

He lifted his eyes and saw: And behold! Three men were standing over him. (18:2)

If Lot had learned one thing from his uncle, Avraham *Avinu*, it was to adhere meticulously to the *mitzvah* of *hachnosas orchim*, hospitality to wayfarers – and anyone in need of a bed or a meal. *Hachnosas orchim* is just one of the many activities that fall under the rubric of *chesed*. Avraham was the *amud ha'chesed*, pillar of loving-kindness. Avraham devoted himself to it to the point of self-sacrifice. *Chesed* also gave him the opportunity to reach out to the pagan world spiritually and to teach the pagans about Hashem. *Chazal* laud Avraham for his extraordinary dedication to serving the three travelers that presented themselves at the door of his tent. This occurred while Avraham was recuperating from his *Bris Milah*, circumcision. While one cannot argue that Avraham deserves recognition for his actions, we cannot ignore the fact that Lot did the same thing when the angels visited his home in Sodom. Indeed, Lot risked his life to protect them. What distinguishes Lot's act of *chesed* from that of Avraham?

The *Kedushas Levi* (also attributed to *Horav* Leib Sorah's) explains that Avraham did not have a selective policy concerning his *hachnosas orchim*. He was hospitable to anyone and everyone who came to his door – rich, poor, pagan; his door was always open and welcoming. Lot, however, knew his guests were Heavenly angels. It is no wonder that he bent over backwards to serve them. Angels did not visit him every day. Lot's *chesed* was discriminating. Avraham's *chesed* was open and indiscriminate. He acted in order to do a *mitzvah*. Lot acted in order to promote himself. He felt good when he reached out, but he was not prepared to reach out to just anyone.

The story is told concerning a *tzaddik nistar*, covert righteous person, who, although a holy man, was careful not to reveal his righteousness. He wandered from place to place, serving Hashem wherever he was. He stopped in a community and approached a well-known philanthropist and asked if he could spend the night in his home. [The man had no shortage of rooms, no lack of food.] The wealthy man took one look at the *tzaddik's* shabby clothes and altogether unbecoming appearance and bid him a good day. He had no room for him. Two years later, the *tzaddik* revealed himself to the world, and now lines of visitors petitioned his blessings. As a distinguished *Rebbe*, he no longer traveled by foot; rather, he had a coach that was pulled by four horses and a driver who chauffeured him. This time, when he had occasion to visit the community where two years earlier he had been shunned, the wealthy man who had ignored him earlier approached him and begged him to stay in his house: "It would be a great honor for me if the holy *Rebbe* would spend the night in my 'simple abode.'" [When one wants to glorify himself with the presence of a *tzaddik*, his palatial home suddenly becomes a simple abode.] The *Rebbe* replied in the affirmative. How surprised the wealthy man was to see the *Rebbe's* driver and horses waiting by the entrance to his large barn. The *Rebbe*, apparently, was residing at the home of a poor, but learned, Jew.

"*Rebbe*, why was my home not blessed with his honor's presence?" the wealthy man asked. The *Rebbe* smiled and explained, "When I was here two years ago and needed a place to sleep

you demurred. I was not sufficiently worthy of your attention. This time, suddenly you want me to stay at your home. What changed? I realize that the only real difference between who I was two years ago and who I am today is my horses. When I last came, I was a poor, itinerant beggar. Today, I am a famous *Rebbe*. Truthfully, the only change that transpired is that now I travel in style. Obviously, what impressed you were my horses. So, I brought you my horses. Let them sleep in your barn!"

The man was more impressed with the outer trappings of the *tzaddik* than with his inner essence. He was not performing *chesed* for the poor person. He was offering to perform *chesed* for himself.

The *Mararil Diskin, zl*, was a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, whose encyclopedic knowledge of Torah was peerless. He spent every waking moment deeply engrossed in Torah study. He was a saintly Jew whose self-abrogation of materialism and physicality paralleled his devotion to Torah and *mitzvos*. He was also a *gaon* in *chesed*. He did not just "give"; he thought before he gave. He empathized with those who came to him and sought the most beneficial avenue to help them. When he left Brisk (where he was *Rav*) and emigrated to Yerushalayim, it was not long before he realized the plight of its many orphans. He then established the Diskin Orphanage, where he and his *rebbetzin* became surrogate parents to those helpless children.

The *Rav's* home was open to anyone. At any time, one could find individuals who had been struck by life's adversities, sitting in his home, being served by the *rebbetzin*, while he continued with his learning. One time, the *Rav* noticed that an elderly, impoverished Jew was having great difficulty chewing his bread. The man no longer had teeth, and the bread was too hard for his gums. The *Rav* arose from his chair, sat down next to the man, took a slice of bread, removed its hard crust, and gave the bread back to the man. The man's face lit up, realizing that he could now eat the bread. This went on for an hour, as shunned, the wealthy man who had ignored him earlier approached him and begged him to stay in his house: "It would be a great honor for me if the holy *Rebbe* would spend the night in my 'simple abode.'" [When one wants to glorify himself with the presence of a *tzaddik*, his palatial home suddenly becomes a simple abode.] The *Rebbe* replied in the affirmative. How surprised the wealthy man was to see the *Rebbe's* driver and horses waiting by the entrance to his large barn. The *Rebbe*, apparently, was residing at the home of a poor, but learned, Jew.

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“The answer to both question (the *Rav*'s noticing the poor man's chewing problem and how to alleviate it, and Avraham's perceiving the angels while he was so engrossed in his meeting with Hashem) is: when one must perform *chesed* – he sees! If you want to do *chesed* and your heart empathizes with the plight of your brethren, then, even when you are in the midst of your *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty – you will sense the needs of another Jew!” Sensitivity for another Jew should permeate a person to the point that it breaches through anything in which he is involved – even *avodas Hashem*!