

The middle bar inside the planks shall extend from end to end. (26:28)

The *Briach HaTichon* was an amazing component of the *Mishkan*. It basically kept the walls together, thus stabilizing the *Mishkan* structure. The *Targum Yonasan ben Uziel* explains how this pillar functioned. Avraham *Avinu* planted a tree in Beer Sheva. When *Klal Yisrael* walked through the miraculously split Red Sea, the angels uprooted the tree and flung it into the sea. The tree floated on top of the water. At that point, an angel proclaimed, "This tree was originally planted by the Patriarch Avraham; it was at this tree that the Patriarch would pray and call out to others in the Name of Hashem." The nation immediately grabbed hold of the tree and eventually appropriated it for the *Mishkan*, where it served as the *Briach HaTichon*. It was seventy *amos*, cubits, long, and when it was placed into the center hole of a beam, it wound itself around the corners and connected all the beams. When the *Mishkan* was disassembled, it returned to its original straight position. The questions are obvious: Why did it require a miracle? Why could they not use any other piece of lumber? Why did it require a historic origin i.e., Avraham *Avinu*? Apparently, nothing else in the *Mishkan* had such an "illustrious lineage" as the *Briach HaTichon*.

In his *Kaayal Taarog*, **Horav Ronen Abitul, Shlita**, offers a meaningful explanation. *Chazal* teach that the world stands on three things: Torah, *avodah* and *gemillus chasadim*, the study of Torah, the service of G-d through prayer, and performing acts of lovingkindness (*Pirkei Avos* 1:2). At first glance, we see that the *Mishkan* was the amalgam of two of these requisites. Moshe *Rabbeinu* erected the *Mishkan*. It was only through his input that the *Mishkan* stood. He was the symbol of Torah; he was its lawgiver, the one for whom the Torah is called – *Toras Moshe*. Aharon and his sons, the *Kohanim*, performed the *avodah*, service, in the *Mishkan*. So we now have Torah and *avodah*. In order for this microcosm of the world to endure, it must have some aspect of *gemillus chasadim* must be connected to it.

This is where the *Briach HaTichon* enters the picture. Hashem specifically selected the tree which was planted by Avraham the *Amud HaChesed*, Pillar of lovingkindness. Our Patriarch wrote the book on *chesed* – both from a material/physical standpoint and from a spiritual perspective. He devoted his entire life to saving the world from the scourge of paganism. He initially reached out to the pagans with material kindness, and then, once he had their attention, he taught them the monotheistic dogma. The *Mishkan* with its *Briach HaTichon* imparts a valuable lesson: Torah and *avodah* are necessary; they are wonderful – but they are insufficient if one seeks enduring reality. *Gemillus chasadim* must be added to the equation, as it was included in the structure of the *Mishkan*. Then it will last.

This was the scenario during the *Bayis Sheni*, The Second Temple era. There was Torah study and the service was being carried out in the *Bais Hamikdash*, but there was *sinaas chinam*, unwarranted hatred between Jews. This – more than any other factor – brought down the *Bais Hamikdash*. There was no chance. How could there be – if people did not get along with one

another?

It is impossible to touch upon the subject of *chesed* without immediately referring to the *tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, **Horav Aryeh Levin, zl**, an individual who not only truly understood the meaning of *chesed*, but lived it with his every breath. After all is said and done, carrying out acts of kindness to our fellow man generates a good feeling within a person – even when one does not receive a thank you. The mere knowledge that one is doing a good thing, that one is helping someone, should engender an internal sense of satisfaction. We observe an even more elevated level of *chesed*: when one acts not only because it is a “good” thing, but because it is the “right” thing to do. When one empathizes with the other, when one feels his pain, when it does not make a difference if the subject is observant or not, ethical or even a criminal – that is *chesed*. This was *Rav Aryeh Levin*.

He gave help to the underground fighter – the Israeli soldier before the State was established. He also found the means and spirit to extend his hand in encouragement to the thief that had befouled his life. He did not care if one was a hero who might have had little or no respect for Jewish observance or one who was down and out, willing to steal and cheat as a means of self-support. At times, he could go in the morning to give courage and infuse faith in the condemned prisoner who was on his way to the gallows, and in the evening, he was at the prisoner’s home giving solace and comfort to the woman who that day became the prisoner’s widow. With *Rav Aryeh* there was no “before” and “after,” no sense of what must come first and what could be put aside for later. It was all one seamless life of *chesed*.

Rav Aryeh had no rating system concerning acts of *chesed*. He loved all Jews alike and he felt their pain equally. For him, every human being was an entire world, and the entire world, in turn, was one unity. The feelings were reciprocated. People who came into his presence simply felt better. They wanted to better themselves, their lives, their religious observance. They were drawn to him because they knew that he loved them all. Who taught him such compassion? Where did he learn such sensitivity, such empathy and love for another human being?

In his memoirs, *Rav Aryeh* wrote: “I remember arriving in the Holy Land in 1905 and visiting Jaffa. I went to visit the *Rav, Horav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, zl*, who received me with good cheer, as was his holy way to receive all who came to him. After chatting a while, we *davened Minchah*, and then went out for a stroll in the fields. He did this often to collect his thoughts. Along the way, I plucked some branch or flower. My *rebbe* was taken aback, and then he gently said to me, ‘Believe me: in all my days I have taken care never to pluck a blade of grass or flower needlessly, when it still had the ability to grow or blossom. *Chazal* teach (*Bereishis Rabbah* 10:6) that there is not a single blade of grass here on earth that does not have a Heavenly force Above telling it – grow! Every sprout, every leaf of grass says something, conveys some message. Every stone whispers some inner, hidden message in the silence. Every creation utters its unique song to Hashem.’

“These words, spoken from a pure and holy heart, engraved themselves deeply on my heart. From

that time, I began to feel a strong sense of compassion for everything.”

As mentioned earlier, performing *chesed* often generates a warm feeling within a person. This, for many, is the ultimate reward – knowing that one is doing something to help another Jew – even if there is no audible gratitude. *Chesed shel emes*, kindness of truth, is the ultimate *chesed*, because one receives no reward. Even this form of *chesed*, however, has varied levels. One can perform *kindness* towards someone who is so sick that he is unaware that someone is even present. One can address the spiritual and emotional needs of those who are incarcerated in prison, as did Rav Aryeh, or he can assist in the preparation of the deceased for burial. Various levels structure the performance of this *mitzvah*. The following is an eyewitness testimony of an act of *chesed shel emes* that is truly *emes*.

In his *Yesupar L’Dor*, Rav Yona Emanuel writes concerning his experiences in the Westerbork Concentration Camp, outside of Bergen Belsen, Germany. Officially, Westerbork was not classified by the Nazis as an extermination camp. Still, prisoners who are not fed, and beaten mercilessly inevitably die. The prisoners who died in Westerbork were not buried, but rather, they were taken to the crematorium to be burned.

It was a gruesome sight: Jews bringing sacks filled with bodies of babies to the crematorium, Jews loading the bodies of their brothers and sisters into the ovens. Rav Emanuel writes that he asked the Jewish kapo in charge of the detail if he could enter the crematorium to see what was being done there. He agreed, but stipulated that it would be a brief “visit.”

The following are his words describing the sight. “The silence of death surrounded me when I entered. I was shaking from head to foot and choked with emotion. Suddenly, I heard voices, and I shuddered as the thought entered my head, ‘Are the dead speaking to one another?’ I walked on nevertheless, and now I heard the voices with greater clarity. Somewhere, people were praying!

“The voices were coming from over to the right. I walked that way and discovered a small room in which a group of Jews were sitting and reciting *Tehillim* with a tone of sad melancholy.

“I do not know if they saw me, but I saw them. Their clothes, like mine, sported the yellow patch. These were the men of the *chevra kaddisha*, Sacred Burial Society, who were responsible to carry the bodies to the ovens. They recited *Tehillim* in memory of the dead after carrying each sack of bodies. Later on, I discovered that before any bodies were burned, these men made every effort to prepare them as if for burial, in accordance with Jewish custom.”

Perhaps, the next time one feels that he has properly executed an act of *chesed* to his self-satisfaction – he should think about what these holy people were doing, and he will have some idea concerning the meaning of *chesed*.