

## And as for you, take yourself of every food that is eaten and gather it into yourself. (6:21)

If the animals walked into the Ark on their own without having to be herded in, why could their food not, likewise, arrive on its own? Why did Noach have to go out and gather food for all the animals – enough to last them a year? The *Brisker Rav, zl*, explains that Noach required a special command to gather food, for, otherwise, he may very well have thought that just as the animals came of their own volition, their food should have “arrived” in the same manner. Thus, Hashem informed Noach that the animals would come on their own; their food, however, was his responsibility. *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, derives from here that it is incumbent upon a person to think constantly about how to address all the needs of his fellow. He cannot say, “Well, I can only do so much.” There is no such concept (it is not acceptable) as “only so much.” One must give all of himself to his fellow. This is what *chesed* means – all partial commitment is limited commitment.

*Horav Baruch Dov Povarsky, Shlita*, adds that, since the seal of doom against the generation of the Flood was based upon *gezel/chamas*, theft, which represents sins committed in interpersonal relationships, it was necessary that the atonement must be acts of lovingkindness. Noach was spared and charged with establishing a new world, a world in which respect and caring for one another is paramount. It would only be in the merit of a world committed to a life of *chesed* that a devastation the likes of the *Mabul* would never again occur.

With this idea in mind, the *Rosh Yeshivah* explains why it was necessary to remain within the confines of the Ark until Hashem instructed him to leave. One would think that Noach was in the Ark in order to be protected from the menacing flood waters. The flood was over; the waters had subsided; why not open the doors and walk down the ramp to freedom?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that while the water had subsided, the survivors merit to leave and re-inhabit the world had not yet been fully achieved. Noach was saved because he had spent one whole year 24/7 taking care of the various creatures on board his Ark. The emotional stress and physical toil that were part and parcel of this mission are indescribable. One time he came late with the lion’s dinner and he paid dearly, when the angry lion hit him with great force. Why? The lion does nothing on his own. He is nothing more than Hashem’s agent. Apparently, Hashem wanted Noach to feel pain. Why? What did Noach, the consummate *baal chesed*, do that should incur such punishment?

Hashem is demanding of His *tzaddikim*. If Noach tarried even for a moment, if the lion’s dinner was delayed for an insignificant period of time, it was cause for punishment! The slightest impropriety in executing *chesed* impaired their ability to leave. The lion’s suffering, regardless of his cognitive level, was sufficient cause to delay their departure from the Ark. The new world must be founded on *chesed* that is perfect. If it is in any way compromised, they were not to leave the Ark. Thus, Noach’s pain was necessary.

How often do we plan to provide *chesed* for someone, only to come up short? We assuage our conscience, pat ourselves on the back, and muse, “Well, it is more than he/she would have had otherwise.” That is not the way it works. Blemished *chesed* is just that! Blemished. Our intentions may be noble, our goal may be realistic, but if something is failing in the execution, it is still blemished. Noble intentions do not help a person in need.

When carrying out acts of *chesed*, we must take the beneficiary into consideration. To make him bend over backwards in order to receive our *chesed* might be worse than no *chesed* at all. It conveys a message: “I will help you when it is convenient for me, and only if it is something I do not mind doing.” To help a person, while denying his/her dignity, is not *chesed*.

Indeed, when the benefactor makes the effort to preserve the beneficiary’s dignity, the *chesed* quotient rises exponentially. The following story underscores this notion:

A single mother of three young children was shopping at a kosher supermarket located in the tri-state area. Recently divorced, after her husband had walked out on her taking their bank account and savings with him, she was relegated to living off the government programs which provide support for the needy. After ten years of marriage, her suspicions were realized when she discovered that her husband was an addict of sorts. To support his habit he needed money, which he took from his wife. When the issue of a *get* came up, he immediately acquiesced, wanting to get as far from the marriage as possible.

That day, the woman filled up her cart with necessities, the basic foods that she would turn into nourishing meals for her three children. According to her calculations, she still had a few hundred dollars remaining on her food stamp card. Thus, she was shocked when the cashier informed her that her food stamp balance was zero. How was she going to pay the one hundred thirty dollars for her groceries? Just then a kind-looking, well-dressed woman appeared. With a big smile, she said, “Here, let me lend you the money. You can pay me back whenever.” The woman handed the cashier her credit card to scan and disappeared as quickly as she had appeared.

As the act of kindness began to sink in, the woman reminisced about her life the last few years. Her husband had been considered a “good catch” until he fell in with other men of similar background who had fallen prey to the acceptable lifestyle of the secular society outside of the *frum/yeshivah* world. One thing led to another. At first, she had no idea that money was missing, that their checkbook balance was always coming up short. It was only after his ugly lifestyle became evident that everything began to fit in.

Her life was a shambles, with no one to whom to turn. Her parents had been killed in an accident when she was but a child. She grew up as an orphan, raised by an aunt and uncle who were loving – but very controlling. The discipline was rigid and strict. Introduced to her husband shortly after seminary, it seemed like a relationship that would blossom and bear fruit. At first it did, until her husband became addicted. What followed was a series of ugly disagreements and constant

discord.

Life now became two-faced: the congenial, happy confident face she presented to her children and community; as opposed to her private, inner face – filled with turmoil and doubt, doubt in her faith and doubt in herself. It all changed that afternoon when that kind woman reached out and announced that she was a person worth caring about. She now felt ready to move forward, to break the shackles of insecurity and self-doubt that had until now encumbered her. That woman did much more than give *tzedakah*; she saved a life, and, by extension, a family.