

A Taste of Torah

The Right Kind

By Rabbi Mordechai E. Fleisher

There is a phonebook which is published annually for a prominent Jewish community in the New York/New Jersey area. Inside this phonebook, there is a list of gemachs. The word gemach is an acronym for “gemilus chasadim” – “acts of loving kindness” – and in this context the term is used to refer to offerings of services or items for free, for borrowing, or for a very nominal fee. The list contains well over two hundred gemachs, offering everything from post diggers to shoes, from chairs to folding beds. And here’s a great one: a drivers’ manual gemach. Or how about a power washer gemach? Yet one may be struck (as I sometimes am) at the fact that people seem to have a need to offer something – no matter how strange – to help another.

Our Sages tell us that one of the defining characteristics of the Jewish People is that they are gomlei chasadim, people who are involved with performing acts of loving kindness. From whence does this trait spring forth? From Avraham Avinu, our Patriarch Abraham. And nowhere Avraham’s desire to help others demonstrated more clearly than at the start of this week’s parsha.

Avraham has just undergone a circumcision at the age of ninety-nine. It is now three days since the circumcision. Knowing that wayfarers frequented the Avraham and Sara home, and hoping to spare Avraham the need to tend to guests while he is recovering from his operation, G-d makes it extremely

hot outside. Really hot. Unnaturally hot. So hot that everyone cancels their outings and opts to stay in their nice, air conditioned (okay, maybe not) homes.

Pretty thoughtful of H-shem, huh? There’s just one problem. Avraham is sitting outside, waiting for someone to pass by. And he’s very upset, because nobody is coming! H-shem quickly solves this issue by sending three angels disguised as travelers to come by. Avraham, upon seeing them, immediately swings into action, and offers them the full hospitality that he is renowned for.

There’s one major issue with this story. If nobody needs assistance, why is Avraham so desperate to offer it? Avraham should have realized that on this day, his services are not needed, and gone to lay down a bit. Why is he so desperate to find someone to help out?

The question is predicated upon a misconception of the proper understanding of what chessed, loving-kindness, is. The idea of chessed is not to fill a need that someone else has. It does not mean that if someone needs help, I will, at that point, look for a way to solve the problem. Chessed means that I have a need to give to others! And if I am unable to do so, it is I who will be lacking. Avraham Avinu had such a desire, such a drive, to assist others, that is superseded all other considerations. And he was genuinely distressed when he couldn’t be of service to anybody. And, we, his descendants, carry those spiritual genes inside of us. Hmmm... maybe I’ll begin a free...

Stories For The Soul

The Mysterious Interloper

Rabbi Yisroel Miller, a prominent Rabbi in Pittsburgh, gives kosher supervision to an area restaurant. He inspects the premises on a regular basis to ensure that the highest standards of *kashrus* are met and maintained.

On one of Rabbi Miller’s visits, the manager told him that a man had been looking around the restaurant. The manager said he did not see him, but one of the workers said the man was reading all the product labels and asking all kinds of questions about the ingredients and the utensils.

Rabbi Miller was a bit perturbed. He always let everyone know that he had nothing to hide about the kosher operation, but he let it be known that if anyone wanted to check out the actual procedure, he would appreciate if the person would contact him.

On Rabbi Miller’s subsequent visit, the manager informed him that one of his workers saw the man again, and he had as many questions as before. Rabbi Miller was beginning to get upset. He felt like he was being spied upon. Why couldn’t the person just confront him directly?

On a third visit, Rabbi Miller was told that the man had come around again, going into all the back rooms and asking about everything. Rabbi Miller was outraged.

Eventually the mystery was solved. The interloper was none other than Rabbi Miller himself. It turned out that a new worker who didn’t know who Rabbi Miller was, kept reporting to his boss that “some man” was looking around and asking questions. Rabbi Miller said that he learned a

Kollel Happenings

REVISITING WOMEN OF THE BIBLE WITH MRS. ESTI SCHWAB

Join Mrs. Esti Schwab for "Revisiting Women of the Bible." This four-part series will help you gain a better understanding and a new appreciation of the great women of the Book of Genesis: Chava (Eve), Sara (Sarah), Rivka (Rebecca), Rochel (Rachel), & Leah. Classes will be held on Sundays from 11:30 am-12:30pm at Barnes & Noble (960 S. Colorado Blvd.)



LIBERATED PARENTS, LIBERATED CHILDREN WITH MRS. AVIGAIL STEINHARTER

Join Mrs. Avigail Steinharter for "Liberated Parents, Liberated Children: Your Guide to a Happier Family." This six part series for moms integrates the timeless wisdom of the Torah with the approach of the world-renowned Dr. Haim Ginott. Classes will be held on Tues., Nov. 1, Nov. 8, Nov. 15, Nov. 22, Nov. 29, & Dec. 6 from 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.. Cost: \$80 for all six classes. For information, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org



THE LATE SHOW: THURS. NIGHT SEDER AT AISH

Join the Chevra for learning and cholent at Aish. Maariv is at 9:00 p.m. followed by learning and refreshments. For chavrusas or other information, contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at rmh@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855

Interpersonal Issues Bal Tolin

A service provider (such as a babysitter, a doctor, etc.) is subject to bal tolin, as well. However, if the provider usually sends a bill for the service, then payment is not expected until the bill is received, and there is no bal tolin.

Nonetheless, once the bill is

received, one is Rabbinically obligated to pay within a normal period of time, and not be delinquent about payment.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi Kaddish: How Long?

Gerdy Trachtman wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Is there any halachic basis for the kaddish (mourners' prayer) to be said 11 months for a deceased parent? Some people say it for 12 months. Please give me the textual sources for this difference. Thank you very much.

Dear Gerdy Trachtman,

The Talmudic Sages teach that the maximum that a very wicked person is punished in the afterlife in gehinom is 12 months. The public recitation of kaddish shields the departed soul from this punishment. Hence, kaddish is recited during the first year after a parent's passing.

However, the custom is to recite kaddish for 11 months only. Saying kaddish the entire 12 months would give the impression that the deceased was a very wicked person who needs protection the entire 12 months.

So, unless the parent specifically requested it, or unless it's known that the parent was a willful transgressor, kaddish is said for only 11 months.

Sources:

Gesher HaChaim
P'nei Baruch

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Stories for the Soul

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valuable lesson about judging people favorably from this episode.

In this week's Parsha, Hashem informed Avraham that he was intent on destroying the people of Sodom because of their intense wickedness. Avraham pleaded with Hashem on behalf of Sodom, saying that perhaps there were some righteous people there in whose merit

the city could be saved. Although it turned out that there were no righteous Sodomites, we see that Avraham always sought to find merit in everyone.

So, too, whenever we think a person is acting wickedly or improperly, we should try to find merit for him and give him the benefit of the doubt.

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