

Safeguard and hearken to all these words... In order that it will be well with you and your children... When you do what is good and right in the eyes of Hashem, your G-d. (12:28)

Gemillas chesed, performing acts of loving kindness, is unquestionably the most rewarding type of deed one can perform. They are rewarding in both a material and spiritual sense. Classic Rabbinic material is replete with references to the merit one engenders for himself when he helps others. Each different category of *chesed* is demanding in its own unique manner. Visiting the sick and infirm means more than getting into a car or sending flowers. It means empathizing with the sick person, feeling his pain and easing his burden. Probably the most important message we can convey to a sick individual that we are there with them; - they are not alone in their pain. The **Chofetz Chaim, zl**, says that performing acts of *chesed* is a *zechus*, merit, for long life and for blessing in family matters. Visiting the sick is a special *zechus* for *shidduchim*, marriage. We see this from *Chazal* in the *Mishnah* in *Peah*, 1:1, that says: These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world but whose principal remains intact for him in the world to come. They are: the honor due to a father and mother;... visiting the sick; providing for a bride; escorting the dead, etc..."

Interestingly, *Chazal* place *hachnasas kallah*, addressing the needs of marriage-- whether it means finding a *shidduch* for a young woman or man, raising the money so that the wedding can take place, or to outfitting the *chassan/kallah* in a manner appropriate for a Jewish child -- prior to *halvayas ha'meis*, caring for the deceased. Moreover, they place *hachnosas kallah* between *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick, and *halvayas ha'meis*. Certainly, the *Torah* is conveying a message to us via the positioning of the acts of *chesed* in this *Mishnah*. The commentators suggest that the *mitzvah* of *chassan/kallah* has the ability to serve as a distinction between visiting the sick and attending to the deceased. In other words, caring for the needs of a *chassan/kallah* is a merit that the sick will not succumb to their illness. Do we need another reason for performing this special and vital act of kindness?

The *Torah* lists the widow and the orphan among the people who are in distress that one should go out of his way to help. Their situation warrants that they have primacy over everyone else. They are alone; they feel dejected. They must be given *chizuk*, strengthened and encouraged. A Jew should never feel alone. It is our responsibility to make sure that every Jew is provided for in every way. The story is told that in the neighborhood of the *Steipler Rav, zl*, an old widow lived all alone. One day, she fell down and broke her leg. She was now alone and incapacitated. One of her neighbors, whose husband happened to be a close student of the *Steipler*, took her into her home and cared for her physical and emotional needs. When the *Steipler* heard of this woman's selfless act of giving, he remarked, "Now we can send people to her to ask her for a *brachah*, blessing. Her *brachos* will certainly be *mekuyam*, fulfilled, because of the *chesed* she performed with this widow." If we keep this in mind, we might find people in our own individual communities who are worthy of sharing their blessing with us.

As a postscript to the above, I would like to address a problem that exists among some of us. We have just concluded writing about the importance of performing acts of *chesed*, reaching out to others in need, and increasing our sensitivity to others who are less fortunate than we are. There are people who devote themselves wholeheartedly to *gemilas chesed*. Regrettably, not all of them are motivated by the same sense of commitment. Some individuals seek to help their fellow-man. They feel his hurt, they sense his pain, they empathize with his loneliness. Other people act similarly, but for different reasons. They either enjoy the glory, crave the attention, or love to talk about all the wonderful things they do. Some members of the community cannot tolerate this insincerity, denigrating these pseudo do-gooders at every opportunity. To them, I ask: Who cares? Who cares why someone helps another Jew? Who cares if their motivation is suspect, if their sensitivity is not what it seems? As long as they help - as long as they are always there - who cares? Even though they talk about their wonderful endeavors - constantly, they do visit the ill, support the infirm, and console the bereaved. If they are performing these good deeds, then *yeyasher kochem*, all power to them.

An intriguing *Midrash* supports this idea. *Chazal* tell us that after the wicked Izevel -- wife of king Achav -- died, the people in charge came to collect her body to prepare it for burial. All they could find was her skull, feet and hands. Everything else had been devoured. *Chazal* explain that Hashem spared these body parts because of Izevel's custom to dance at weddings, clapping her hands and shaking her head back and forth. Her devotion to the *simchas chassan v'kallah* was rewarded in that these limbs were spared for burial. We can assume that Izevel's motivation was certainly not because of her sensitivity to the feelings of the bride and groom. This was a woman who proliferated idol-worship and who had *Neviim*, prophets, mercilessly killed. This cruel, evil woman cared only about one person - herself, yet she was rewarded for her act of *chesed*. Indeed, only the actual limbs that "performed" were spared. Hashem does not seem to critique one's motivation. Why should we?