spiritual and emotional support. Now for the story:

One *Erev Shabbos* when *Rav Scheinberg* lived in the Lower East Side, a young married man asked him a *halachic* query (*shailah*) concerning a family purity issue. Although *Rav Scheinberg* felt that he had reason to *pasken muttar*, render a decision of permissible, to the man, he wanted to buttress his decision with a little research. He needed a certain *sefer*, volume of *halachic* responsa, which he did not own and would have to borrow. He told the young man that since it was almost *shkiah*, sunset, he would not be able to answer his *shailah* before the beginning of *Shabbos*. He did not bother telling the young man that the *sefer* was located in Williamsburg. Soon after *Shabbos* began, *Rav Scheinberg* walked one hour across the Williamsburg Bridge and looked up the *sefer*. He confirmed that it was *muttar*.

He then returned to the Lower East Side, went up to the young man's apartment, knocked on the door and, when the man answered, *Rav Scheinberg* said, “*Muttar*.” He did an about face and went home to make *Kiddush*. Two hours of walking, keeping his family waiting for him, all to answer a *shailah*. He knew that a young couple needed the answer. This is *chesed* at its zenith.

Having digressed, I return to *Rav Aharon's* question: Why was Lot not spared as a result of his *chesed* activities? *Horav Yerachmiel Chasid, Shlita*, distinguishes between two *middos* which on the surface appear similar, but actually are quite different from one another. They are: *chesed* – kindness; and *rachamim* – mercy. *Rachamim's* focus is to fulfill a need, a vacuum, something that a person is missing. Therefore, the benefactor is addressing the *chisaron*, deficiency/fault. When travelers appear at one's tent on a hot day, after trudging through the desert's grueling heat, what they need is shade, something to drink. Once these basic necessities have been addressed, they no longer need mercy. The immediate need has been filled. It is time to move on.

*Avraham Avinu*, however, was not satisfied with *rachamim* alone. He was a *baal chesed* who

brought three fresh tongues. He himself waited on the travelers, attempting to give them anything that would make life better for them. This is *chesed*: going beyond filling the need; doing more, acting with generosity of spirit, a smile, as if this is the only activity that one has to do that entire day. There is no limit to *chesed*. *Rachamim*, however, fills the gap. *Chesed* is non-judgmental. *Chesed* is inclusive – making a point to involve others. *Rachamim* can be selective: one must be sensitive to the person, the issue and feel pity for him/her. A *baal chesed* lives where he can perform acts of kindness. He does not make his home in Sodom, a city which featured the opposite extreme of *chesed*. Avraham Avinu manifest *chesed*. Lot was merciful. *Chesed* was beyond him. Therein lay the difference between the two.