

1  **PARASHA VAYESHEV 2016**

Can kindness transform our world?

2 

What conceivable difference can we make in this world?

We may believe we are no more than a leaf in a forest, a grain of sand on the seashore.

Is it even feasible that with one act we could change the path of our life, let alone that of humanity as a whole?

Our parsha *Vayeshev* reminds us:

yes, it is possible to change the path of our life and humanity as a whole.

3 

As the story of Ya'akov's children unwraps, there is an increase in tension between his children that threatens to spill over into violence. Ya'akov loved Yoseph more than his other sons, and they resented it. They were jealous of their father's love. Worse yet, they were provoked by Yoseph's dreams of greatness. The sight of the many-colored robe Ya'akov had given him as a token of his love provoked them to more anger.

4 

One day Ya'akov sent Yoseph to see how the brothers were doing as they were far away from home attending the flocks. After Yoseph found them, their envy and anger reached boiling point, and they resolved to take violent revenge.

*"Here comes that master dreamer!" they said to each other. 'Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a wild animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams.'"*

5 

Of the twelve brothers, only one of the brothers disagreed: Reuven. He knew that what they were proposing to do was in the wrong, and he protested. At this point Reuven heard and rescued him and said: *"We must not take his life".* And Reuven said to them, *"Shed not blood! Fling him into the pit in the wilderness and do not raise a hand against him" – that he might rescue him from their hands to bring him back to his father."*

6 

⊙ Reuven, realizing that he is only one against all of his brothers, devises a strategy. His kind intention was to come back to the cistern later, when the others were elsewhere, and rescue Yoseph.

⊙ Reuven wanted to save Yoseph and intended to do so, but in fact he failed. The moment passed, and by the time he acted, it was already too late. Returning to the cistern, he found Yoseph already gone, sold as a slave.

7 

⊙ Reuven wanted to bestow an act of true kindness to his brother Yoseph. He intended to rescue him and bring him back to his father.

⊙ But he delayed the action. He postponed his act of Chesed (kindness) until it was too late. Returning to the cistern, he found Yoseph already gone, sold as a slave.

⊙ Proverbs 3:27- *"Don't withhold good from someone whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it."*

8 

This is one simple point I so highly want to make in this Torah portion:

1. One act of kindness can change one's course in life and change the world
2. But one missed act of kindness can also change one's course in life and change the world.

9 

There is a very moving story that reflects this point.

In 1966 an 11 year-old African-American boy moved with his family to a white neighborhood in Washington. Sitting with his brothers and sisters on the front step of the house, he waited to see how they would be greeted. They were not. Passers-by turned to look at them but no one gave them a smile or even a glance of recognition. Years later, writing about those first days in their new home, he says, *"I knew we were not welcome here. I knew we would not be liked here. I knew we would have no friends here. I knew we should not have moved here ..."*

10 

As he was thinking those thoughts, a woman passed by on the other side of the road. She turned to the children and with a broad smile said, "Welcome!" She emerged minutes later with a tray laden with drinks, cream-cheese and jelly sandwiches which she brought over to the children, making them feel at home.

That moment – the young man later wrote – changed his life. It gave him a sense of belonging where there was none before. It made him realize that a black family could feel at home in a white area and that there could be relationships that were color-blind. This defining memory broke down a wall of separation and turned strangers into friends.

11 

©This young man, Stephen Carter, eventually became a law professor at Yale and wrote a book about what he learned that day. He called it *Civility*. The name of the woman, he tells us, was Sara Kestenbaum, and she died all too young. He adds that it was no coincidence that she was a religious Jew. "In the Jewish tradition," he notes, such civility is called *hesed* – the doing of acts of kindness – which is in turn derived from the understanding that human beings are made in the image of God."

©"Civility", he adds, "itself may be seen as part of *hesed*: it does indeed require kindnesses toward our fellow citizens, including the ones who are strangers, and even when it is hard."

©"To this day", he adds, "I can close my eyes and feel on my tongue the smooth, slick sweetness of the cream cheese and jelly sandwiches that I gobbled on that summer afternoon when I discovered how a single act of genuine and unassuming civility can change a life forever."

12 

*When I am talking about kindness there is only one Hebrew word that we are referring to Chesed (חֶסֶד)*

This word is commonly translated as "loving-kindness," "kindness" or "love." *Chesed* is central to Biblical ethics and Jewish theology. It is a common term in the Bible for describing God's love for mankind and God's special relationship with Israel as well as mankind with mankind.

The nearest New Covenant equivalent to the Hebrew *chesed* is the Greek word *charis* (grace).#5485 –kindness, blessing, gratitude, thankfulness, concession, favor. Grace which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness: grace of speech.

13 

☐ Simon the Just taught: *"The world rests upon three things: Torah, service to God, and bestowing Chesed (kindness)"* (Pirkei Avot 1:2).

☐ Rabbi Simlai claims that *"The Torah begins with chesed and ends with chesed."*

This may be understood to mean that "the entire Torah is characterized by chesed, i.e. it sets forth a vision whose life's goals are behavior characterized by mercy, gratitude, and compassion."

14 

A person who embodies "*chesed*" (חסיד is known as a "chasid" ,חסידone who is faithful to the covenant and who goes "above and beyond that which is normally required.

It's a love that will not let go!

Just like God's unfailing love which will not let Israel go.

Moreover, *Chesed* is often used with Brit (Covenant) and especially of the Covenant between God and Israel.

15 

*Chesed* appears in the Torah to communicate God's kindness and love toward humanity. But it also speaks of human kindness and love toward each other.

For example, in the story of Sodom and Gemorrah God is gracious to engage with Avraham in discussion based on the *chesed* that Avraham showed to the angels who visited him just prior to this in the text. Consequently, Lot and his family are rescued by God after Lot has tried to show hesed, in the form of hospitality, to his guests. Human chesed here results in evoking God's chesed.

16 17 

☉ Today, there is a new movement within Judaism today called the "Jewish Renewal" which Abraham Joshua Heschel and Arthur Waskow have paved the way. *There's even an organization called Aleph which has become the coordinator of some Jewish Renewal activities.*

☉ However, when Yeshua came to Israel, He offered the original "Jewish renewal". This consists of His Chesed which insists on full equality for everyone – rich and poor, slave and free, women and men in order to return them to the living path that connected to God.

18 

☉ Similar to the Jewish Renewal movement today, Yeshua sought *a revolutionary transformation of the world: away from the attitude of selfishness and materialism and toward an ethic code of love and caring.*

☉ *It is Yeshua who said: "Let your light shine before people, so that they may see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven."*

☉ "But I tell you, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! <sup>45</sup> Then you will become children of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun shine on good and bad

people alike, and he sends rain to the righteous and the unrighteous alike.”

19 

⊙<sup>46</sup> *What reward do you get if you love only those who love you? Why, even tax-collectors do that!* <sup>47</sup> *And if you are friendly only to your friends, are you doing anything out of the ordinary? Even the Goyim do that!*

⊙Yeshua desirous us to bestow and impart chesed – lovingkindness to all people just as He does.

⊙We never know how much we affect the lives of others until we act on chesed.

20 

⊙Don't forget that we are all interdependent. We can't experience a full life without each other.

⊙Remember that chesed - kindness comes in many different forms. It is fed by inspiration from the Torah that leads to a selfless deed:

Generosity, an honest answer, a rebuke, instruction, labor, encouragement

⊙Think and speak positively, and remember —Adonai makes his sun shine on good and bad people alike.

22 

TAKE HOME:

⊙Don't delay kindness when it is in your power to do so. Proverbs 3:27- "Don't withhold good from someone whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it." Remember Reuben wanted to save Yoseph and intended to do so, but in fact he delayed kindness and it was too late.

⊙Don't underestimate the ripple effect of your actions. If they are truly from the heart of Chesed, it will go very far!

23 

⊙Don't underestimate the boomerang effect your actions will have on your own life; even if not immediately apparent.

⊙Allow kindness to become the natural and spontaneous response to every situation. Through this ability to respond kindly and compassionately, true success will follow.

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In your hands a life's transformation can be given away in an instant!