

**Good Shabbos Everyone.** Everybody likes being treated nicely. So, when we treat others kindly and with respect, we fulfill the mitzvah of: "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Vayikra – Leviticus 19:18) It may sound obvious that must treat our fellow Jews respectfully and with feelings of love. Why then did Hashem give us a mitzvah to treat others with love and respect? The answer to our question lies in the definition of a mitzvah.

Many people think that a mitzvah is a "good deed." A "good deed" is optional; it is a nice thing to do. The implication of this definition is that if you want to do a mitzvah, fine. If not, that is also fine. In truth, mitzvahs are much more than just "good deeds." Mitzvahs are an obligation. This is why we have a mitzvah to be nice to one another. If treating others kindly were just a "good deed" then one may decide that he does not feel like being nice to others because, for example, he was forced to wait too long in a line, or he was not feeling well or he did not have enough sleep. That is why we have an obligation to be kind to one another. It is not just a "good deed" to be kind to our fellow Jew. We must be kind to our fellow Jews.

The Torah discusses the importance of treating others kindly in our parsha this week Mishpatim. Hashem tells us: "Do not oppress the widow and orphan. If you do oppress him, when he cries to Me, I will hear his cry. And I will become very angry and I will kill you with a sword, and your wives will be widows and you sons will be orphans" (Shemos - Exodus 22:21-23) Rashi explains that this warning not only applies to widows and orphans, rather, the verse applies to all people; the verse merely singles out widows and orphans because they are more sensitive. This verse is quite amazing. Hashem so much wants us to treat our fellow Jews with love and respect, that Hashem actually threatens to kill us if we mistreat another Jew.

Besides reading the following beautiful and inspirational story, we will also learn some important tips on how to avoid hurting other people's feelings. We begin with the following true story: Avigdor Ribicoff, a member of a kollel (a yeshiva for married men) in Tiberias, Israel, and his wife had been married many years and had unfortunately not been blessed with children. They sought medical help in Israel and abroad and had undergone various tests and procedures, but sadly, they still had no children. Despondency and desperation, heaven forbid, were beginning to gnaw at the young couple.

They both came from "Litvishe" families and had no connection with chassidic rebbes. Yet, friends urged Avigdor to go for berachos (blessings) to various Chassidische Rebbes. Avigdor listened to this advice and went for blessings, if not reluctantly. During the summer vacation, when Avigdor saw his colleagues taking their children on outings, the pain of emptiness was worse than ever. He had to do something. Avigdor decided that he would go to the Nadvornier Rebbe, Rav Chaim Mordechai Rosenbloom (1904-1978), a rebbe in Bnei Brak. When Avigdor went in to speak with the rebbe, he broke down and cried.

The Nadvornier Rebbe listened sympathetically and asked Avigdor where he would be davening (praying) on Rosh Hashanah. Avigdor said he planned to daven at a yeshivah near his home in Tiberias, where he enjoyed those he prayed with and felt comfortable with the pace of the prayer service. "Come daven with us," said the rebbe warmly. "The first day of Yom Tov, the Torah reading is, 'And Hashem remembered Sarah [and blessed her with a child] (Bereishis - Genesis 21:1), and the haftarah is about Chanah (who finally had her long-awaited child, Shmuel) (I Shmuel 1:1). It's a segulah (omen) to have that maftir. Come here for Rosh Hashanah, and with the G-d's help, things can happen."

Avigdor had never heard that it was a segulah to be called for that maftir, but he knew that in many shuls the aliyos were usually sold for substantial sums of money on Rosh Hashanah. Did the rebbe mean that he should buy that aliyah, or that he would receive the aliyah free of charge? He didn't have the courage to ask; he decided he would cross that bridge when he got there. Besides, if it meant having a child, he would pay anything, even if he had to borrow. Avigdor and his wife made plans to be in Bnei Brak that Rosh Hashanah. On the first night of Yom Tov, the rebbe's shul was over-flowing with people and as Avigdor scanned the crowd, he wondered if the rebbe would even remember him or his problem. After davening, the warm ambiance in the shul was practically tangible. With radiant smiles everyone seemed to be wishing each other the traditional greeting: "May you be inscribed and sealed immediately, for a good year, good life, and for peace." People stood on line, gradually making their way towards the rebbe to receive his blessing. Avigdor stood back, allowing the "regulars" their chance to greet the rebbe first. As he stood off to the side, he noticed another fellow his age, who also seemed to be a visitor. It appeared that the other fellow also knew no one, and he too was waiting for the "regulars" to clear the shul before greeting the rebbe. Avigdor approached the fellow and extended his hand in greeting. "Shalom Aleichem," he said. "My name is Avigdor Ribicoff. Are you from around here?" "Aleichem Shalom," came the reply. "I'm Yeruchem Lazar and I'm from Jerusalem. I am here to be with the rebbe for Yom Tov." "Oh?" said Avigdor. "To tell you the truth," Yeruchem said, "I don't know how it's going to happen tomorrow, but I heard that the rebbe said that if [I get] maftir, it's a segulah for children. Look at this crowd..." He let his words trail off.

Avigdor was crestfallen. He could not believe what he just heard. Hadn't the rebbe told him to come get maftir tomorrow? That was the only reason he and his wife had come to Bnei Brak for Yom Tov. How could both of them get maftir at the same minyan? For the last month and a half he was waiting for the next day's Torah reading - and now this? Avigdor did not allow his disappointment to surface. Not wishing to hurt the feelings of another Jew, Avigdor was silent. He continued to make small talk with Yeruchem and wished him well. That night Avigdor was in turmoil deciding what to do the next day. The next morning Avigdor, in deference to Yeruchem, prayed in another shul. And sure enough Yeruchem had maftir. And within a year Avigdor and his wife had a baby girl. The rebbe had said that "things could happen." And they did -and all because of Avigdor's extraordinary character in his willingness to relinquish a potential blessing. (Echoes of the Maggid p.39, Rabbi Paysach Krohn, names have been changed)

Instead of arguing with the other Jew and making a fuss, Avigdor put aside his personal feelings and emotions and kept quiet. We can learn from this example to always put first the feelings of another Jew. One of the simplest ways to treat others right is the following: One should make it his business to find out what certain people like and dislike. He should then try always to do those things that the person likes, and not do the things that the person does not like. We are all children of Hashem, as the verse tells us "You are Children to Hashem your G-d." (Devarim – Deuteronomy 14:1) Every parent who has ever witnessed children fighting can testify to how difficult a sight it is. Every parent who has ever witnessed children treating each other properly can testify to how beautiful a sight it is. Similarly Hashem wants very much that his children get along and show love for each other. Let us make an effort to treat others kindly and with respect. Often the father promises a reward to the children who behave. How much more so will Hashem, our Father in Heaven, reward us for getting along with one another. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**