

I shall show favor when I choose to show favor, and I shall show mercy when I choose to show mercy. (33:19)

Hashem revealed to Moshe *Rabbeinu* that there are instances in which He shows favor and mercy to people who are (for whatever reason) not deserving of these gifts. Hashem essentially intimated to Moshe that, even though someone had sinned egregiously, there was still hope for him, and Moshe should pray for his forgiveness. *Horav Avraham Pam, zl* (cited by Rabbi Shalom Smith in *Messages from Rav Pam*), derives a powerful insight from this. Hashem not only shows mercy and favor to those who are undeserving, [Undeserving is a strong term, because we have no idea who does and who does not deserve. The Heavenly barometer is different than ours.], but He does so repeatedly, time and time again. When Hashem helps a person, He does so knowing that the person will (soon) return for more. He will do so numerous times, yet He responds favorably. This, explains the *Rosh Yeshivah*, is an added understanding of the above *pasuk*: “I will show mercy to the person again in the near future.” This idea applies to all aspects of *chesed*, kindness --- be it financial, emotional or even in a failed relationship, where a friend seeks forgiveness for an infraction he or she committed. We are to show and bestow the requisite kindness, knowing full well that it is not over. They will be back again.

The willingness to help someone repeatedly reflects a combination of compassion, patience and hope. This mindset takes human failing into consideration and places a premium on the act of support over guaranteed outcomes. At its core, this belief is rooted in a few key principles.

We acknowledge that every person has within himself the ability to change, even if the progress is slow and beset with setbacks. Helping someone repeatedly acknowledges the fact that growth is a process – not an event. Every person has potential. For some, the potential is concealed beneath layers of circumstances, family dynamics and social demands. The individual must jump through various hoops to overcome his struggles –even if it requires time. We also accept that some people are so weak that they will not make it to the finish line – either because they do not try, or because they are too weak.

Rather than focusing on the likelihood of failure, we should look closely at the struggles with which they must contend and empathize with them. People require support most often when they are down and unable to break out of the pattern which signals that they are in trouble. Giving up on someone is a failing which is unacceptable. True, it means enduring frustration, disappointments, and even humiliation, but that is what being Jewish is all about – not giving up hope on anyone --- even oneself. If one becomes emotionally or physically drained, it is a signal that he must move on and hand over the help and outreach to someone else.

The *Chafetz Chaim* writes (*Ahavas Chesed* 1:7) that the benefactor’s reaction to the repeated requests for financial, personal, emotional or even spiritual aid should be like that of the storekeeper who lives for the moment in which he has many repeat customers. Clearly, he will not

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berate a customer, “You were here yesterday! How many times will you return to shop in my store?” Obviously, he is overjoyed to be able to serve this customer again – and again. When the opportunity to perform *chesed* knocks, answer the door with a smile. That is what Hashem does. *Mah Hu – af atah.*