

## A hidden treasure, key included

I started, or attempted to start this article on Shiva Asar Bitamuz sitting in my yard and finished it a week later sitting in a hospital room. I know that we are supposed to internalize the meaning of the Three Weeks and I when I started this I was hoping to share some theoretical insights regarding our religious and psychological state of mind. We have all heard that the way to combat the effects of Sinas Chinaam, the baseless hatred that led to the destruction of the Bais Hamikdosh, is through Ahavas Chinam, what I would call overall niceness. As I look around I realize that the simplest message to send out is this, we all have the capacity to be nice in some way. Seriously, look around and see the kindness of others around you. Never be satisfied to say “oh, that is a wonderful display of behavior but that’s not me and I can’t do that”. Approach every situation with the thought that you can rise to the occasion and, when you do, allow yourself to feel good. Realize that it is because of people like you that these days will turn “Me’evel Lisimcha”, from mourning to joy!

I heard about an inspiring incident that happened on Motzoei Shabbos and I am proud to say that the main character in the story is . . . my husband! My husband will be the first to tell you that he is not always so patient but really triumphed. After Maariv on Motzoei Shabbos my husband went to pull the car out of the Shul parking lot only to discover that he was blocked in. There was a simcha in the Shul and the guests were still loitering around in the Simcha room waiting to make Havdala. Some of us would have sat in our cars muttering while perhaps not having such simchadik thoughts about the Baalei Simcha. Some would have gone into the room and announced, nay demanded, to have their car unblocked even though Havdala had not been made. (After all, the men would have already said Ata Chonantonu and so Melacha was already allowed.) My husband stood there and waited until Havdala had been made. He then made the announcement about the blocked car. It wasn’t just a matter of patience, it was the consideration that he had for others in the realization that interrupting their pre-havdala time could have been distressing. It occurred to me that therein lies the message of Shiva Asar Bitamuz and the three weeks in general.

At one point, when I lived in Queens, my car was out of commission for a month or two due to complications. I had a neighbor who offered to lend me her car to do every carpool that I had to do for the entire two months. This wasn’t an extra car that she did not need, it was her van, that she used on a daily basis. Her offering to lend it to me meant anticipating my needs and inconveniencing herself at the same time. It was not an empty offer, either and, in fact, I did use her car for the duration. Here is another great example of kindness: One day I was in Amazing Savings and there was a woman there looking to buy party supplies. Another woman, a stranger, approached the shopper and immediately offered to lend her some silk flowers that she had at home to enhance the simchah. This was not a matter of being asked, this was not even a matter of knowing your friend’s needs and responding with an open heart, this was not even a matter of acting to avoid guilt because no one around, certainly not the Baalas Simcha, would have known that this woman had silk flowers at home. This was a totally unsolicited act of reaching out to another Jew.

Sometimes when we do these things we say to ourselves or to others who comment on them, “It’s no big thing”. The reality is that these acts are BIG things. We shouldn’t become braggarts but

each of these actions, when seen or told over to others, have a positive impact on how people feel about Jewish mankind in general, how people feel about one another as individuals and how we each feel about ourselves. This enhanced sense of self then has a positive impact on our behavior and the cycle continues. Rabbi Levitan taught in one of his shiurim that while we want to teach our children humility, we should not be humble about the acts of kindness that we perpetrate. We should share these with our kids so that they develop pride in us and develop the proper sensitivity towards others needed to master Chesed.

Just wait until you hear the next story. I run a costume gemach (no, that's not the punchline) and am always looking for clothing racks. A friend (I could write a whole article just on this friend's chesed) suggested that I try a particular store that was going out of business. When I approached the store it looked empty and dark until I noticed a man sitting in the window. When I asked about racks he brought me to a large room FILLED with clothing racks and said, take whatever you want! Imagine that! I then asked him if I could advertise the racks to other people/Gemachs that might need them and he said that if I take responsibility to show people where they are then he'd give them away! I figured that using this column is a great way to get the message out. (The racks have four arms each pointing in a different direction. Just call me if you need them.)

I know that you're all wondering what I am doing in the hospital. Well, the hero in paragraph two, ended up in the hospital for dehydration. I had hoped to celebrate his birthday with a BBQ for the family but, instead will have to celebrate by honoring him for his chesed and wishing him Refuah Shelaimah. B"H his recovery is steady. The hospital is, of course, another place to witness amazing chesed. Food from Chesed 24/7 as well as food and visitors from Bikur Cholim are very welcome and really make you feel like you are part of a greater picture called Klal Yisroel. These are the Chasadim Geluim, the openly recognized acts of charity. There are so many other opportunities to do chesed here. I noticed when I just smiled at any of the numerous people lying on stretchers and said "feel better", it had an effect. The aid who came in to my husband's room with a smile as he introduced himself, had an effect on our mood. I returned the chesed in kind by telling his trainee how appreciated this small gesture is. Kindness, no matter how seemingly small, really is the key to our own happiness and with it, we can open the doors to the happiness of everyone around us.

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This article appeared in "The Front Magazine" on 7/18/2012.

