

Power of Chesed

Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, was a giant in Torah scholarship. He was also a giant in chesed. He did not merely delegate others to perform acts of chesed; even at his advanced age, he personally went out of his way to help those in need. He exhibited a sense of caring for others that was unparalleled. An observant psychologist who lives in Yerushalayim related the following story. When he walked into shul on Erev Pesach, he was greeted by a number of mispallelim, worshippers, "You must have done something special to have merited a visit from Rav Shach."

"Who? What are you talking about?" he asked them.

"Rav Shach was walking around your courtyard last night for about an hour," they said.

"Impossible. You must be mistaken. Why would Rav Shach visit my courtyard?" the psychologist asked incredulously.

After awhile, it became clear to the psychologist that, indeed, Rav Shach had been at his house. He now became chagrined, exclaiming, "Woe is me. It is my fault. I told the Rosh Hayeshivah not to come up to the house. It is because of me that the gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of our generation, waited outside for an hour."

The worshippers looked at him, without a clue as to what he was talking about. The psychologist was miserable. On Chol Hamoed, one of the Intermediate Days of Pesach, he traveled to Bnei Brak to ask mechilah, beg forgiveness, from Rav Shach. The Rosh Hayeshivah joyfully welcomed him to his home, saying, "I should ask you for mechilah!"

Afterwards, Rav Shach explained what had occurred and what had precipitated his trip to Yerushalayim. On the night before Pesach, when everyone was occupied with Bedikas Chametz, searching their homes for chametz, a bachur, young man, came to speak to Rav Shach. The Rosh Hayeshivah perceived that something was clearly wrong emotionally with this bachur. He then telephoned the psychologist to ask if he would spend some time speaking with the young man. The psychologist was prepared to travel to Bnei Brak if that was what Rav Shach desired. Rav Shach told him that he would send the bachur over to him. Little did the psychologist know that Rav Shach, feeling that the bachur should not travel alone, would go along and wait outside for the duration of the visit.

Upon being asked why he did not send someone else with the bachur, Rav Shach responded, "I am an old man and, thus, have very little to do to prepare for the Yom Tov of Pesach. Why should I bother someone else who is busy? Furthermore, I had the opportunity to take a stroll and partake of the refreshing air of Yerushalayim while I thought of divrei Torah. What greater pleasure is there?" This story speaks for itself.