

## **Kindness with Wisdom**

**Rabbi Maury Grebenau**

Any person who has been in the position of needing Chessed from others is very aware of a painfully familiar situation. Many well intentioned people seem unsure of how to help and end up either not really helping or even making the situation worse. We have all witnessed the person who makes inappropriate remarks at a shiva call or in shul to a person who has recently lost someone. The same situation presents itself when we wish to engage in bikkur cholim or a host of other chessed opportunities. I recently had the opportunity to hear from a person who lost his wife at a young age. He spoke about people who, in the aftermath, truly wanted to help but really didn't know how to go about offering their help. Truly caring members of his community who wished to reach out and yet would make very general offers of help which he felt uncomfortable pursuing. A person who engages in Chessed needs to use their head as well as their heart.

The Beis HaLevi finds this important idea in Eliezer's test of Rivka. The test seems a simple measure of Chessed but when we look deeper we find a good deal of sophistication. Water could only be drawn from the well in the large jug which Rivka was holding. Eliezer planned to ask the potential bride for a drink from the jug, not to see if she would give him a drink, but to see what she would do after he had drank from the jug. To bring the left over water back home to her family would be foolish since Eliezer was a stranger and sharing water that he drank from would not be sanitary. On the other hand she could not very well pour the rest of the water out in front of him since that would be insulting. How could she make sure her Chessed was well received and still bring clean water back to her family? Rivka reacted with intelligence, quick thinking, and respect. She offered to water the camels thus disposing of the rest of the water in a way that would not insult Eliezer. Moreover, she proceeded to demonstrate unparalleled consideration by drawing more water so the camels could finish drinking. Rivka, one of our paradigms of Chessed, was able to perform her act of Chessed to the utmost by using her head.

What is it that separates Chessed done with wisdom from Chessed which may fall flat? I believe that the starting point is to move outside of our comfort zone. Many times we are more concerned with our own comfort than with the needs of the person we are trying to help. Rivka was able to step outside of her own needs and consider what action would be most considerate for Eliezer. She went to extra trouble to make sure that she helped Eliezer and continued to treat him with respect. Her actions were carefully calibrated to Eliezer's needs at the expense of her own time and comfort.

Making a shiva visit or visiting a sick person may not be a comfortable experience, especially if we feel that we don't know what to say. If we focus on the person we are visiting and their needs, instead of our own feelings, we will be on the road to Chessed with wisdom. Chessed requires us to step outside of our world and our own needs for a moment. If our Chessed

is to really lift the spirits of the recipient we must learn a lesson from Rivka and color our helpful gestures with the wisdom that they require.