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PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Vayaira ✍️ Rabbi Dovid Rokach

Gifts that keep giving

In describing *Hashem's* great love for *Avraham Avinu*, the *pasuk* states:

"I love him because he commands his children and family after him to guard the way of Hashem to do charity and justice so that Hashem will bring upon Avraham everything He told him." (*Beraishis* 18:19)

Rashi explains that *Avraham* gave his children a specific reason to follow the way of *Hashem*—so that *Hashem* would fulfill His promises. But this appears contrary to the principle that *mitzvos* should not be performed for the purpose of obtaining a reward. (*Pirkei Avos* 1:3) Although such incentives are sometimes useful, why would anything less than an ideal transfer of the *mesorah* be identified as the basis of *Hashem's* love for *Avraham*?

The *Rambam* (*Hilchos Teshuva* 9:1) notes that the *Torah* often emphasizes how performing *mitzvos* leads to rewards in this world, even though obtaining these rewards is not our true goal. He explains that the rewards of peace and prosperity promised in the *Torah* are not intended merely for our personal enjoyment, but rather, as a means for allowing us to devote more time and attention to *avodas Hashem*. When a person keeps the *mitzvos*, *Hashem* provides rewards in this world that make it easier to reach even higher levels in *Torah* and *mitzvos*. However, if a person misuses these rewards to sin, they are retracted and the opportunity for further growth is lost.

Avraham Avinu understood that the blessings promised to him by *Hashem* were necessary for *klal yisrael* to realize its full potential. For example, when *klal yisrael* received *Eretz Yisrael* we were able to reach a level of *kedusha* and *avodas Hashem* that was not possible elsewhere. But when we sinned and were sent into *galus*, this unique opportunity was lost and cannot easily be reclaimed. Thus, *Avraham* was not commanding his children to do *mitzvos* for the purpose of obtaining rewards, he was providing the key for achieving *klal yisrael's* mission. By teaching his descendents to harness the blessings of this

world for growth in *Torah* and *mitzvos*, *Avraham* ensured that they had the tools for success in *avodas Hashem*, and as the *pasuk* states, merited *Hashem's* love.

This idea also helps explain the context of the above-quoted description of *Hashem's* love for *Avraham*. The *psukim* first mention *Hashem's* intention to tell *Avraham* about the impending destruction of *Sedom* and then go on to explain that *Hashem* loves *Avraham* because of the way he instructs his children. What is the connection between this particular characteristic of *Avraham* and the need to tell him about the destruction of *Sedom*?

The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 109a) states that the wickedness of *Sedom* resulted from an abuse of the wealth they enjoyed. Many of the cruel practices adopted by the residents of *Sedom* were designed to deter outsiders from visiting and sharing their prosperity. In contrast, *Avraham* overcame such temptations and recognized how prosperity can instead be utilized to grow in *avodas Hashem*. He was therefore uniquely suited to understand *Sedom's* problem and to advocate the possibility that its failings could be reversed through the influence of even a few righteous individuals.

Another example of this concept is the rule that one *mitzvah* leads to another. In *Parshas Ki Saitzai* (*Devarim* 22:8), *Rashi* explains that one who performs *mitzvos* will receive houses, fields, and animals for use in fulfilling *makeh*, *kilayim*, and *tzitzis* respectively. Our reward for *mitzvos* includes both personal benefit as well as an opportunity to do additional *mitzvos*. As the *pasuk* states:

"You should guard the words of this treaty and fulfill them so that you will succeed in everything you do." (*Devarim* 29:8)

May we be *zoche* to achieve the success envisioned for us by *Avraham Avinu* and to teach his *mesorah* to our children as well.

Rabbi Rokach learns daily at the kollel.

HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Bikur Cholim

Rabbi Hensch Plotnik

Chazal teach us of the importance of emulating the midos of Hashem- “Acharei Hashem Elokaychem Teley-chu”. This includes, amongst other things, the mitzvah of bikur cholim, visiting the sick. Hashem Himself came to “visit” Avrohom Avinu in Elonei Mamreh when he was recovering from his weakened state following the bris milah. This event serves as our model for the precious mitzvah of bikur cholim. In fact, the Shita Mekubetzes uses this example to prove that bikur cholim obligates someone of higher stature to visit a choleh of a lower stature. With this mitzvah, we do not apply the general rule of “zaken v’ayno l’fi k’vodo”. In fact, according to the Bahag and a number of others, bikur cholim is a genuine mitzvas aseh d’oraisa. However, the Rambam and Meiri maintain that it is a mitzvah d’rabbonon. Either way, the gemara promises incredible reward for the performance of this mitzvah. One is guaranteed protection from the yetzer hara and suffering, as well as having true friends in one’s life. Additionally, he will be upheld as an honorable person by everyone he comes in contact with.

The halachos of bikur cholim all revolve around maintaining the dignity and sensitivity of the choleh one is visiting. The Chochmas Odom mentions a beautiful custom the Chevra Kadisha Society of Berlin had instituted. Any member of the community who would not be at davening for three consecutive days would receive a visit and be encouraged to recite viduy (first confession). This was meant to assuage the fears of someone who was indeed seriously ill and would truly need to recite the viduy. Naturally such a patient would panic and feel his end is near, even if that was not necessarily so. However, by reminding him that he wasn’t in shul for three days and that they were merely following standard procedure, his fears would be somewhat calmed and he would not feel as if his demise was soon to come.

The Gemara warns against visiting a choleh who may be embarrassed due to the nature of his illness. In such a situation, the visitor should instead ask the choleh what his needs are, and above all, daven for his refuah. Davening is an integral component of the mitzvah as well. (See Haskomo of R’ Y.Y. Fisher to P’nei Boruch where he questions the assumed understanding of the poskim that lack of tefilla negates any ful-

fillment of the mitzvah. Rather, that particular component is lacking, but the mitzvah is fulfilled nonetheless).

The Poskim discuss if Bikur Cholim can be fulfilled over the telephone. Obviously, there is a definite advantage to a personal visit, as this takes away a percentage of the sickness, as well as giving the visitor the opportunity to smile at the choleh and cheer him up. However, according to the Igros Moshe, as long as the caller inquires into the choleh’s needs and davens for him, he has fulfilled the mitzvah of bikur cholim. Dayan Y.Y. Weiss Zt”l maintained that one go at least once to the choleh in person to get a real feel for his situation, and to see if consistent phone calls may actually increase the choleh’s burden (as is often the case)!

A very sensitive shailoh was brought to the Gedolei Haposkim which highlights the importance of treating the choleh with dignity. A prominent member of a community was injured in an accident and couldn’t recognize even his closest friends and family. Due to his injuries, he needed to be restrained in the hospital. The family was quite embarrassed for people to see the choleh in this state. On the other hand, there was reason to hope that if he saw familiar faces, he may regain his cognitive abilities. Should people attempt to visit him or not? Although the Gemara instructs us not to cause embarrassment to the choleh, perhaps this does not apply when he is unaware of his plight and it may actually be beneficial!

Rav Chaim Kanievsky Shlita suggested that visits would not be in place here. He brought proof from a Gemara in Bava Kamma that even in this unfortunate situation, one may not cause bizayon. The Gemara debates if one is liable to pay “boshes” (payment for embarrassment) if he embarrassed someone in his sleep who proceeded to die and never knew of the embarrassing event. This is due to the fact that even though the victim was oblivious, there was still public embarrassment on his account. (See Aleinu L’shabeach Shmos, Teshuva # 67 who quotes Rav Elyashiv Shlita as to the veracity of the proof from the Gemara).

Although we daven for the day when this mitzvah is not needed, let us see to fulfill it when the need arises in its proper and most dignified manner.

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