

She filled her jug and ascended. (24:16)

Chazal interpret the “ascent” of this *pasuk* as a reference, not to Rivkah, but to the water – the water rose up to “meet” her. Her virtue was so great that a miracle occurred when she came to the well.

Eliezer saw the water rise up to Rivkah – a miracle which clearly manifested her elevated spiritual plateau. Miracles do not occur for someone who is undeserving. If so, why did Eliezer require a sign that demonstrated that she excelled in the *middah*, attribute, of *chesed*, lovingkindness. Apparently (as expounded by the commentators), miracles do not define a person’s character. Character traits are the measure of a man. The fact that one is accustomed to miracles does not necessarily mean that he/she will be a fitting spouse. Acts of *chesed* allow us a window into the essence of the person’s true character. Is he/she caring, generous, kind, benevolent, empathetic, loving, etc.? Character refinement translates into the type of individual who will be a worthy spouse.

Chesed is described as one of the attributes of Hashem, a virtue to be practiced by mankind. It reflects a selfless and compassionate attitude. The dimensions of *chesed* are often explored in the context of interpersonal relationships and moral conduct. *Chesed* encourages one to cultivate a mindset of compassion, following “thought” with “action” by actively engaging in acts that promote the well-being of others – individually and communally.

Having said this, one would expect *chesed* to be performed between two living individuals. There is also a concept of *chesed shel emes*, kindness of truth, in which one engages in preparing the deceased for his final journey. Every step -- from being there during one’s last moments to arranging for every aspect of the funeral and burial – goes under the rubric of *chesed shel emes*, since no material reward can compensate for one’s actions. It is *chesed* in its most pristine form – or so I thought.

I write this after recently being made aware of an act of *chesed* that amazed me for its far-reaching and selfless act of generosity. It was not about money or time. It was about giving oneself over to another person – after both were deceased!

Children of Holocaust survivors did not have large extended families. Those who were fortunate to survive were not necessarily blessed with surviving progeny. They either had survived and married late in life, or the physical and emotional trauma of the purgatory from which they emerged took its toll on their reproductive ability. Many aged survivors left this world childless, with *Kaddish*, the mourner’s prayer, being recited by a more distant family member or a close friend. Someone whom I knew quite well, himself the son of survivors, had an aunt who died, leaving no offspring. As such, she would not really have anyone to visit and pray at her grave. Her nephew, who otherwise would have been interred in *Eretz Yisrael*, asked his children to bury him next to his aunt. Thus, when his children and many friends would visit his grave, they would stop by his aunt’s grave and offer a prayer in her soul’s behalf. Is this not mind boggling? The nephew’s reward for

his act of kindness certainly continued on and accompanied him to *Gan Eden*! No remuneration, the benefactor himself was not present to collect, knowing that he would be in the *Olam HaEmes*, World of Truth, when his act of *chesed* occurred.

Opportunities to perform *chesed* come in various shapes and forms. At times, one acts kindly by allowing someone to take advantage of him. The *Baal Shem Tov* was traveling, and he found himself in a remote village for *Shabbos*. Seeking a place to *daven*, he asked the Jewish innkeeper if he could have a room to pray in, no food, no beds, just *daven*. The innkeeper agreed, but asked an exorbitant sum of money for this privilege. The *Baal Shem Tov* immediately gave him the money. His students who were traveling with him were taken aback at the man's temerity and their saintly *Rebbe's* compliance to pay such a sum. He explained that this was the man's sole income. To deprive him of the funds, even though he would be justified, would be harmful to his livelihood. He did not want this responsibility on his shoulders.

Some people are kind-hearted and perform all forms of *chesed* for others, but they want no help from anyone; they want to do it alone. This is not what *chesed* is all about. Just as it is important to help the beneficiary, including others in the project provides *chesed* for them. It is understandable that there are instances when, for reasons of privacy and to preserve the beneficiaries' self-esteem, the fewer people involved, the better. When individuals come together to uplift the spirits and support those in need, it fosters a sense of unity and strengthens the bonds of the community. It has the potential to transform the dynamics of the group, promoting the personal growth of each individual, elevating and reinforcing values and inspiring others to act in a similar manner.

We mistakenly think that *chesed* is defined by how much, how great, how many we impact, when, in fact, it is the little things, the small, sincere actions that make the difference. This is especially true when a group is involved, catalyzing the little things to mushroom exponentially. Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky tells the story of an Israeli housewife, and mother to a houseful of children, who approached him and said, "I want to do something that will impact the world." He questioned her skills, to which she replied that she had none of the exotic skills that so many successful people possess. "Wait," she said. "I do have one skill. I am particularly good at baking." He asked her to return the next day, and they would discuss how her baking skills could alter the world.

The next morning, she returned all excited. "I have an idea," she declared. "I make a delicious cupcake. A school for special children is in my neighborhood. I am going to bake cupcakes in honor of *Rosh Chodesh* and bring them to the school for the students." "A wonderful idea, which would make fifty children happy, but how would it change the world?" He was wrong.

Following *Rosh Chodesh*, the woman called Rabbi Orlofsky with excitement in her voice. "The principal informed me that I raised the spirits of the children beyond anything I could imagine. They are a group of fifty children, each one struggling with his individual physical and emotional challenges, and I made them happy! They were overwhelmed with the kindness. News about my project spread and other schools called and asked if I could keep them in mind. I said, 'Sure.'

However, I can only do so much. So I enlisted the help of my friends who also were happy to volunteer. As a result, a number of schools with hundreds of children are benefitting from the delicious cupcakes.”

One act of *chesed* mushroomed into an endeavor that now included many volunteers and sweetened the lives of hundreds of struggling children. I would go on with many similar stories, but I think the reader understands. It is not how much one does. It is the fact that one is willing to do it. We start small and let Hashem take over. If we are sincere and worthy, it will grow exponentially beyond our wildest expectations.