



Alone in the Streets of Jerusalem
Parshas Chayei Sarah

She was fondly known throughout Jerusalem, as “Libah the Collector” for her charitable deeds she performed to help the needy of the city; collecting and dispersing food and clothing to the impoverished.

Nothing deterred her, not the weather or any other obstacles, and her door was always open to everyone.

One day in 1948, bullets were flying through the air. No one left their home, except Libah the Collector. Her daughter, my mother, pleaded with her to stay. She was steadfast; “You can’t lose from doing charity,” she said.

This saying of hers was well known. My grandmother, Libah Feiga Gutfarb, undertook several charitable endeavors and touched lives in several spheres. One of her projects was preparing *Tzizis*, the four-fringed ritual garment, for those who could not afford it.

She would hold the fringes, kiss them and say: “He who observes the commandments will know no harm.” She would deliver the garments herself to each family, bullets and bomb shells notwithstanding.

In our weekly parsha we read of the first act of match-making. Avraham orders his slave Eliezer to find his son Yitzchak a wife. “And Avraham was old, advanced in days, and the Lord had blessed Avraham with everything. And Avraham said to **his servant, the elder of his house, who ruled over all that was his**, ‘Please place your hand under my thigh. And I will have you swear by the Lord, the G-d of the heaven and the G-d of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose midst I dwell.’”¹

Several commentators questioned the long list of titles Eliezer is described by in the verse. Why not just call him Avraham’s servant?

Furthermore – “And he [Eliezer] said, ‘O Lord, the G-d of my master Avraham, please cause to happen to me today, and perform loving kindness with my master, Avraham. Behold, I am standing by the water fountain, and the daughters of the people of the city are coming out to draw water. And it will be, [that] the maiden to whom I will say, ‘Lower your pitcher and I will drink,’ and she will say, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels,’ her have You designated for Your servant, for Yitzchak, and through her may I know that You have performed loving kindness with my master.”² What is the meaning of this sign?

The lesson learned here is that charity is not only of significance when no one else can help someone in need, but also when the person is seemingly not in need and you help them just the same.

Eliezer stands at the well and has no problem drawing water for himself, but he seeks help anyhow. An ordinary person would respond to his request for help, by telling him to do it himself, but Rivkah went and helped him.

Eliezer learns the significance of this act of kindness from Avraham. Avraham has everything, and yet the closest person to him is his slave Eliezer who has control over everything.

When Avraham sends him on the match-making mission he has him swear, showing him the extraordinary circumstances of this undertaking, even though he is the man of many titles.

The mission entails the next generations of the Jewish People, and therefore a mistake is not an option, and should be executed in Avraham’s way.

What is Avraham’s unique way? That of unconditioned charity. In last week’s parsha, Avraham hosted guests in his home even though he was sick, and was already an elderly man, and the day was hot.

However, Avraham does not use any of these excuses and goes out to meet them. That is real *Chesed* – acts of kindness – to do it even though there are reasons not to do it.

Eliezer sought a bride who could demonstrate this trait. Rivkah had several excuses not to help Eliezer, but she helped him nonetheless. She was the bride for Avraham’s son.

After dropping off the garments, grandmother went on to give out loaves of bread in several neighborhoods. It was self-sacrifice, in the simplest sense of the word.

Many years later, I asked my grandmother about her courage to go on with her acts of kindness despite the dangers. She explained that she was worried about the spiritual challenges, as much as the physical ones; she was worried about the future generations and their education. She knew that for the sake of future generations she needed to do something beyond her abilities. What extraordinary actions could she have taken back then?

My grandmother said, “I decided, to do all I could for the sake of others, to care for their physical and spiritual wellbeing, as caring for others physical wellbeing is your spiritual wellbeing. I went out into the menacing and empty streets and prayed to G-d that just as I help His children, may I merit that he help mine, grandmother shared. Thank G-d, none of my offspring have fallen” she concluded.

Grandmother did merit to see many offspring who followed in her steps.

¹ Beresheit 24:1-3.
² 24:12-14.