

Avraham rose up from the presence of his dead and spoke to bnei Cheis. (23:3)

The Torah is circumspect concerning its text, spelling of each word and overall locution. No word is superfluous, no spelling is ignored. *Chazal* derive volumes of *halachah* from every nuance, every seeming redundancy. As the message of its Divine Author, nothing in the Torah is to be taken capriciously. As such, it is intriguing to note that the words, *bnei Cheis* (children of Cheis), are mentioned nine times in our *parshah* and once in *Parashas Vayechi* (49:32). It is not as if these were laudable people. They were idolaters who were greedy and selfish – among other things. Yet, the Torah finds it important to underscore their negotiating with Avraham *Avinu* when he sought to purchase a plot of land to bury his wife.

Chazal (*Bereishis Rabbah* 58:8) intimate this question. Rabbi Eliezer said, “How much ink is spilled and how many quills are broken, in order to write ‘*bnei cheis*’! Ten times, the Torah writes ‘*bnei cheis*’. These ten citations correspond to the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, in order to teach that whoever assists in the business ventures of a *tzaddik*, righteous person, it is considered as if he has fulfilled the *Aseres HaDibros*.”

Chazal ask the question, derive the lesson, convey the message, but what should we learn from it (other than the overriding importance of assisting a *tzaddik* in his financial affairs)? *Horav Noach Weinberg, zl* (*Wisdom for Living*), explains that *Chazal* are teaching us that (even) one act can alter the course of history. *Bnei cheis* were far from respectable people. They were barbarians whose entire demeanor was the antithesis of that of Avraham *Avinu*. It was the furthest from the mind to imagine them sitting down to the table with our holy Patriarch to discuss a business enterprise – one which was not a long-term arrangement, but a one-time deal which would net them just so much. Yet, for once, they acted like *mentchen*, decent human beings, deferring respect to the *tzaddik* who stood before them, someone who was acknowledged as the *Nasi Elokim*, Prince of G-d. This godless people showed reverence to a representative of G-d who embodied spirituality at its apex. This one time, one act, singular performance of kindness and decency, elevated them to the point that they are considered to have fulfilled the *Aseres HaDibros*. Their one-time achievement made their life worth living.

One deed, one achievement at the right time, in the right place, can impact the world in such a manner that it qualifies (and gives meaning to) one’s existence and makes his name worthy of being perpetuated for all time. One well-placed act can enroll a person in the eternal book of history. Because he made a change, he made a difference. This does not mean that once one has successfully performed this life-altering act that he should go into retirement, live a reclusive life of abandon. No! It should serve as the springboard for a continued successful life – impactful living. While some live longer than others, it does not mean that the one with the shorter life span has a diminished opportunity for achievement. It is not how long one lives – it is how one lives that matters. If every G-d-given moment of life is recognized as just that – G-d-given, he will not waste

it. He knows that he can achieve and influence a world in that moment.

The people that change the course of history, who leave an enduring impact, are not necessarily the well-known movers and shakers. Each and every one of us has the opportunity to leave our imprint for eternity. *Rav Weinberg* explains that by reaching out to our fellow Jew, who – for a number of reasons (many out of his control) – is alienated from the religion of his ancestors, whose understanding and appreciation of his heritage is at best minimal, superficial and often jaundiced, is drowning in a society whose culture is immoral and toxic, one can change the course of generations to come. If we throw him/her a line and succeed in reining him/her in, we have changed the world and made our mark for eternity.

The one good deed will pay out its investment in ways that one cannot imagine. I present two vignettes in which we see how this played out. *Rav Mendel Futerfas*, a *Lubavitch chassid* emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* from Communist Russia after spending many years in the *gulag*, Russian prison, for the “treason” of teaching and inspiring Jews to *Yiddishkeit*. He also risked his life to help his fellow Jews escape from Russia.

When he emigrated in the 1970's, he first traveled to England where his wife was living. He then went to Crown Heights to meet with the *Lubavitcher Rebbe, zl*. When he left New York, his first destination was to return to his wife in England, and together they would travel to *Eretz Yisrael*. He was sitting next to a man whose facial features identified him as Jewish. He could not prove it, but his gut feeling gravitated toward Jewish. The man was clearly not *frum*, observant. His soul was in a turmoil. After spending years reaching out to Jews of all stripes, in a country dedicated to denying the existence of a Supreme Being, saving Jews both physically and spiritually, how could he sit next to this man for six hours and ignore his apparent disconnect from Jewish observance? The problem was that he hardly spoke English. How could he interact with the man? On the other hand, the fact that they were sitting next to one another was surely Divinely preordained. He had an idea. He took out his *Tefillin* and pointed to them. He said to him, “I Jew, you Jew; I *Tefillin*, you *Tefillin*.” His neighbor agreed to put on *Tefillin*. It was not the most eloquent oratory – but it was sincere. When words emanate from the heart – not just the mouth – they drive home a message: “I care about you.” That one decision altered the trajectory of that man's life.

Rabbi Yechiel Spero (*To Light a Spark*) relates the story of a family in Bnei Brak who began to notice cracks in their son, Yossi's, spiritual armor. In the beginning, it was little nuances, the manner in which he would *daven*, his attitude toward *Shabbos*; *kashrus* was no longer observed in the strict manner in which he was raised. Their normally good relationship began to sour, as his failure to observe Torah and *mitzvos* became more obvious, evidencing a lack of respect for his parents' feelings and an almost rebellious attitude toward Torah and *halachah*. The clincher came when Yossi asked his father to buy him a car. It was not as if his parents could not afford the expenditure. They were well-to-do, and a car would not break the bank. Their concern was: Would he flagrantly drive on *Shabbos*? Were they assisting him in *chillul Shabbos*? Perhaps they should purchase the car on the condition that he does not drive it on *Shabbos*? They decided that they

knew only one address to hear *daas Torah*, the wisdom of Torah: The *Chazon Ish*. The sage was not well, but he made the effort to advise families that were going through challenges with their children.

The *Chazon Ish* met with the father and listened to his tale of woe. The father related his son's latest request and his suggestion that he buy him the car on the condition that he does not drive it on *Shabbos*. The *Chazon Ish* responded immediately, "Absolutely not! When a father buys a car for his son, no strings or conditions should be attached to the gift." The father was expecting/hoping to hear a different response from the sage, but the *gadol hador*, preeminent leader of the generation, had spoken. He would adhere.

The next day Yossi received his new car – without strings attached. Surprisingly, when *Shabbos* began, the car was parked in its place. Yossi no longer observed *Shabbos*, but, apparently, he was not about to desecrate it with the new car that he had received. This went on for four weeks, until one *Shabbos*, Yossi sat down to partake in the *Shabbos* meal with the rest of his family. Words cannot describe the joy mixed with tears that coursed through his parents' heart. It was an inspiring meal, almost like a homecoming – which it was. Nonetheless, the father wanted to know what it was that had effected the change in Yossi's attitude.

Yossi explained, "When I asked you to buy me a car, I was certain there would be the condition of no driving on *Shabbos*. I had decided that if this would be the case, I would return the car, make a loan and purchase my own car, which I would drive all over – on *Shabbos*. I was going to do this to spite you. If you cannot accept me for who I am, then you do not really love me. When you bought me the car and gave it to me without strings attached, however, I realized that you were giving me the car because you loved me. I then asked myself, "How can I drive the car when I know that it will hurt my parents and cause them severe pain?" I decided not to drive out of respect for you. After a few weeks, I realized how much *Shabbos* meant to me – and I returned.

One decision prompted by the *gadol hador* saved a young boy from the abyss of spiritual infamy.