

## And do kindness and truth with me. (47:29)

*Rashi* explains that the kindness performed towards the dead is the kindness of truth, altruistic kindness. Every act of loving kindness carries with it the possibility of reciprocity or of some form of recompense. When one performs kindness for the deceased he has no hope for any return. This is pure altruism, ie, truth. *Rashi* seems to be describing the acts of *chesed* as consisting of two levels: plain *chesed*; and *chesed* infused with *emes*. Yaakov *Avinu* was asking Yosef to commit to an act of kindness which reflected truth, an extraordinary act of kindness, unlike any other: kindness characterized by truth. This implies that the *chesed* act remains static, unchanged, which is probably true from the position of the beneficiary. Kindness is kindness. From the perspective of the benefactor, the one carrying out the act of kindness, however, *chesed* which has the added component of *emes*, is a *chesed* of a different genre. It is not the same act of *chesed* as “plain” *chesed*. How can we understand this?

When Yosef *HaTzaddik* saw that his end was near, he asked his brothers to see to it that his remains would be removed from Egypt for burial in *Eretz Yisrael*. He followed in the path of his father, who had previously made the same request of his sons. A difference existed, however, with regard to the nature of their requests: Yaakov asked his sons to execute the deed, while Yosef requested this of his brothers. He did not address his sons. Indeed, at the time of *geulas Mitzrayim*, the Egyptian redemption, when the Jews departed from the land that had been their surrogate home for 210 years, it was Moshe *Rabbeinu*, a descendant of Levi, who removed Yosef’s bones from Egypt. Why did Yosef ask his brothers – not his own sons – to take his bones out of Egypt? Furthermore, why was Moshe, the leader of the nation (who probably had other things to do), selected to carry out the promise to Yosef?

*Horav Levi Dicker, zl*, explains that an additional component is intrinsic *chesed*, kindness, of which we are unaware. Complete kindness is kindness that has come full-circle, with the receiver reciprocating kindness to the benefactor. Yosef had done so much for his brothers, from finding them a place to live, to sustaining them in Egypt. He had forgiven them for selling him into slavery. He had done everything to alleviate their feelings of melancholy concerning what they did and their fear over what he might do in revenge. Nonetheless, despite all of this, Yosef’s expression of kindness to his brothers remained incomplete.

What is the definition of complete kindness? *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, explains that complete kindness is the process by which the beneficiary is able to reciprocate the kindness to his benefactor. The *Zohar HaKadosh* writes that by performing *mitzvos*, we complete Hashem’s kindness to us. He is benevolent; we “pay back” via the agency of *mitzvah* performance. When a person acts kindly to another person, but does not allow the beneficiary to do anything in return, his act of kindness is deficient; it is lacking, because the beneficiary is pained by his inability to reciprocate. He feels that he is in debt until that time in which he is given the opportunity to repay that kindness with a kindness of his own. Hashem certainly does not need anything from us. Nonetheless, in His infinite kindness, He grants us the opportunity to reciprocate, thereby

“relieving” us of our obligation to Him.

Yosef also wanted to avail his brothers the opportunity to return the favor, but since he was the viceroy of Egypt, they could do very little for him. Yosef obviously could not personally negotiate taking his own bones out of Egypt. Thus, he asked his brothers to do for him what he would be unable to do for himself. Thus, he was setting the scene for his act of *chesed* to achieve completion. This is why he did not ask his sons. Moshe *Rabbeinu*, too, was in a unique position. As *Klal Yisrael's* leader, he was the people's surrogate; in this manner, he was uniquely suited to act on behalf of the entire Jewish nation. He had the ability to grant all of the *Shevatim* the closure they required, thus completing Yosef's acts of kindness.

Returning now to our original questions: Are there two forms of *chesed*? And what is the meaning of *chesed v'emes*? As we explained, in order for *chesed* to be complete it must go full circle, allowing for the beneficiary to reciprocate. Anything less deprives the benefactor of the complete *mitzvah*. When one performs *chesed* for the dead, reciprocity is impossible. In such an act of *chesed v'emes*, the benefactor must come to terms with the notion that he is performing *chesed* that is supported by truth. He can expect nothing in return – not even a thank you. This is absolute *chesed*.

*Chesed Shel Emes* is an area shrouded in obscurity. The *misaskim*, volunteers, who engage in their holy work of preparing the deceased for burial, are involved in an endeavor that can best be described as otherworldly. Dealing with the deceased requires reverence, being aware that the body is the physical container which houses the *neshamah*, soul, the spiritual life force of the human being as the soul's earthly repository; the body maintains a degree of holiness and must be treated accordingly. Anyone who is involved in the holy work of *Chevra Kaddisha*, sacred burial society, attests to the verity that the members are engaged in an esoterically holy endeavor.

Stories concerning *Hashgachah Pratis*, Divine Providence, provide glimpses into another world which members of the *chevra* occasionally witness. To the first-time reader, these stories might represent a stretch of the imagination, but having had the privilege to be a member of the *chevra* for the past forty years, I can state unequivocally that these stories may be taken at face value. Since I am limited by the parameter of space, I will pick one sample of the many incidents that have taken place.

A tragic accident occurred in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. A car lost control and was driven wildly onto the sidewalk, knocking down two people at a nearby bus stop and a woman who happened to be standing in front of a store window. The woman was a religious Jewess, a Russian immigrant. She died instantly.

One of the area *rabbanim* contacted *Chesed Shel Emes*, an organization in Brooklyn consisting of hundreds of volunteers, who address all *tzarchei ha'meis*, the needs involving the deceased – literally from illness to beyond. They are devoted 24/7 to this *chesed* which they perform with *emes*.

*Chesed Shel Emes* immediately dispatched a volunteer to the medical examiner's office to ensure that no autopsy would be performed, that the *nifteres*, deceased, be treated with *kavod ha'meis*, full and proper respect, and that the body be released in a timely manner. Several volunteers went to the scene of the accident to collect all human remains that were required to be buried.

*Chesed Shel Emes* maintains its own *chelka*, section, of the Jewish cemetery in Long Island. It is used for those who have no designated burial site, most frequently due to a lack of funds. Following the burial, the *misaskim* noticed that the grave right next to the new grave had the same last name as the present *nifteres*. After a little research, they discovered that this other grave belonged to none other than the present *nifteres'* grandmother, who had been brought to *Kever Yisrael*, Jewish burial, by *Chesed Shel Emes* several years earlier. Unquestionably, Hashem had manipulated the events, so that these two *neshamos*, *ha'neehavim v'ha'neimim b'chayeiheim u'bmosam lo nifradu*, "the beloved in life were not separated in death."