

“See Hashem has proclaimed by name, Betzalel son of Uri, son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehudah.” (35:30)

Every time the Torah details Betzalel's pedigree, it goes back two generations to his grandfather, Chur. Apparently, Chur played an important role in molding Betzalel's perspective on life. Indeed, it was probably because he had descended from Chur that Betzalel was selected to build the Mishkan. Only a very special individual, one whose devotion to Hashem had been exemplary, would undertake this unprecedented endeavor. Chur was the individual who challenged the *erev rav*, mixed multitude, when they rebelled against Hashem to build the Golden Calf. He was killed for his devotion. His spirit of *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, remained alive in his family. His grandson was prepared to be *moser nefesh*, to build the Mishkan that would atone for the sin of the Golden Calf. That incident caused his grandfather's death. Hashem needed a person whose devotion to Him was so great that it would override even his own personal feelings. This was Chur's *zechus*, merit; it was his reward. His grandson would be the architect of the holy Mishkan.

In Shemos 34:7, The Torah tells us, “*Notzer chesed l'alafim*,” “(Hashem) preserves deeds of kindness for thousands of generations.” Horav S. R. Hirsch, z.l., notes that the word “*notzer*” also means “creates” or “causes to blossom.” Thus, the expression “*notzer chesed*” can be a reference to Hashem's benevolence. He allows an act of *chesed* which we perform to become a seed of *chesed* that germinates, grows and blossoms, bringing forth salvation at a later time. Our acts of kindness do not comprise an isolated entity that ends when they are completed. No, at times they catalyze deliverance and happiness for the individual who has performed the act of kindness. Situations also occur in which the reward is manifest at a later time, even generations later, for a descendant. This is what happened with Chur. He acted. His grandson shared in the reward. The seed of *mesiras nefesh* was planted. It sprouted and blossomed in a grandson who was sanctified by Hashem's Name.

I recently heard an intriguing story from Rabbi Dovid Ordman of Eretz Yisrael. I will attempt to capture its essence on paper. A number of years ago, the Israeli government airlifted thousands of Falashan Jews from Ethiopia in a daring rescue called Operation Solomon. One day the Jews were in Ethiopia, starving and living under terrible conditions. The next day they were welcomed into Eretz Yisrael – free at last. Much planning and political manipulation was involved in carrying out this incredible rescue. It did not just happen overnight. The behind-the-scenes maneuvering involved the United States State Department, the Israeli Government, and the Central Intelligence Agency. Apparently, before the Falashan Jews could be released, it was necessary for the United States, who was “brokering” this rescue, to provide two things: Thirty-five million dollars, and an apology tendered by the President of the United States to the Ethiopian dictator.

The money seemed to have been the minor issue. An apology, however, was not that simple to obtain, nor was it considered “diplomatically correct.” The President convened a meeting, which was attended by his thirteen closest advisors. They were asked to vote on the question. Their vote

would determine if thousands of Falashan Jews would live or die. The votes were cast: six for and six against. One vote remained to be cast, that of a prominent African American, a distinguished member of the intelligence community. Everyone looked at him to hear his opinion, since his was the tie-breaking vote. He stood up and addressed the group: "Gentlemen, I am about to cast my vote, but, before I do so, I would like to relate to you a story that occurred some thirty-five years ago, which has critical bearing on my vote.

"One hot, summer night in the Harlem section of New York, a large fire broke out in a tenement house. The fire raged on as the people did everything possible to escape. The fire fighters did all that was in their power to contain the blaze, but it was too late, the fire was out of control. They were able to rescue the tenants – or at least they thought they had, until they looked up and saw three young children on the second floor screaming from the window: 'Help! Help! Save Us! Please,' they screamed hysterically. The entire building was engulfed in flames. No one would or could go forward to save them. Suddenly, as if from nowhere, a young man appeared. Ignoring everyone's warnings, he ran into the building. A few minutes later, he came out carrying the three little children.

"In the meantime, the children's father, who had been away, returned to see the awesome sight of his three babies being carried out of a burning building by a young man. Understandably, everyone went over to the hero to praise and thank him for his selfless act of heroism. 'It was nothing,' he said, 'I was only performing a "mitzwah."'" He kept on repeating this phrase, 'I was only performing a mitzwah,' which, of course, no one understood.

"I, too," continued the advisor, "did not understand what a mitzwah was until now. You see, I was one of those three children, and the young man who rescued us was an Ethiopian Jew. I know that a mitzwah is a good deed. I want to repay my rescuer's people; I also want to perform a "mitzwah." I vote that Operation Solomon be put into action."

An act of chesed performed by one individual many years earlier had planted a seed that sprouted many years later, bringing about salvation for thousands.