

## Chessed & Derech Eretz (*Ki Tetze*)

Among the various stories and laws recorded in *Parshat Ki Tetze* is a description of how *Bnei Yisrael's* treatment by the nations of Amon & Moav:

*'An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of Hashem; even to the tenth generation none belonging to them shall enter into the assembly of Hashem forever, because they didn't meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came forth out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Bilam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you' (Devarim 23:4-5).*

According to the Ramban, the structure of these verses is intentional so as to teach us that it was the Ammonites who did not provide *Bnei Yisrael* with bread and water, while it was the Moabites who demonstrated their ill-will by hiring Bilam to curse *Bnei Yisrael*.

However, this then raises a question: *Bnei Yisrael* received their daily portion of heavenly manna in the merit of Moshe, while they drank from the miraculous well which accompanied them in the merit of Miriam. Given this fact, why did it matter to them that the Ammonites did not provide them with bread and water? They already had food and water?!

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 34:8) answers this question and while doing so provides us with a remarkable lesson about *derech erez* (common courtesy):

'Rabbi Simon in the name of Rabbi Elazar said: "Who was it that did not perform *chessed* (kindness) for those who were not in need of *chessed*? The Ammonites and Moabites towards *Bnei Yisrael*, as it is written: "because they didn't meet you with bread and with water" (Devarim 23:5). But did *Bnei Yisrael* need additional bread and water? Is it not so that during all those forty years that *Bnei Yisrael* were in the wilderness that the manna fell for them, the water arose for them, the quail was provided for them, the clouds of glory surrounded them, and the pillar of cloud traveled before them? Rather, it is *derech erez* that one greets travelers with food and drink. And how did the Holy One blessed be He repay them as a result? "An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of Hashem" (ibid. 23:4). From here we can infer an a fortiori (*kal vachomer*). If God punished those who did not perform *chessed* for those who were not in need of *chessed*, then someone who does not perform *chessed* for one who is in need of *chessed*, all the more so [that God will punish them]."

Clearly this teaching provides us with a powerful *mussar* lesson regarding how we must show *derech erez* both to those not in need of *chessed*, and especially towards those in need of *chessed*. In fact, the Midrash then proceeds to explain that we learn from Avraham (who performed *chessed* by giving food to the angels even though they did not need food – see *Bereishit* 18:8), and from Boaz (who performed *chessed* by

giving food to Ruth who was in need of food - see Ruth 2:14) how the performance of *chesed* brings rewards & blessing to those who do so.

With this in mind, and as we near towards Rosh Hashanah, now is the opportune time not only for us to upgrade our general behaviour to ensure that we act with *derech eretz*, but also to look around our local communities while asking ourselves what acts of *chesed* can we perform - especially for those in need.

*Shabbat Shalom!*