

Let it be that the maiden to whom I shall say, “Please tip over the jug so I may drink,” and who replies, “Drink, and I will even water your camels,” her will You have designated for Your servant Yitzchak. (24:14)

Eliezer established a criteria for a suitable mate for Yitzchak. He would request of her an act of *chesed*, kindness. If her response exceeded his request, it would indicate that she was truly a *baalas chesed*. The wife for Yitzchak, the future Matriarch of *Klal Yisrael*, must be an individual whose character refinement is innate. Rivkah displayed a level of *chesed* that was exemplary. We may wonder why her willingness to draw water for the camels was so remarkable that it demonstrated her admirable quality of *chesed*. What was so special about it?

We suggest that the answer lies in understanding the essence of *chesed* and its true meaning. People perform acts of loving-kindness for various reasons. Some people do it because they actually want to help others. Other individuals do it because they feel good when they make other people feel good. Yet others perform acts of *chesed* for the recognition they get. True *chesed* is developing a sensitivity towards another's needs. We feel for other people, and we attempt to provide them with what they need, not with what we need. It is essential to help those who are in material need with food and clothing and, at times, even shelter. A simple “Good morning,” or the act of including someone who does not have friends into one's inner circle, also constitutes *chesed*. *Chesed* means providing kindness where and when it is needed--not when it is convenient or fashionable. *Chesed* means not expecting and not desiring recompense--of any sort. A cute anecdote tells about the boy scout who came to school one half-hour late. When the teacher asked him to explain his tardiness, the young boy responded, “I was helping an old woman to cross the street.” “Since when does that take a half-hour?” asked the teacher. “Well, she did not want to cross!” This boy had been taught to perform acts of kindness, so he performed them whether or not the person was in need.

All too often, we act kindly--for our benefit. We might be responding to a guilty conscience or the need for recognition, or, we might be searching for a merit. We must be sensitive to the needs of those around us, looking for those areas where we can be of assistance, for purely altruistic reasons. Being available when one is needed can be of greater significance than sending a meal.

Rivkah was the model of a *baalas chesed*. She was sensitive and caring. She sought to give help, even if it was to an animal that could not express its feelings or say, “thank you.” When Eliezer saw Rivkah's outpouring of *chesed*, even for an animal that does not express its needs or respond with gratitude, he knew that he had found the suitable mate for Yitzchak.