

# THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING!

by Rabbi Label Lam

*And he said, "Whose daughter are you? Pray tell me. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah whom she bore to Nahor." And she said to him, "Even straw and feed is plentiful with us as well as a place to lodge." (Breishis 2:23-25)*

I am the daughter of Bethuel...She answered the first question first and the second question second! (Rashi)

Even after Rivka had had shattered all records and standards for kindly performances, providing water for Eliezer, his attendees and ten camels as well, she still needed to pass an oral exam. The two questions were asked as a sort of test to see if she answers the questions in order, which she did indeed. Why was it necessary to administer an intelligence test? What is the great advantage of answering the questions in the order of appearance?

The Peshiska Rebbe, otherwise known as the Yid HaKodesh said that a Jew needs three things to be complete. 1) He should be clever. 2) He should be kindly. 3) He should be religiously devoted. He went on to explain that each one of the three attributes alone, without the counter force of the others could potentially produce more harm than good.

He said, "One who is only clever, is inclined to be a thief." Left to its own devices, brilliance and intelligence does not necessarily lead one to a decent and wholesome result. The human mind is a tool or a weapon, which if harnessed for selfish interests alone, can serve to perpetrate subtle and overt crimes justifying them all the while.

It's clear from the writings of some of the world's most notorious criminals and infamous evil doers that they felt they were doing some extra favor for mankind, and their only regret was either not finishing the job or not articulating the cause well enough. The Nazi war machine was not lacking for unlettered men. Unjust genius may tap reservoirs of artistic expression or technical mastery but it might also unleash a talent for totalitarianism as well.

"The one who is only kindly", the Rebbe said, "is at risk of becoming self-indulgent." All too often the one who has the keys to the kitchen likes to serve others and more than occasionally taste test as well. Every once and a while it can be observed that the hungriest one is the one who wants to help serve the food and make the many trips into the kitchen. It doesn't have to be that way, but a drive for kindness may be an excuse or an opening for a burgeoning appetite.

Without boundaries and discipline and just a general motto of, "All you need is love!" one can start out loving his neighbor and eventually his neighbor's wife. Misapplied and misappropriated mercy and kindness can be as destructive ultimately as any campaign of hate. Love is not all that's needed.

Lastly, the Rebbe commented, "A devoted religionist runs a risk of being merely a monk-like ascetic." To a person with a hammer every problem is a nail. If moral discipline is the only tool available then "no" is always the only option. Pleasures are perceived as assailants and the mind as a mortal enemy. Retreat from temptation becomes the best defense and life and love remain unengaged and unfulfilled.

Therefore, the Rebbe said that in order to be wholesome and complete a person needs to encourage all three aspects of his personality simultaneously. 1) Develop the mind and sharpen the processes of thought through learning. 2) Promote a passion to help and do acts of loving kindness for others. 3) Remain obedient to conscience and law and gain the moral muscle necessary to avoid yielding to unproductive and capricious desires.

By answering the second question secondly, Rivka demonstrated that her actions were not an outburst of unchecked youthful emotion. The impulsive type is more likely to respond to the last question first in spontaneous response to the most recent entry into the mental registry. The thoughtful and disciplined approach to tapping the wellsprings of human kindness displayed by Rivka made her worthy to be a mother of a great and holy nation and it is also the secret of the gift that keeps on giving.

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