



Carnegie Shul Chatter

October 25, 2018



Candlelighting 6:07pm

Shabbat Services 9:20am

Take it from Abraham

Abraham was truly an amazing man. His father was an idol maker, yet Abraham rejected idols and put his faith in the one true God, founding the world's first monotheistic religion.

But Abraham was more than just a man who had discovered God. He was a good man, a man who truly cared for others, whose *chesed* should be a lesson for all of us.

Sadly, we live in a world where idol worshippers seem to abound.

The idols may not be carved from wood, as Abraham's father carved his idols, but may appear in the form of shiny new cars, dollars in a savings account, sports heroes, or entertainers.

It always amazes me that, when elections come around, entertainers are featured in ads endorsing a candidate. Why should I vote for someone just because his/her advocate can act or sing?

Why should I buy a car because a guy who knows how to throw a football tells me to?

Idol worshipping, regardless of what form it takes is never the right way to go.

Take it from Abraham. And this week try to put a little *chesed* in your life.

Loving Kindness: We Come by it Naturally

The South Hills Jewish Community Center recently established a Center for Loving Kindness and Civic Engagement. But what exactly is loving kindness from a Jewish, Torah, perspective?

In this week's parshah, Vayeira, God appears to Abraham just days after Abraham has circumcised himself as part of his covenant with God. It is here that the Jewish concept of *chesed* can be well explained, as it is in this lesson from aish.com:

"And God appeared unto him" are the opening words of Parashas Vayeira. Interestingly enough, although in context it is clear that God appeared to Abraham, the Torah does not explicitly name him. The last verse in Parashas Lech Lecha indicates that Abraham had just circumcised himself and the members of his household, so we know that Hashem came to visit him during his recuperation. Some commentators wonder why the text omits the Patriarch's name. Why does he remain anonymous? Surely, his many merits rendered him worthy of the Divine visitation.



There is a profound teaching behind this omission. The true greatness of Abraham (whose name means "father of all nations") could be found not only in his incredible *chesed*, loving kindness, his all-encompassing faith in God, his ability to sacrifice ... but also in his genuine humility. "Behold, I am but dust and ashes," he proclaimed. He totally negated himself, divested himself of his ego, and became a complete spiritual being. It was this humility that enabled him to connect with God.

All of us who would strive to have a relationship with the Almighty should attempt to emulate Abraham's example. For our generation, this should not be too difficult, for if anyone should realize how fragile life is how, in an instant, all our possessions can be wiped out and our very lives forfeit it is we. On a universal as well as on a personal level, we live with uncertainty. It seems that no place is secure. Terrorism, economic instability, and fear of illness loom over us like sinister shadows. Certainly we can all echo the words of the Patriarch: "I am but dust and ashes" Our only hope is to return to God and proclaim with the psalmist, "I raise my eyes upon the mountains, whence will come my help? My help is from Hashem.

Chesed – Loving Kindness

Our Sages teach that certain traits distinguish us and indicate that we are descendants of the Patriarch Abraham. One of those traits is *chesed*. In addition to *chesed*, yet another trait is associated with lovingkindness: *rachamim* (compassion). But there is no redundancy in Hebrew; thus, each of these terms has its own distinct component of loving kindness, which we will discover in this *parashah*.

The *parashah* opens with Abraham, at the age of 99, recovering from his circumcision. For any adult to undergo such a procedure is no simple matter, but for a man of 99 it is a painful ordeal. This narrative takes place on the third day following the *bris*, which we know is the most difficult. Yet Abraham sat in the doorway of his tent, looking for guests so that he could perform the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim* (hospitality). Therefore, Hashem compassionately caused the sun to shine in its full intensity to deter travelers so that Abraham should not be disturbed by wayfarers.

But Abraham's heart was bursting with *chesed*. He had a need to give, and he suffered more at the thought of not being able to welcome guests than from the physical pain of his circumcision. He anxiously sat at the threshold of his tent, searching for passersby to invite into his home. When the Almighty saw Abraham's yearning to reach out, to be of service to others, He sent him three angels in the guise of nomads. Although ailing, Abraham was so overjoyed to see them that he actually ran to greet them, offered them hospitality, and prepared a lavish meal for them.

Herein is to be found the difference between the traits of *chesed* and *rachamim*. The word *rachamim* is derived from the word *rechem*, which means "womb." Even as a mother has compassion on the child growing within her, so, too, the individual with *rachmanus* has his/her compassion aroused by a certain need. But *chesed*



operates independent of need. It throbs in the heart and demands expression. The *baal chesed*, he who personifies *chesed*, desires to give because that is his *raison d'etre*. Doing so lends meaning to his life; that is the spiritual gene that our forefather Abraham transmitted to us: the desire to give, to make the world a better place by extending a helping hand.

From whom did our forefather Abraham learn this? From the Almighty Himself. It was on pillars of *chesed* that God built this world. Prior to the Creation, there was no life in need of God's compassion, but it is God's "desire," so to speak, to do *chesed*. Therefore He created the world in order to dispense His loving kindness. We have a mandate to emulate the Almighty God: to live our lives in such a way that we become *gomlei chasadim*, men and women who impart loving kindness to others.



Please consider sponsoring a Kiddush in honor or in memory of a loved one, for only \$36. Your sponsorship will be announced from the bimah and in the weekly Chatter. To sponsor a Kiddush, email mrmike7777@yahoo.com.

Yahrzeit Plaques

Commemorate a loved one by dedicating a yahrzeit plaque in his or her memory at the Carnegie Shul. These beautiful plaques, mounted on the sanctuary walls, are lit on the loved one's yahrzeit, Yom Kippur, and days when Yizkor is recited. The names are also read aloud from the Bimah during services on the Sabbath of the yahrzeit and on Yom Kippur. To purchase a plaque, for only \$175, please email Mike Roteman at mrmike7777@yahoo.com.