

For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice. (18:19)

Chazal (*Kesubos* 8b) apply the above *pasuk* to Avraham Avinu's devotion to the *middah*, character trait, of *chesed*, acts of lovingkindness. *Chazal* relate various statements made by *Amoraim* in an attempt to comfort Rav Chiya bar Abba on the loss of his son. [We will not examine how these statements are comforting, but rather, focus on the statement and its implied message.] *Acheinu gomlei chassadim b'nei gomlei chassadim*, "Our brothers, who bestow lovingkindness, sons of those who bestow lovingkindness, who embrace *b'riso shel Avraham Avinu*, the covenant of our Patriarch, Avraham Avinu, as it is stated, 'For I know him, that he will command his children to do righteousness and justice.'" *Rashi* explains that *bris* refers to Avraham's act of *chesed* as a covenant between him and Hashem. He cites Avraham's *eishel, achilah, shtiah, linah* providing wayfarers with food, drink and a bed, as *bris*. This means that Avraham's acts of lovingkindness were much more than a manifestation of a good *middah*. They established a *bris* between him and the Almighty. Thus, Hashem said, "I know him/love him, because he commands his children to carry out righteousness and justice" as part of his covenant with Hashem. When we follow in Avraham's footsteps by carrying out acts of *chesed*, we are fulfilling Avraham's *bris* of *chesed* with Hashem.

This offers us a new vista of understanding regarding the concept of *chesed*, how it applied in practice to Avraham, and, by extension, to us, his descendants. The *Alter, zl, m'Slabodka* (*Ohr HaTzfun* 95-98) explains Avraham's *chesed* based upon *Chazal* (*Avos D'Rav Nosson* 7:1) *V'yi'heyu aniim bnei beisecha*, "Let the poor be members of your household." This does not mean (explain *Chazal*) that poor people should actually move in and live in your house; rather, they should speak of what they ate and drank in your house as they spoke of what they ate and drank in the house of *Iyov*. [This means that *Iyov* went out of his way to promote sufficient sustenance to those who came to his door.] *Chazal* continue that, when the tragic misfortunes struck *Iyov*, he cried out to Hashem, "Did I not feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty?" Hashem replied, "Regardless of what you have done, you still did not reach even a *chatzi shiur*, half the level, of Avraham Avinu's spectrum of *chesed*." The *Mishnah* qualifies this, noting that *Iyov* sat at home and, if a poor person came to his door, he fed him. If the man was accustomed to eat wheat bread, *Iyov* provided him wheat bread; if one's custom was to eat meat, *Iyov* served him meat. If his usual beverage was wine, *Iyov* provided him with wine. Avraham's *chesed* outweighed *Iyov*'s acts of kindness. First, he went looking for wayfarers who might be in need. If he was unable to find someone, he kept on looking. If the poor person was unaccustomed to eat wheat bread, Avraham prepared wheat bread for him. If the man did not eat meat (because it was beyond his budget), Avraham prepared meat for him. If he normally did not imbibe, Avraham gave him wine.

The question that confronts us: It is true Avraham and *Iyov* had distinctive styles in addressing their *chesed* concerns, but to say that *Iyov*'s level of *chesed* did not even achieve half the level of

Avraham's seems a bit strong. Furthermore, perhaps Avraham was taking the *mitzvah* of *chesed* a little too far. One has to provide the poor man with material and even emotional sustenance. Where does it say that he must feed him foods that are luxurious to his palate?

The *Alter* explains that *chesed* does not demand that we simply fill a need: the poor man is hungry; feed him, and good day. No! *Chesed* means that one acts kindly because that is what the giver is and does. We do not fill a need. We do good, because we are good. Thus, a true *baal chesed* seeks every opportunity to act kindly, because *chesed* sustains him (self). It is about me, not about him. A Jew does (should) not rest until he finds a medium to help someone. A Jew who has not had the opportunity to help his fellow should feel that he has personally failed in his mission of emulating Hashem's ways.

Avraham searched for every avenue to perform *chesed*. If the man never ate meat – he should by all means have a succulent steak. We see this from the manner in which Avraham served the angels, serving them himself and providing them with delicacies. *Chesed* was not something he had to do, but something he wanted to do. Avraham's attitude toward *chesed* was founded in *v'halachta bidDrachav*, "You shall follow/go in His ways." Hashem performs *chesed* because He "wants" to do so. It is part of the underlying principles of Creation. Altruism, magnanimity, is the expression of a desire to help others without being begrudging, and with selflessness. Thus, Avraham's acts of *chesed* are called a *bris*, covenant. This is what he shared with Hashem.

The following story illuminates a powerful side to *chesed* and altruistic care for a brother, but it could (and should) apply equally to all. A fellow purchased a shiny new car. Wherever he went, people stopped to look at and admire it. He stopped in a random neighborhood (not upper echelon) to get some groceries. He noticed a young boy, clearly dressed in old, hand-me-down clothes, standing in front of the store, admiring his car. He asked the boy, "You like?" "Yes!" was the boy's immediate reply. "Where did you get it?" he asked. "My brother got it for me" was the fellow's reply.

Staring at the car with wide, longing eyes, the boy began, "I wish... wow, I wish..." At this point the owner of the car expected him to say, "That I had such a brother," but he did not. He said, "Wow, I wish I could be such a brother."

Surprised at such an insightful response from a young boy, the fellow decided to offer the boy a ride in his car. [This was probably before children were taught not to talk to strangers.] The boy's eyes went wide as he said, "I would love to take a ride in your car." As he climbed into the car, the boy asked, "Can we drive by my house?" "Sure," the fellow said, assuming that the boy wanted to show off to his friends that he had gotten a ride in a fancy, new car. The man was in for a surprise.

They arrived at the house, and the boy asked if he could run in for a moment. He soon returned carrying his little brother who was unable to walk. "You see that car, Billy! That man's brother bought him that car. One day, I will buy you a car. That way it will not be so hard for you to get

around.”

Many people perform acts of *chesed*, and, for some, at the expense of their time, money and even health. But how many eat, sleep and drink *chesed*? How many look for any opportunity which can serve as a platform for *chesed*? How many sit thinking for new ways to help others, to enable them to be like everyone else? Not many, but then Avraham was in a league all to himself.