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בשבת



אור ישראל

Self Inspired

PARSHAS
CHAYEI SARAH

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN

DETERMINED DECENCY

Parshas Chayei Sarah begins with the loss of Sarah Imeinu, the first of our foremothers, and Avraham's partner in their life-mission of *chesed* for so many years. At the age of one hundred and twenty seven, Sarah Imeinu followed the path of all living creatures, and passed on to the Next World. In describing her life, the Torah is brief but full of depth. Rashi¹ explains that the one sentence devoted to the summary of her life is explained as follows — she was spiritually pure, physically angelic, and all of her years were good.

Reb Moshe Feinstein² points out a discrepancy between this description of Sarah's life, and what we actually know of her. Rashi stated that all of her years were good, but a quick perusal of the previous *parshiyos* will quickly show that there were some years that were better than others. Sarah was captured twice by enamored kings, had to contend with Hagar's marriage to Avraham, and perhaps above all, didn't have a child of her own until the age of ninety. It would be hard to fathom that one can consider all of these years, 'equally good.'

Reb Moshe clarifies that Rashi does not mean that all the years of Sarah were equally good to her, rather, Sarah was equally good in all of these years. That is, despite any challenges, difficulties, or troubles Sarah faced, she rose to the occasion, and treated guests and travelers the same way as if everything were going smoothly in her life. Though it would have been understandable, and perhaps even expected that one would be in a 'bad mood,' and at least not smile as broadly when they had a rough day, Sarah remained unaffected in her mission. And despite her personal concerns, every visitor was treated like a king.

The fact that, out of everything Sarah accomplished in her rich life, the Torah highlights this one aspect, points to the value of *chesed* done with a smile. Her crowning achievement, as per the Torah's description, is her ability to care for others in a most refined and beautiful way.

We, too, have many chances for *chesed* through our days and lives. We can choose to approach these occasions as chores, things that need to get done and be over with, or we can choose to approach these moments as opportunities, a time for us to truly shine.

1 Bereishis 23:1 s.v. שני חיי ויהיו חיי

2 Darash Moshe, *ibid.*

**Despite any
difficulties Sarah
faced, she rose
to the occasion...**

Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Sarah Imeinu is a difficult measuring stick for one to use to judge our own efforts in *chesed*. That being said, it is still important for us to bolster our 'chesed muscles' when we can, even when we might not feel like it. How can we do this?

In general, our attitude towards *chesed* may be, "Do I feel like it or not?" But how often do we think, "How can I make myself feel like it?"

If we don't 'feel like' helping another out at a particular time, we excuse ourselves and move on. But there is another option — motivating ourselves to truly want to help out another.

And how do we do that? One suggestion may be to focus on the mitzvah of loving all members of *Klal Yisrael*.¹ Focus on the greatness of every human being, and the great opportunity given to you at this moment, the ability to help out someone else!

When we take just a few moments to realize who we are dealing with, it can inspire us to share our time and smiles with those who can truly use it.

1 Chidushei HaLev, *Shemos*, pg 63

לזימן אבי מורי ר' צבי אלעזר בן ר' ישעיה עייה
ודודתי מרת חיה וויטא בת ר' יוסף עייה
מאת משפחת גרינוואלד

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**My friend, it is only my absolute
commitment to studying a bit of
Mussar every day that anchors me and
prevents me from spinning off into the
abyss.** - Excerpt from a letter written by
the Alter of Kelm, R' Simcha Zissel Ziv zt"l
to R' Itzele Blazer zt"l Kochvei Ohr pg. 196,
Alon Publishers

SEND YOUR BREAD UPON THE WATERS

Yoav Zilberstein's* hands shook as he read the letter he had just received. It was from the KGB, and he was 'asked' to come to the local office the next Thursday, as they had some questions they wanted to ask him. There was little doubt what that meant. Everyone knew that you were lucky if you were only sent to Siberia after an 'interview' — sometimes the KGB did away with someone in a way that their family and friends simply never heard from them.

There was also no doubt in Yoav's mind as to what the KGB wanted from him. His past twenty years were spent doing what he could to bolster the spirits of his fellow Jews, whether in physical or spiritual matters. Substantial sums of money passed through his hands to those who needed it most. He arranged for *mohelim* to perform *brissim*, secretly married couples according to *halachah*, and became a one-stop shop for everything Jewish. And now, all his accomplishments turned on him, as he contemplated how to tell his family the devastating news.

The dreaded day came. He had already instructed his wife and children what to do if he didn't return. With a heart full of fear, he entered the KGB office, wondering if he would see daylight again.

He was told to enter a small office, and waited for the interrogation to begin. Before long, a young man with a stern face walked in, sat down behind the desk, and stared at Yoav. Yoav looked down, not knowing what to do with himself. But after a few moments of silence, he looked up at the officer. To Yoav's astonishment, the officer's expression slowly softened, until he spoke up in a pleasant voice and asked, "Do you recognize me?"

"Not at all!"

"No? You don't recognize me? Well, I recognize you!"

The officer took a deep breath. "I want you to know, in this envelope in my hand, I have a list of every *bris* you arranged, every marriage you performed, every penny you gave to charity. The information in this envelope would put you away forever — and I believe it should, for your crimes against Mother Russia!

"However," continued the officer in a soft voice, so soft that it was hard to hear, "I cannot do that to you, because of the great good that you once did for me. When I was little, my family was left in terrible poverty after my father had died. I had ten siblings, and my mother simply could not care for all eleven of us. Through a friend, she was told of your kindhearted ways, and took me along to meet with you.

"I remember very clearly — it was a Friday, and she said that if you don't provide for us today, you will have twelve funerals come Sunday. Without hesitation, you took off your watch and handed it to her. My mother sold it, and we lived off of the proceeds for the next few months.

"I truly believe that you are guilty of terrible crimes against our country. But how can I harm you in any way? Leave this area, I will even help you leave Russia, and my debt will have been paid. Thank you."

**"Leave this area,
I will even help
you leave Russia,
and my debt will
have been paid."**

*Adapted from *Tiv Hischazkus - Chesed* by R' Gamliel Rabinowitz, pg. 446

DID YOU KNOW?

- People are not created to help themselves, rather, people are created to help others as best as they can.¹
- *Chesed* is not simply a 'nice thing.' It is an obligation, and is, in fact, one of the more serious obligations a person must observe.²

1 *Nefesh HaChaim*, Introduction by R' Yitzchok Volozhin (son of the author)

2 *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, 3:13

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