

Gaining a Deeper Appreciation for Kindness

Based on the weekly Shmuess given by HaRav Shaya Cohen, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshiva Zichron Aryeh

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח | הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר | רפאל חיים דוב בן בן-ציון שלום | ר' ברוך בן ר' יהודה | שרה בת ר' יחזקאל | ראובן יוסף בן יהושע | דב בעריש בן פסח צבי
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In this week's Parsha, there is a Pasuk (31:6) that states, "And Moshe sent them," referring to Moshe sending Klal Yisrael to take revenge against Midyan, led by Pinchas. The Medrash Tanchuma provides an interesting commentary on this verse. It says, "Hashem said to Moshe, take revenge, you yourself," but Moshe chose to send others instead. The Medrash explains that Moshe acted this way because he had a connection to Midyan. He grew up there and felt unable to cause harm to those who had shown him kindness. This idea is further illustrated through a Mashal: "Don't throw a rock into a well that you drank from."

At first glance, this Medrash can be difficult to understand. Midyan had led Klal Yisrael astray, causing them to engage in forbidden relationships and idol worship. They were responsible for a plague that resulted in many deaths. It is clear that they deserved to be punished, as commanded by Hashem. Furthermore, it is important to note that these may not have been the same Midyanim who had shown kindness to Moshe. Given these circumstances, it is perplexing why Moshe refrained from personally taking revenge. What adds to the confusion is that Moshe appeared to be going against a direct command from Hashem, yet there is no record of him being criticized for his actions.

From this episode, we can deduce that the obligation of Hakaras Hatov extends so far that it can paralyze someone from acting against a person who has been kind to them. This obligation remains even if the person who showed kindness is now mistreating them. Therefore, either Moshe was personally unable to carry out the task, or he understood that Hashem did not intend for him to be the one to execute the revenge.

This incident provides us with insights into how we should

feel when we are on the receiving end of kindness. Another perspective on the power of kindness can be found in Parshas Masei. The verse (33:13) mentions that Klal Yisrael encamped in Alush. The Medrash Rabbah explains that Alush was located in Midbar Sin. It further asks, why did Klal Yisrael merit to receive the Manna in the desert? The answer lies in the merit of Avraham, who instructed Sarah to "knead" dough and make cakes for their guests.

Avraham's meticulousness and attention to detail in performing acts of kindness generated an astounding level of merit. The addition of the word "knead" to his instructions for making cakes had a profound impact. Avraham was deeply concerned that the entire process be carried out properly for his guests. This seemingly small act earned Klal Yisrael the Manna, a miraculous sustenance in the desert. Rav Sadya Gaon even suggests that the constant provision of the Manna was the greatest miracle in the desert. The reward for Avraham's Chesed seems disproportionate to the action itself. This teaches us the significant value of every word, caring gesture, and attention to detail when performing acts of kindness. We often underestimate the tremendous rewards awaiting us and future generations due to these extra measures of Chesed.

Both the Medrash about Moshe's reluctance to take revenge and the story of Avraham's meticulousness in Chesed should prompt us to reconsider the depth of our appreciation for kindness, both in terms of Hakaras Hatov and the far-reaching effects of our acts of Chesed. It becomes evident that our obligation to express gratitude and the importance of our acts of kindness go beyond surface-level understanding.



Shir HaShirim Insights

In loving memory of Mr. Marvin Halpern

In next week's Haftorah, we encounter the Pasuk: "And when you lift up your hands, I will turn My eyes away from you; Though you pray at length, I do not hear. Your hands are filled with blood" (Yeshayah 1:15). Hashem informs us that when Klal Yisroel's hands are filled with blood, He does not simply ignore our prayers. Instead, He turns His eyes away from us, metaphorically speaking, so as not to see or hear us at all. But why can't He just ignore us?

We can possibly find an explanation in the following Pasuk from Shir HaShirim (6:5) with Rashi's commentary. Here, Hashem says to Klal Yisroel, "Turn your eyes away from me, for they have made me haughty." Rashi provides an analogy: "Like a young man whose betrothed is dear and pleasing to him, and her eyes are comely, and he says to her, 'Turn away your eyes from me, for when I see you, my heart becomes haughty and proud, and my spirit becomes arrogant, and I cannot resist.' The Holy One, Blessed Is He, said, 'In this Beis Hamikdash, it is impossible to restore to you the Ark, the Ark cover, and the cheruvim, which excessively endeared you to Me in the first Beis Hamikdash, to show you great affection, until you betrayed Me.'"

Hashem cannot simply ignore our pleas when we call out to Him because, as He tells us, "Turn away your eyes from me, for when I see you... I cannot resist." Instead, He must "turn His eyes away from us" because if He were to witness His beloved's hands lifted to Him in prayer, His love would overpower Him. Even though those very hands may be stained with blood, their hearts remain "dear and pleasing to Him, and their eyes (which reflect the true nature of the depth of their hearts) are comely." This demonstrates the extent of Hashem's burning love for His children, regardless of the depth of depravity they may have fallen into, and the opportunity that we have when we sincerely turn to Him in prayer.



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The Sefer HaChinuch teaches us that through the Mitzvah of Tefillah, Hashem has granted Klal Yisroel the ability to attain all their requests for good by asking Him directly. The power and means to fulfill their needs lie in His hands. As Hashem responds to those who call upon Him in truth, there is no obstacle or hindrance that can prevent Him from granting their desires.

However, one may question the claim that there are no impediments to Hashem granting our every desire. What about our sins? As Chazal (Sifri, cited in Rashi Devarim 32:18) state, many times when Hashem is about to bestow good upon us, we provoke Him to anger and weaken His power, making it seemingly impossible for Him to bless us. After all, Hashem has established certain rules by which He governs the world, and our transgressions can prevent Him from bestowing goodness upon us.

The Sefer HaMiddos reveals an incredible benefit of Tefillah that addresses this question. It states, "Great is the power of Tefillah, for whenever one davens with concentration to his Father in heaven, the Holy One, blessed be His name, accepts his prayer and forgives all his sins, as the Pasuk (Tehillim 5:5) says: 'For You are not a G-d who seeks wickedness.' The Sages also said, 'The Holy One, blessed be He, does not desire to punish His creatures, but rather desires that they pray to Him so that He may accept them.' Likewise, the Navi states (Daniel 9:19), 'O G-d, hear; O G-d, forgive.' Although we no longer have prophets, priests, sacrifices, the Temple, or the altar to atone for us, Tefillah remains available to us." Therefore, Daniel said, "Hashem, listen; Hashem, forgive!" And the Sages declared (Yalkut Shmuel 87), "Tefillah is even greater than the sacrifices of the Beis HaMikdash."

While it is true that when we provoke Hashem to anger, it may seem as if His power is weakened and He cannot bestow goodness upon us (as mentioned in the Sifri), this becomes irrelevant in the face of heartfelt prayer. In the presence of sincere prayer, we are promised that Hashem forgives all of our sins.