

Performing a Mitzvah To The Fullest

I recently read an incredible story about empathy for another Jew in Rabbi Yechiel Spero's book, *Touched by a Story*. Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl, was the preeminent Torah leader of pre-World War II Europe. As rav of the prestigious city of Vilna, he had his hand on the pulse of European Jewry. His shiurim, lectures, which enthralled his students, were brilliant masterpieces which covered the breadth of the sea of Talmud and penetrated its depth. He would customarily walk home from the yeshivah accompanied by a throng of students, eager to hear his every word.

It was a bitter winter day, a blustery arctic wind exacerbated the already sub-zero temperatures. The old Rosh Hayeshivah was trudging along the streets of Vilna, accompanied by his students. A young man approached Rav Chaim Ozer and waited to ask a question. Rav Chaim Ozer turned to the young man, whom he did not recognize, and asked him, "How can I help you?"

The young man, not more than fifteen years old, answered with a terrible stutter that he sought a certain street. The young man's speech defect was magnified by nervousness in the presence of the rav. Although Rav Chaim Ozer was practically home already, he turned around and, together with his students, walked the young man to his destination.

Twenty-five minutes later, frozen with cold, Rav Chaim Ozer and his students turned around and began the trek home. The students could not figure out their rebbe. This was a man that never wasted a moment. His poor health and advanced age did not permit him to be out in the cold longer than was absolutely necessary. Yet, he walked the young man to his destination when he could have simply given him verbal directions. Why? The worst that would have happened is that the young man would have had to ask someone else along the way to confirm the directions.

Sensing his students' query, the Rosh Hayeshivah looked at them and said, "This boy clearly had a stuttering problem. He was obviously embarrassed by his impediment. If I had simply given him directions, he would have had to ask others along the way to confirm the directions to the obscure street. I did not want to cause a Jew further humiliation. Therefore, I walked him to his destination to spare him the discomfort. Is that so bad?" This is a paradigm of empathy for another Jew.