

# ***More Blessed to Give Rebbe Nachman on Charity***

**by Chaim Kramer**

## **Essay #14**

The portion of Torah read each Shabbat is called *PaRShah* (section, portion) because it is meant to be a *PeiRuSh* (commentary) on one's life. As Reb Noson explains, each person can draw understanding on how to go forward with life and live that week to the fullest, with the advice he gleans from the *parshah*. We are interested in learning about charity so let us examine Parshat VaEira.

This week's *parshah* begins with Avraham being weak from his circumcision. He is visited by none other than God Himself. This is *bikur cholim* (visiting the sick) which is one form of the mitzvah of *gemilat chessed*, doing charitable acts. This, together with the hospitality that Avraham showed his human-looking angelic guests, teaches us the importance of performing charitable deeds. Such deeds are so valuable that God Himself might visit the person who performed them!

God willing, in future essays we will discuss the mitzvah of *gemilat chessed* and its various forms, such as visiting the sick, burying the dead, matchmaking, helping a friend carry a heavy load or the like. Even diapering a baby is *gemilat chessed*. An additional level of *chessed* (lovingkindness) - as one of our readers pointed out in an email - is to help others spiritually, emotionally or psychologically. This includes even just being there to listen to another or just making one's presence known, as if to say, "I'm available for you if you need it." Such help is also in the realm of *gemilat chessed*.

Also in Parshat VaEira we find the incredible story of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, those whose wickedness knew no parallel, as detailed in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 109) and Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 50-51). Yet, despite their inhospitable, uncharitable, inhuman behavior, we find Avraham, charity personified, approaching God in prayer to forgive their sins. After sending the angels to destroy those cities, God says about Avraham, "For I know him, that he will command his children and household after him, to guard God's way, to do charitable and righteous acts..." (*Genesis* 18:19). Immediately afterwards, Scripture tells us of Avraham's beseeching God to overlook the iniquities of Sodom and Gomorrah. What more charitable act is there than to forgive the sinner?

Still, we have to ask ourselves, "Is compassion for the sinner the optimum pathway?" How many thieves, rapists and murderers are released from prison only to commit the same crimes again and again? Aren't innocent people deserving of peace of mind and protection from those despicable creatures? *Should* the evil of Sodom and Gomorrah be overlooked and forgiven? Is that the way a kind and charitable person should act? In fact, didn't Avraham himself pursue and kill his enemies, the four kings, when they kidnapped his nephew Lot (*Genesis* 14)? Why didn't he show them compassion? Furthermore, wasn't it Avraham himself who took the slaughter knife to his own son during the Binding of Yitzchak (Isaac). Didn't Yitzchak deserve compassion?

Before Rosh Hashanah ([Essay #9](#)), we mentioned a short lesson from Rebbe Nachman about the power of charity to protect a person from sin. With the above questions in mind, we can take a deeper look into

that lesson and better understand the viewpoint of Avraham when he asks God to spare those awful sinners, as well as shed some light on the Binding of Yitzchak. Rebbe Nachman taught:

One who gives charity is spared from sinning. This is because "whoever shows compassion for God's creations, is himself shown compassion from Heaven." Yet, when one lacks *daat* (awareness), it is forbidden to show him compassion [for that compassion is wasted on the fool - e.g., giving drugs to an addict].

Thus, when one gives charity he displays compassion. "Whoever has compassion, Heaven must show him compassion. Therefore, it must be that the person is given *daat*, so that he will not be a fool. He is thereby spared from committing a sin. "For a man does not sin unless a spirit of folly has entered him." But when he has *daat*, he is spared from sinning. Amen, so may it be His will (*Likutey Moharan* I, Lesson #116).

If we carefully follow the prayer of Avraham, we find him praying for the righteous man in Sodom. Fifty righteous tzaddikim. Forty-five. Forty. Thirty, twenty, even ten tzaddikim. Any tzaddik, even one! (Although this is not specified in the Bible, this seems to be the case because we find that Lot, who was not a tzaddik, was saved, along with his two unmarried daughters.) What was Avraham's prayer then? When Lot moved there, Avraham was quite aware of the sinful nature of Sodom and its surrounding environs (see Genesis 13:1-14 and Rashi). Still, Avraham tried to find a way to have them repent from their evil. This can be accomplished by engaging in the mitzvah of charity.

As the Rebbe taught, by giving charity, one is "spared from sinning." The person who shows compassion is showered from Above with compassion, with *daat*. By attaining *daat* one is spared from sin. Avraham's intent in his prayers to God was to invoke God's compassion upon them so that they would attain *daat*, knowledge of God (which is the purpose of the entire Creation; see [Essays 10-13](#)). By attaining that *daat*, one can be spared from sinning. The wicked person will not return to his previous ways. Rather, he will be filled with knowledge of God and thus spared, from that time on, from sinning. That was Avraham's intention. "If You find in Sodom fifty tzaddikim...forty...twenty...will You destroy the righteous along with the wicked. Will You not spare the others...?" For when one attains *daat*, he is spared from sin.

Why didn't Avraham's prayer work? The one candidate who could have effected forgiveness and enlightenment for the people was Lot. Though Lot was initially a disciple of his uncle Avraham, he chose to adopt a more Sodom-like lifestyle. Nonetheless, the lessons he learned from his uncle saved him. He was the only person in Sodom who was hospitable. It was he took in the angels. He was the only one who dared to engage in charitable acts. Imagine then! Here we have a city (actually five) that was so wicked that its punishment was to be overturned with no survivors. Yet, there was one survivor, Lot, who performed a charitable act.

Such is the power of charity! It can save a person from death (*Proverbs* 10:2; *ibid.* 1:4). It saved Lot from certain death. Yet, that is not the full extent of charity's power. It can save a person from sin, from foolishness, from his own folly. It can open and expand a person's mind, for it can help bring the person to the level of *daat*.

This was also the idea behind the Binding of Yitzchak. The purpose of the entire Creation is to come to recognize and know God. There is no greater kindness and compassion that to get a person to a level of awareness of God that his entire being would be subsumed in God. The command to Avraham to

sacrifice Yitzchak was an act of the ultimate sacrifice for God, the ultimate level of recognition of God, even under adverse circumstances. It was a level of *daat* of God hitherto concealed from Avraham. He had to take the step to recognize it as a deep compassion and love that exists in the inner recesses of the person, even when it seems cruel. Such is the concept of disciplining a child. Such is God's compassion when a person suffers. The suffering of a punishment is not to be viewed as vengeful torture, but as a call to recognize the Source of the suffering. It is the ultimate compassion.

Still, we have the power to invoke that compassion in a manner that we can understand and appreciate. We need not receive God's compassion as suffering. We must pray to God and act charitably towards others, for even the worst of sinners can be spared from death if they perform charity. Lot was spared by invoking God's kindness and compassion through hospitality. Mikhah was also spared. Who was Mikhah? He was the first to establish idolatry in the Land of Israel after the Jews conquered it. The Talmud relates that the smoke from his altar of idolatry mixed with the smoke from the altar of the Sanctuary in Shiloh. Why was he spared? - because he was hospitable. "God said, Leave him be. His bread is available to the wayfarer" (*Judges* 17-18; *Sanhedrin* 103b).

A "lot" can be learned from Lot and others who are wicked too. They can be hospitable and be spared many a suffering. This, in fact, accounts for the fact that we find many wicked people who have success and good health in this world. They did some good and charitable acts and deserve a reward. Unfortunately, they receive that reward in a temporary world. If the rewards for charity are so great in this finite world, imagine how much greater the eternal reward for even a single good deed, for many good deeds!

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