

Good Shabbos Everyone. The Talmud tells us that a Jew is distinguished by three character traits: shyness, mercifulness, and dedication to doing of acts of kindness. (Yevamos 79b) The Talmud goes so far as to say that someone who lacks one of these qualities must be checked out to make sure that he is really Jewish!

The Torah describes this week how Hashem commands Moshe to request from the people donations to build the Mishkan - Tabernacle, the portable sanctuary in the wilderness. The Jewish people were so eager to donate, that Moshe later tells them to stop the donations! (Shemos 36:6) We see from here that Jews have a generous nature. The following true story from about 200 years ago illustrates this quality of the Jewish people...

Most people just turned the other way when they saw a blind old man walking into town, led by his young son. The two looked poor, hungry and needy, especially on this damp and chilly day. No one seemed interested in helping them; the townspeople wanted to just get home, sit by their fires and eat a warm meal.

As Reb Yankel watched the father and son trudging through the town square, he took an immediate interest in them, approached and asked if they would be interested in a warm meal. The old man declined the offer, insisting that he would be just fine eating at the local inn that, he assumed, offered free meals to the poor; the young boy, however, eagerly accepted the kindness.

The father seemed irritated by the fact that his son's hunger had overridden other consideration; nevertheless, they followed their kind host to his home. As they walked, Yankel tried to make small talk, asking where they came from and about the rest of the family.

The boy, whose name was Shlomo, gladly held up his side of the conversation, but the old man repeatedly tried to hush him. The child revealed that his mother had died years before and that he and his father were alone. He added that since his father was blind they had very little resources and had not eaten a good meal in a long while. They had almost no money and were very thankful that someone had taken the time to care for their needs.

Yankel would, under normal circumstances, have asked the boy what he Torah was learning, but it went without saying that the boy did not have much of an opportunity to learn anything. He was fully occupied in taking care of his father.

They arrived at their host's home and sat down to eat the meal. Not having eaten in quite a while, the two ate heartily and listened as their host spoke; he had an offer for them and it was almost too good to be true — he would allow them to stay as guests in his home, he would provide them with food and, in addition, Yankel wanted to hire an excellent melamed for the young Shlomo. It would seem that there was very little to discuss; how could they possibly turn down such an offer?

But that did not stop the boy's father from expressing his disinterest. Although he was offered three delicious meals a day and the very best education for his son, he still hesitated out of pride.

However, Shlomo's reaction was a different story; his eyes lit up at the offer. Hope for a better life, one where he would have a chance to be just like everyone else, was right there at his fingertips and he desperately wanted it.

The father finally agreed and their new life began. Day after day Yankel catered to the needs of his guests and accommodated every request the man made. Shlomo flourished in the new environment, his thirst for learning and unquenchable desire for Torah growing daily. The boy's phenomenal memory allowed him to connect various pieces of Gemara that most boys his age could never begin to do. His comprehension, mature beyond his years, coupled with his diligence, allowed him to grow in his learning at a phenomenal pace. The middos Shlomo had cultivated by caring for his elderly father blossomed even further, and before long he became an outstanding talmid chacham as well as a young man of sterling character.

A few years later the father, to whom the boy had devoted so much of his life, passed away. The young Shlomo now channeled all of his energies into his learning. Without any distractions, nothing could stop his growth.

Yankel was not just any Yankel. He was Rav Yaakov Kranz, better known as the greatest maggid ever, the Dubner Maggid (1740-1804). And the young boy also was not just anybody. His reputation grew, eventually he married and became the great Rav of Brod, Rav Shlomo Kluger (1785-1869)!

The Chofetz Chaim would retell this story to convey the importance of uncovering the hidden treasures that lie within our very own children. Often circumstances prevent them from becoming who they are destined to be. But with a much needed break and an offer from a kind stranger they can rid themselves of the shackles that chain them down and have the freedom to chase their dreams. (from Touched by Story 4, p. 82, Rabbi Yechiel Spiro)

By doing Chesed - acts of kindness and giving to others, there is no limit to what we can help others accomplish in life. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**