

Ahavat Chesed: Benefits of Chesed #3

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Beinish Ginsburg

In his book, *Ahavat Chesed*, the Chofetz Chaim writes that Torah and *chesed* are two of the most powerful *mitzvot* in the Torah. They atone for one's sins and can even replace *korbonot*. The Chofetz Chaim brings a fascinating Gemara in Shabbat which shows how the *aleph beit* hint to this concept. It happened once that a group of young children came to the *beit midrash* and told over *chiddushim* (Torah insights) developed from the *aleph beit*. They taught that *aleph* is spelled, *aleph, lamed, peh* which can be read as *yaluf*, to learn. *Beit* is *binah* which refers to learning Torah. *Gimmel* is *gimmel, mem, lamud*, which means *gomel* to perform acts of *chesed*. *Daled* is *dal* which hints to helping the poor. So we see that the *aleph beit* of life is learning Torah and doing *chesed*.

One can learn vital lessons from the shape of the letters too. The Gemara explains that the leg of the *gimmel* faces the *daled* to teach us that the one doing *chesed* should run after good deeds. The main body of the *daled* faces away from the *gimmel*, to teach us that the highest form of charity is giving anonymously.

A small part of the *daled* faces towards the *gimmel*, hinting that the poor person must do his *hishtadlut* and make himself available, so that those who want to help him can find him.

The Chofetz Chaim brings proof from the Gemara how performing acts of *chesed* can lengthen one's life. Hashem said, "I swear that the *bnei Eli* will never be forgiven, even with *korbonot*." Abaya taught, "With *korbonot* they won't be forgiven, but with Torah and *chesed* they will. The Gemara learns, even if there is a powerful decree set against someone, Torah and *chesed* can annul it. Abaya and Rava were descendants of *bnei Eli*. Rava lived 40 years and Abaya who was more involved in *chesed*, lived 60 years. When Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky was older he would give up hours of his time to help Klal Yisrael. He would say, "It's an investment. If others depend on me, Hashem will give me more years to help them." And in fact, Rav Yaakov lived well into his 90's.

We are meant to emulate Hashem's ways and

actions by helping others. The *mitzvah* of *chesed* is mentioned eight times in the Torah and its merit lasts forever as it says in Tehilim, "*V'chesed Hashem m'olam vad olam al yereiv.*" The Midrash tells how the souls of those involved in *chesed* will not sit in the shadow of spiritual beings but in the shadow of Hashem himself. The Torah considers one who is lacking in *chesed* an idol worshipper. He is called *bliyal*, without a yoke.

The Chofetz Chaim explains that people may neglect to do *chesed* out of ignorance. They simply don't know the halachot or the many details of when this *middah* applies. In addition, people may be unaware of the power of *chesed* and how strongly it can affect a person's judgment in the next world. In Parshat Noach, Rashi notes that just as a person leaves children as a physical remembrance, a person's good deeds are his spiritual legacy. Rav Moshe writes that we learn from this that just as a person loves his children he should love and desire to do good deeds.

Megilat Eicha: Perek 2: The Wrath of G-d

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The prophet Yirmiyahu refers to the Jewish people as *bat zion* because the attribute of femininity is to accept and build and that was our greatest failure. *Zion* means distinct or distinguished. We betrayed *Zion* by not actualizing our potential. We were held accountable for living with such spiritual grandeur and ignoring it. Therefore Hashem sent destruction and darkness. The *beit hamikdash* was called *hadom raglov*, the resting place of Hashem's feet. Hashem's feet is *midat hamalchut* (the attribute of kingship). The *beit hamikdash* was the medium through which His thought was translated to speech and deed.

The outpouring of joy and the celebrity song of the enemies sounded like our *hallel* on Yom tov. The world of spirituality can be grasped more through song than words, because

words are limited by the human mind and we can only see so much. All nations achieve whatever their *ruchniyut* drives them to, through song. The soul aspect of our songs which were already destroyed from within, was captured by the non-Jews so that their songs were heard in the *beit hamikdash*.

Hashem stretched the line and waited for us to repent. He didn't want to destroy us. But in the end all the lines were crossed and the borders fell. The city was captured and its great locks were broken. The king of the Jewish people and their rulers were seized by the nations and the Torah scholars were expelled and killed, leaving the people with no leadership. The forces of evil entice us to sin and then the only way to heal the damage is by peeling it away with the same force that caused us to sin. Suffering strips away the haughtiness, the layers of external consciousness, and the

desire for temporal things, until we're left with our core selves. Hashem swallowed and destroyed everything without mercy. Mercy enables us to stay as we are which is not possible past a certain point. Therefore Hashem's anger poured out like ceaseless fire. He acted as though He was an enemy and decimated the land of Israel destroying her palaces and fortified cities.

The period of the three weeks is meant to teach us that instead of creating a situation where our desire and arrogance must be forcibly torn from us, we must make a *cheshbon hanefesh* (spiritual accounting) and mourn what we have become. We must resolve to repent and rectify what was destroyed so that we can become whole and united once again.



Parshat Balak

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

Why did Hashem give the non-Jews a prophet like Bilaam? The commentators explain it was so that they wouldn't have an excuse to say, "If we would have a great prophet like Moshe we would've served Hashem." Yet Bilaam caused the people to be even more immoral than they had been. Amazingly Bilaam defined the essence of the Jewish people even more than the Jewish prophets who were wont to give rebuke. One of the first prayers a Jew says in the morning is *Mah tovu ohelecha*, the blessing Bilam gave the Jewish people.

What did Balak do to deserve that a parsha be named after him? Some opinions say it was the sacrifices that he sincerely offered to Hashem. Others say it was the merit of his illustrious descendants David and Ruth who were descendents of Moav. The elders of Moav advised Balak that Moshe's spiritual powers rested with his mouth. Therefore he planned to fight fire with fire and bring Bilaam to do battle with the Jewish people. While Balak feared the Jews, Bilaam hated them, seeing them as a competition for Hashem's favor.

On the way to curse the Jews, Hashem sent an angel to block Bilaam and his donkey. Rashi says it was an angel of mercy. Hashem

wants only our good. When things go wrong we think Hashem is working against us but in reality it is an angel of mercy that is impeding us and working towards our favor. Hashem opened the mouth of Bilaam's donkey and Bilaam lost the debate to him. The donkey ultimately died. Rashi says we learn from here a great principle of honoring others. Bilaam was a murderer and a criminal. And yet so that he not be shamed, the donkey was killed. How much more so should we go out of our way to be careful never to hurt a fellow Jew.

We can learn many lessons from the incident of Bilaam and his donkey. Many times Hashem sends us messages from heaven and we have to be attuned to it. A donkey talking and misbehaving was a clear sign from Hashem. He was saying, "Bilaam you want to go on this mission, you have the free will to do so. As the Gemara says, '*B'derech sh'adam rotzo leilech molichen oso*,' (In the way a person wants to go, he is led.) but don't forget that whatever I tell you, you will be compelled to say. So too in life there may be times when we only see the donkey and not the angel. We perceive the small things and fail to recognize the greater message. We have to open our eyes and try to ascertain what Hashem is really telling us.

Some commentators explain that the purpose

of the incident was to impress on Bilaam that human speech and that of a donkey are in the hands of Hashem. Bilaam was about to become the spokesman of the Almighty and define the essence of the Jewish people. He was so conceited that he needed a major shot of humility to represent Hashem. To lose a debate to a donkey is a rather humbling experience and Bilaam was meant not to forget that.

Bilam reached a level of prophecy only Moshe attained. He wanted to evoke the sin of the golden calf but he was unsuccessful. He was so impressed by the Jews modesty, how every tent was facing in another direction, that he proceeded to bless them. Hashem wanted the nations of the world to hear from their own prophet the greatness of the Jewish people so that they could learn from it. Bilaam likened the *avot* to rocks and the *imahot* to the hills. Our foundation and roots are our forefathers and the heritage they bequeathed us. Bilaam said, "They will not be reckoned among the nations." Rashi explains that when the final reckoning will be among the nations, Israel will not be included. Our purpose is to remain separate and distinct from the nations and to be a role model for them.