

Good Shabbos Everyone. The Torah gives us this week the ever important mitzvah of "and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Rabbi Akiva explained this is THE general rule in the Torah. If one follows this mitzvah, they will observe all the other mitzvahs regarding how we must treat others. Through do so, we will all lead rewarding lives both in this World and in the World to Come. The following story illustrates this concept in action.

Yakov Braunstein (not his real name) is Jew who lives in the Brooklyn, New York area. One day, Yakov's brother brought his attention to a "help-wanted" ad in a local paper. There was an older man who was looking for an attendant. It looked like a good opportunity and Yakov called soon after to set up an appointment. Soon after, Yakov interviewed with the man whom we will call "Mr. Roth." Boruch Hashem, Mr. Roth liked Yakov and hired him for the job. Yakov would have to work 6 days a week helping Mr. Roth. The following is the amazing account retold in Yakov's words about his experiences while working for Mr. Roth.

"Very quickly, I realized that life in Mr. Roth's house was no easy street. He was a bit younger than eighty, and a difficult and stern person — easily angered, nervous, and convinced that the entire world was against him, that they no longer needed him alive.

During my first few months on the job, I got to know all of Mr. Roth's employees. And there were quite a few of them: a private attorney, a gardener, a cleaner, a cook. All contributed information. I learned that Mr. Roth was very, very wealthy; he had owned factories across the globe. Ten years previously, he'd given over the business to his sons. Mr. Roth remained a multimillionaire, with enough money to line his grave with diamonds. "They say he used to be a nice person," the gardener told me, "but you can see those days are gone."

And gone they were. Mr. Roth was a strict, angry, and very suspicious person. During my first day on the job, I realized that even though I hadn't very much to do, I had a major task: to be constantly at his beck and call. Mr. Roth could call me at any given moment and ask for something. He didn't have much to ask for, because the household followed a very strict routine, and every worker knew that the smallest mistake could cost him his job. Even though he paid well, the turnover was astounding. When I arrived, there was not a single employee who'd been on the job more than half a year. During my first two months on the job, two of them had to leave. He simply could not tolerate errors. Mr. Roth tested me many times during my first six months on the job. He often asked me to stay overtime; he asked me to arrive early even though it would destroy my entire morning routine and I had to search for Shacharis minyanim in different places, and believe me, those extra hours gained him nothing. I didn't do much then, just as I didn't do much during the rest of my hours. He left money in strange places, as if it had been forgotten. I found a hundred-dollar bill in the bathroom, and one day I found a package of dollar bills wrapped in aluminum foil in the refrigerator, as if someone had hidden it there. Documents were scattered in places where any curious person would have been happy to find them. Of course, I brought the money directly to Mr. Roth. And I didn't glance at the documents, for the simple reason that it was forbidden to do so. At first, I thought that he was really a bit tired and forgetful, but I quickly realized that he was sharp as an eagle. He was simply testing me. I smiled to myself and tried to keep up with all his demands, even though he complained about every single thing I did.

It was a conversation with my father that clued me in as to what was really happening. My father was approximately the same age as Mr. Roth and once remarked that he himself was fortunate that he had returned to learn Torah in kollel after retirement. Otherwise, he would have felt that no one needed him, and his days would have been long and boring. My father, at his advanced age, still worked two hours every day, went to visit patients in the hospital, learned in a kollel, and received visits from grandchildren every day. All this in addition to three minyanim a day. He was a very busy man. Once, when I visited him, he told me all about a friend who had grown depressed because his life was so boring and he felt that no one needed him. It was then that I suddenly understood Mr. Roth. Mr. Roth was a man who had once been active almost twenty-four hours daily, who'd been consumed by international business ventures, who'd been consulted every moment, had suddenly fallen into a paradise of silence and serenity, which essentially served as a prison. No one asked his advice; no one needed him. His four sons were very busy. True, they did phone every day to ask how he was feeling, but how much time did the conversation take? Each one took no longer than five minutes, totaling twenty minutes of the long day of Mr. Roth. The moment I understood that Mr. Roth was lonely, a lot of things became clear. I decided to implement a different method in my work. Until that moment, I had never initiated any conversation with Mr. Roth. If he didn't ask for anything, I never volunteered. That's how I had done my job until this point. But from the moment I understood how difficult life was for Mr. Roth, who felt as if the entire world had forgotten him and that his life had no meaning, I changed my perspective and behavior. Of course, I did it slowly and subtly, because I wasn't sure how he'd react.

It began when I brought up the morning paper. I said, "Mr. Roth, would you be able to explain the mess that happened in Wall Street? I don't understand what they're so upset about." Mr. Roth, who could discuss shares, stocks, trends, and the like with ease, and who hadn't had such an opportunity in ten years, began a long, detailed explanation. I learned more in that hour than a student studying for his MBA. The information didn't interest me at all. I never dreamed that I'd ever have enough money to invest in stocks. But the fact that Mr. Roth was lecturing with such gusto told me something. Of course, I thanked him profusely for the explanation, and he asked me whether I planned on investing. I laughed and told him that for now, I was investing in diapers, baby food, and a bit of bread and milk.

Later, when my daughter Miri had a sore throat, I told Mr. Roth that I was worried about my daughter. To be honest, I wasn't really worried. Any father of several small children doesn't get excited about a sore throat. But it was the most interesting thing I could share with Mr. Roth. Later, he looked at me in shock when I asked him if he had any good solutions for my underweight daughter, whose sore throat was preventing her from eating. "You understand," I said, "anyone can get a sore throat, but Miri isn't gaining properly, so it's a real problem."

"My mother," he seemed to come alive, "used to treat most of these simple illnesses on her own. Believe me, it helped more than all the antibiotics they use today." But Mr. Roth now knew that I had a daughter named Miri, and for the next week, he asked how she was feeling. Then he asked me the names and ages of my other children. From then on, I told him about all their antics. Now every morning we began our conversation talking about our families, well usually my family, because, sadly, his family members didn't really include him in their lives. During those conversations, Mr. Roth was no longer the stern master. He became a wise, experienced, and intuitive human being. Even his wrinkles looked as if they'd been ironed out. I very much enjoyed his insightful comments. Perhaps the greatest benefit was that he didn't get angry for the hour after our conversation, and didn't summon any of the workers needlessly. And when two months passed, we discovered that no one had been fired. I guess you can say that I had discovered a patent of sorts.

At a certain stage Mr. Roth fired his driver. It was so normal that I thought it amazing I was still employed. Then he asked me to drive him. That wasn't so extraordinary; he had asked me to drive him around before even when the driver was in service. But now we had new, interesting topics of conversation. He would tell me about places I didn't know or explain how the neighborhoods had changed during the last fifty years. I told him everything I knew about the Jewish aspects of the streets of New York. One day, we got stuck in an area where a Chassidic Rebbe's son was getting married. The entire area was closed off, and Mr. Roth grumbled that they were ruining his schedule just for a wedding. But then I suggested that we get out of the car and try to see what was going on. And that's how Mr. Roth saw for the first time in his life that Rebbes do have more than twenty-three Chassidim, which is what he'd always thought. He was astounded by the sight of thousands of people filling the streets. After we managed to enter the area, he simply forgot how to close his mouth, because he was in awe. Of course, we couldn't actually see anything. We were too far away... Little did I know that Mr. Roth's life would be changed forever after going to that Rebbe's son's chasunah (wedding)... To be continued next week. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**