

MAKING IT PERFECT

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Over the course of the first 1500 years of world history, human and animal life on earth had degraded to the extent G-d determined that the only hope was to destroy virtually all life on the planet and start again. "The earth had become corrupt before G-d and the earth had become filled with snatching," (Beraishis/Genesis 6,11, per Targum Onkelos) indicating a complete societal breakdown that mandated their destruction, with a select few reestablishing life on earth. But a perusal of the Torah reveals that G-d has many means at His disposal; much death and destruction would later come upon Egypt with the ten plagues, and the Children of Israel were spared from every one of them. What is the significance of the salvation of the human and animal kingdoms with the ark?

Michtav Me'Eliyahu (collected writings and discourses of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1891-1954) of London and B'nai Brak, one of the outstanding personalities and thinkers of the Mussar movement) elucidates that if brazen grabbing was the world's death sentence, creation could only be saved by the diametric opposite: rampant kindness.

Noah and his family - a mere crew of eight - spent virtually every hour of every day for over a year tending to the needs of tens of thousands of animals, each and every one according to its own schedule and diet. This unparalleled selfless benevolence was the spiritual lifeblood of the ark. And if but once in the hundreds of thousands of feedings and cleanups, Noah would be tardy, the results could be devastating. Indeed, the lion lashed out when Noah was once late, rendering him maimed for life. In as much as the physical world is simply a reflection of the higher spiritual realm (see Kol HaKollel, Simchas Torah 5763), for someone who maintains a passionate connection to chesed (acts of loving kindness), such a lapse indicates a defect in his trait of chesed. The physical impairment is merely a manifestation of the spiritual deficiency. The entire existence of the ark was miraculous, from the ability to fit so many creatures onto such a small vessel, to the ability of this craft to survive the awesome, destructive forces of "nature" exhibited during the flood. This chesed was their lifesaver.

Rabbi Dessler further explains that there are two understandings to our Sages' statement "Olam chesed yibaneh" ("A world is created by chesed"). First, that the purpose of creation that humans are able to fathom is that G-d "wanted" to do chesed for his creations and allow them to benefit from His presence. Second, that every moment of our existence benefits from G-d's boundless, limitless gifts. His entire relationship with us is one of giving. How should we respond? If we dedicate ourselves

only to taking His gifts, we become self-absorbed and our spiritual senses are dulled to the extent we lose all appreciation of G-d's grace, contrary to the stated goal of G-d's chesed to draw us closer. Someone dedicated to taking looks askance at the sincere giver, wondering what he expects in return. Only someone invested in giving can appreciate how G-d is the ultimate giver. Therefore, the way we meet our objective of appreciating G-d's presence in our world is to emulate Him and strengthen our own ability to give. Furthermore, the person of chesed leads a happier existence in this world, because he appreciates that all that he has are free gifts given in love. The proverbial cup is not just half full, it is overflowing!

Finally, concludes Michtav Me'Eliyahu, appreciation of giving brings wholeness and purpose to creation, for it eliminates division caused by self-centeredness as the Divine gifts accomplish their mission.

Many view chesed as an opportunity to do for others, something that gives us a warm feeling inside. It IS very important to feel positively about the mitzvos (Divine commandments) we fulfill. But, like the mitzvos between man and G-d (like reciting the Shema, observing Shabbos and keeping Kosher), mitzvos between one person and his friend (such as chesed) are ALSO Divine opportunities to increase our "G-d consciousness". We do not do chesed because WE want to be nice; we do chesed because G-d relates to us completely with chesed and we want to emulate His ways. It is our chance to augment the Divine plan to bring perfection to the world. And that is something to feel MOST positive about.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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