

The Little Things We Do

I recently read about a project initiated by a professor in clinical psychology. He encouraged his students to get involved in helping people. They asked, "What is there to do?" That is a typical question of those who are looking for a way to avoid responding to the needs of others. The professor took one of his students, whom we will call Joe, and brought him to a senior citizens center, so that he could do something for others. The following is what happened as a result of Joe's visit.

When Joe first came to the home, he noticed that there were a large number of elderly patients just lying around in bed wearing their old cotton gowns, doing nothing but staring up at the ceiling. These people were acting like they had become victims of senility, but this was not the case. Senility is not necessarily a natural consequence of old age. It often occurs when people do not feel loved or useful.

At first, Joe did not know what to do. Indeed, this was the first time he had been in such a home. The professor suggested that he approach a certain elderly woman and begin a conversation with her. Joe went over to the patient, and they began to talk. It was more of a monologue than a dialogue. Nobody had listened to the woman for so long that she had a lot to share. She talked about her life, the ups and downs, the successes and failures, the happy times and the sad ones. She even spoke about her impending death. She had made peace with the fact that she would not live forever. She had so much to say, but no one had cared to listen!

Joe was thoroughly moved by the experience. Therefore, he returned the following week. Soon he began to spend the day visiting many of the patients. It became known as Joe's Day. He would come to the home, and all the patients would gather to speak and even to listen. Someone cared.

No longer did they sit around in their worn-out gowns, staring at the ceiling or at the clock on the wall. Some asked their children to bring them new clothes. They had their hair done; they wanted to look nice, because someone finally cared. Joe realized that kindness can be expressed through the little things we do. Look around, and you will find a lonely person who needs company, a hassled worker whom no one remembers to thank, a young student whose parents have seemingly forgotten about in the maelstrom of life, a spouse who needs a smile, a child who needs an encouraging word. It is the little things that we do - or do not do - that make the difference. That is what chesed is all about.