

Teachings of the Maharal

THREE TYPES OF KINDNESS

Netiv Gemilut Chasadim 3:156 - Rabbi Eliezer says that it is better to go to a house of mourning than a house of feasting [Bava Metzi'a 28b]. A living person will put in his heart awareness of death - eulogies, burial and accompanying the dead. All of these acts of kindness are worthy of repayment good for good, measure for measure. This is a special form of kindness that cannot be repaid by the dead recipient. Consider that Hashem's providence is a large, endless river of kindness and a man's kindness is a small tributary stream. When the small stream fills a pit near it, the water is replaced from the large river immediately. Similarly, when a kind person gives to another some of the goodness Hashem provided to him, Hashem repays and replaces it. The same way he gave he is given. Understand that this form of kindness is fitting for a bigger reward. Kindness to the dead is chesed shel emet, true kindness.

Rabbi Yosef learned on the verse "you shall inform them the path on which they shall walk and the deeds they shall do" [Sh'mot 18:20] that "inform" means teach a livelihood [beit chayeihem], "the paths" means acts of kindness, "in which" means burial, "they will go" means visiting the sick, "and the deed" means the law, "that they will do" means beyond the letter of the law [Bava Metzi'a 30b]. How do we explain the

overlap between kindness and visiting the sick which is a type of kindness? Visiting sick must be enumerated separately because of the visit of a similarly aged visitor who removes from the sick person and takes on himself one-sixtieth of the illness. Despite the small risk, the visitor performs the mitzva, an additional kindness. What about burial - is it not the same as kindness? The separate mention of burial by a zakein [scholar, elderly person] for whom such work is not honorable. "That they will do" refers to beyond the letter of the law, as Rabbi Yochanan said Jerusalem was destroyed because they decided law with exactitude and did not go beyond the letter of the law.

Thus, there are three levels of kindness, 1- acts of kindness, 2- visiting the sick, 3- burial. The first is doing good for others through kindness, the second is doing it with risk to one's self, even reaching the gates of death to do good to others, which is far more than lending a pot, and the third, burial, which is a kindness of necessity, more necessary than visiting the sick.

Column prepared by Dr. Moshe Kuhr