



Rabbi Yisroel Moshe Guttentag

Rabbinic Coordinator, KF Kosher; Federation Shailatext

The Author can be contacted at rabbi.guttentag@federation.org.uk



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CHESSSED - PARTNERING WITH HASHEM

Parshah

Avraham Avinu, whose inheritance to his descendants was to be the midda of chessed - loving kindness, certainly sought out each and every opportunity in his long lifetime to perform this mitzva. Yet it is not until he reaches beyond the 100 year milestone that the Torah makes direct mention of this activity.

Picking up on the unparalleled level of detail mentioned in the story of Avraham's Hachnosas Orchim, the Midrash explains that for each of the activities mentioned by the Possuk, Avraham was rewarded and that was in turn passed on to the Jewish people - his descendants. This story seems to have been so unique that it is the only direct mention of what we know to have been Avraham's life's mission.

So what makes this act of chessed stand out amongst all others? Was it his post-mila weakened state? Or was it that the recipients were heavenly Malochim, and not weary travellers?

The Sfas Emes offers an approach in which he maintains that the mitzva of chessed, performed by a freshly circumcised Avraham was an entirely different mitzva than those which preceded it.

The mila which Avraham had undergone had changed him entirely; it had injected true meaning into every righteous act he performed. Acts of kindness performed after his mila were different than they had been before, because now he was locked into a bris with Hashem. As a dedicated member of Hashem's service his mitzvos now had added potency.

But whereas the effects of mila may be self-explanatory with regards to Mitzvos which place emphasis on the relationship with Hashem, why was bris such an important component in the quality of a mitzva whose focus is the interhuman relationship?

The Sfas Emes adds a further layer of depth to his reasoning.

איזהו הוא חסיד המתחסד עם קונו. Chazal taught us that the term chosid is used to refer to someone who does acts of kindness with his Master. This teaching which is normally understood to mean that one is deemed a Chosid by choosing to go the extra mile in his relationship with Hashem, is taken by Sfas Emes as a reference instead to the way in which one interacts with his fellow human.

As believers we know that somewhere in Hashem's masterplan everyone receives what is due to them. The poor man WILL receive his bread; Hashem WILL channel it to him in some way or another. By choosing to get involved and to come to a fellow man's aid, one has opted to partner in the Heavenly chessed apparatus.

Referring back to the words of Chazal, Sfas Emmes explains that the term 'Chosid' is one who sees even in his inter human chessed

performance (המתחסד) an opportunity to interact with Hashem. Aware that he is not acting alone, the chosid gives due thought to the fact that he is on a Heavenly mission – עם קונו – with his Master.

It is when chessed is also a means of interacting with Hashem that the ultimate power of this mitzva is unlocked. Avraham, explains Sfas Emes, was capable of this only after he had locked himself into Hashem's service through a bris. Now able to function as an agent of Hashem, his every movement had become invested with the unique status of partner in Hashem's work.

When considering the possibility of playing a role in Hashem's goals, there is no area where this is more obviously relevant than that of teaching Torah.

Those active in this field must remain aware that we act as *shluchim*, small players in Hashem's great scheme to provide Torah and Halocho to all areas of the community.

Knowing that we are only agents ensures that we retain the correct perspective and also allows us to key in to the necessary *siyatta dishmaya*, as partners with Hashem.

May Hashem send continued *siyatta dishmaya* to all who engage in His mitzvos!

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2. In Parshas Vayeira it brings (end of Chapter 19) the episode of Lot and his two daughters and their children Moav and Amon. Which daughter acted better?