

A man's holies shall be his. (5:10)

The **Chafetz Chaim, zl**, was wont to say that the above *pasuk* teaches us that an object or endeavor which a person dedicates/consecrates for sacred use is what actually belongs to him, and this is what ultimately accompanies him to the eternal world of *Olam Habba*, the World to Come. This means that the only objects/endeavors that we may call “ours” are those which are linked to a spiritual goal. Otherwise, we cannot consider it to belong to us. Moreover, we should not rely on others to carry out our responsibilities. True, many wonderful and generous people are around who are available to help a person in need, but what about “our” responsibility? Who will address our obligation to serve Hashem?

Indeed, in his *Ahavas Chesed*, the *Chafetz Chaim* underscores this issue. He writes: “Who is greater than Hillel, who certainly had sons who were holy Torah scholars, which in itself is a great merit for the *Tanna*? Yet, it was Hillel who declared, *Im ein ani li – mi li?* ‘If I am not for myself – who (else) will be for me?’ (Apparently, Hillel did not rely on his many *z’chusim*, merits. He continued to endeavor on behalf of Torah.) If so, what shall ‘we’ say, as we see the spiritual persona of the generations in decline... Each and every one of us must exert himself to the fullest to achieve spiritual perfection.”

Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* in 1947, to serve as *Mashgiach* in Yeshivas Ponevez. He returned to his home in Gateshead, England, after one year, stayed for a while, and then returned to the Holy Land. During his short stay in England, he delivered a number of *shmuessen*, ethical discourses. In one, he spoke of his observations concerning the spiritual climate of the Holy Land, and how its residents were imbued by its sanctity. Among the many anecdotes, he related one about a meeting he had with a successful businessman. This individual was blessed with a large family whom he was supporting both prior to and following their marriages. He had an interesting practice -- almost a ritual to him-- which he performed prior to marrying off a child. It was this practice, which inspired *Rav Dessler*.

Traditionally, when one marries off a child, new clothing for the wedding is either sewn or purchased for each member of the family. (This was before the days of the *G’mach*; and this is assuming one had the wherewithal to outfit his entire family. This was, sadly, not always the case.) This man was not satisfied with merely having new clothes made for his children. He went one step further. He would go to the Diskin Orphanage and ask the director to give him the sizes of ten orphans who were in need of new outfits. If it was a daughter whom he was marrying off, he would go to the orphanage of *Rav Weingarten* and do the same for ten girls!

Rav Dessler observed that he had yet to see such acts of *chesed* in Europe. Indeed, he felt that it was the unique sanctity endemic to *Eretz Yisrael* which imbued its residents with such thoughtfulness and sensitivity for others not as fortunate as they are. He added that there was something about this man’s practice that, indeed, left much to be desired. The individual in question shared with him what he felt was a personal shortcoming concerning the *chesed* he was

performing. Apparently, when he had clothes made for his family, he used the finest silk, but the garments he had sewn for the orphans were made of simple linen. What bothered him was that the clothes he had made for his family were not destined to last very long. The garments that he had made for the orphans were quite special, since they would accompany them to the World to Come. If he would have been a better businessman, he would have spent even more on these garments. They were his ticket to Paradise. Why would he pinch pennies on a *mitzvah* that garnered such reward?

Veritably, we are often unaware of the spiritual weight engendered by what appears to us to be simple actions, often of little meaning. The Heavenly scale, however, factors its reward based upon a different quotient. The following examples shed light on this premise. The *Midrash* comments that, had Boaz been aware that his simple act of giving Rus some kernels of grain would be recorded for posterity in the Torah, he would have fed her fattened calves. *Chazal's* statement causes one to pause. Are our Torah giants politicians who thrive on publicity and would do anything to garner attention for themselves and their purported cause? Certainly, Boaz would have downplayed anything that he did. Why would feeding Rus be any different?

Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita, explains the following. If we were to ask Boaz to state his achievements during his long life, he would clearly not allude to the few kernels of grain that he gave to Rus. He would talk about his education, scholarly achievements, his family, his students, people whose lives he touched – everything – but the bit of food to Rus. Why? In his eyes, he probably did nothing earth-shattering.

We find a similar statement made by *Chazal* concerning Aharon *HaKohen*. He was an individual who devoted his life to advancing Jewish relationships. Whenever two Jewish men gravitated towards a dispute, Aharon would do everything within his power to prevent controversy from occurring. When two people were embroiled in a *machlokes*, dispute, he used his convincing powers to encourage a quick resolution. *Shalom bayis*, peaceful harmony between husband and wife, was another area in which he excelled. When Aharon died, his coffin was followed by 80,000 youngsters who carried the name Aharon. They were the products of his marriage counseling successes. Can we imagine how many families he brought back together – daily?! All this was in addition to the Torah that he taught to the multitudes. Aharon lived a long life replete with much spiritual achievement. Therefore, he would not have thought that his happiness at his younger brother being selected to lead the Jewish People out of Egypt was exemplary. Yet, we see that underscoring Aharon's benevolence would have made a great impression on him.

What makes Aharon's attitude even more incredible is the fact that had he not been happy about his younger brother's ascension to the leadership of the Jewish People, Moshe *Rabbeinu* would not have taken the Jews out of Egypt. He refused to accept the leadership if it meant hurting his brother's feelings. Now that Aharon had acquiesced, he played a pivotal role in the Redemption! Therefore, looking back at his agreement, at his favorable attitude, had he known that, by his attitude, he was changing the course of Jewish history, he would have accompanied his

acquiescence with a drum roll, band and huge festivity.

Likewise, had Boaz known that, by giving Rus a few kernels of grain, he was facilitating the entire cycle of events that led up to Rus' marriage to him – a union that produced the seeds of *Moshiach Tzidkeinu* – can we even begin to imagine Boaz' reaction? In a way, by his very action, Boaz became the catalyst for *Sefer Tehillim*, written by his grandson. This book has accompanied the Jewish People throughout the millennia, and it has been our source of consolation through pain, persecution and even death.

Now that we have both Aharon's and Boaz' actions in perspective, is there any doubt that their reaction once they discovered that the exodus from Egypt and *Sefer Tehillim* and the future Redemption are the results of their actions – that they would not be overjoyed? We now have an idea of the long-term results of each and every spiritual endeavor that we perform.

Horav Shlomo Levenstein, Shlita, explains that, actually, Boaz and Rus themselves were the greatest beneficiaries of their actions. Boaz was the *baal chesed* par excellence, performing acts of lovingkindness with all of *Klal Yisrael*, as a loving leader who cared for all people. Boaz merited longevity and a prolific family. *Chazal* say that he fathered sixty children. Nonetheless, Hashem judged him (as He judges all *tzaddikim*, righteous persons) *b'chut ha'saarah*, like a hairsbreadth. Apparently, Boaz did not invite Manoach, the father of Shimshon, to the wedding of his children. He felt it was wrong to accept presents from a man who was childless, because he would not be able to repay him at his own *simchah*, joyous occasion. As a result of this, each and every one of Boaz' children died, cutting off his ability to establish a living legacy. Thus, Boaz was truly all alone, with no one to even recite *Kaddish* for him.

Part two of Boaz' life was quite short, but incredibly successful. He met the young Rus, who returned with her mother-in-law, Naomi. He reached out to her with his unique sensitivity and generosity, an action which ultimately resulted in their marriage, which, in turn, produced a very unique *Kaddish* for Boaz – David *HaMelech*, the progenitor of *Melech HaMoshiach*!

Rus was also a beneficiary of this act of *chesed*, but the primary beneficiary was none other than Boaz. Rus performed her own acts of kindness with her mother-in-law, meriting her to become the Mother of Royalty, the grandmother of David *HaMelech* and his son, Shlomo *HaMelech*. She witnessed David author *Sefer Tehillim*, and Shlomo build the *Bais HaMikdash*. While her mother-in-law benefitted greatly from Rus' *chesed*, it was Rus, herself, who was the greatest beneficiary of her lovingkindness.

We now have a deeper understanding of the meaning of *V'ish es kedoshav lo yeheyu*. When one acts kindly towards others, he is the greatest recipient of his benevolence. The *gomlei chassodim* see how their dedication to helping others pays off handsomely for themselves. Indeed, the benefactor becomes his own beneficiary.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates that the mother of Rav Bentzion Felman died at the age of ninety-seven. She was followed two years later by her sister who was two years younger than she, who also died at the age of ninety-seven. These women merited unusual longevity in the merit of an act of *chesed* which they had performed as young girls. They were both born and raised in Baranovitz, Poland, the city which was home to the distinguished *yeshivah* under the leadership of **Horav Elchonon Wasserman, zl**. As was the case with all *yeshivos* prior to World War II, the economic situation was bleak. Some had it worse than others, but none escaped financial insecurity. In Baranovitz, however, it was not a question of meat or chicken; it was a question of bread. The *yeshivah* had exhausted all avenues of economic sustenance. There was not even bread for the proverbial “bread and water” diet on which many *yeshivah* students subsisted. This situation greatly troubled the two teenaged girls – ages nineteen and seventeen – respectively.

In their desire to help the students of the *yeshivah* continue their learning without starving, these two girls took a sack and daily walked from door to door throughout Baranovitz, petitioning the householders for a slice of bread, so that a student could have some food upon which to nourish himself. They did this throughout the difficult period during which the *yeshivah* was financially challenged.

When word of their personal benevolence reached the ears of the *Rosh Yeshivah*, *Rav Elchanan*, he blessed them both with longevity. His blessing was fulfilled.

Many of us think that *chesed* is an opportunity which presents itself, and one person jumps at the opportunity, thus granting him great merit. *Rav Levenstein* quotes the *pasuk* in *Devarim* 13:18, *V'nasan lecha rachamim v'richamcha v'hirbecha*, “And He will give you mercy and be merciful to you, and multiply you,” which alludes to the idea that, at times, the *chesed* opportunity which presents itself is by Heavenly design, specifically designated for an individual upon whom, under the circumstances under which it was decreed, should undergo a Heavenly chastisement – but was awarded the *chesed* in an attempt to circumvent its effect on the individual, thereby sparing him a dose of adversity. We never know what our act of *chesed* will achieve – for us, and the beneficiary; nor do we realize that it is an opportunity which was availed to spare us from perhaps being on the receiving end of the act of *chesed* of someone else.