



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

DISTRIBUTION DATE:
JUNE 8RD 2016 – 2 SIVAN 5776

PARSHA:
שבועות ב' 2 Shavuos

SERMON TITLE:
BRINGING FOOD TO THE HUNGRY

Shavuos 2

Bringing Food to the Hungry

Good Yom Tov!

In the 1950s, the Jewish education situation in Israel was at its worst. Most Israeli cities did not have religious education schools.

At the time, the Rebbe instructed that Jewish schools be set up for Israeli kids wherever one might be missing. But one of the primary problems were that in order to get the city to approve a new kindergarten or religious school, the organizers would need to produce signatures of at least 25 parents who wanted such a school.

But how do you find parents interested in Jewish education? Well, Chabad Chasidim went door to door, convincing parents of the need for Jewish education for their kids.

So in one Israeli city, the rebbetzin (rabbi's wife) of that town had an idea: She would walk around the city streets every Friday night "peeking" into houses. In those days, a lot of houses in Israel were one-story flats, and so it was easy to see into people's living rooms.

As such, any house in which the rebbetzin saw burning Shabbos candles, she would know that with this house, there was at least a chance that she'd find parents who'd agree to send their kids to a religious kindergarten—the candles indicated that they were at least traditional.

So our rebbetzin would take her little brother-in-law, who had an excellent memory, on her Friday-night trips, and he would remember after Shabbos exactly which houses had had the candles burning on Shabbos. On each Saturday night, she would write those addresses down, and during the week, she would make it a point to visit those families.

She would knock on the door and say, "I'm sorry, but I happened to be walking by on Friday night and I couldn't help but notice candles burning. Would you by any chance have any little kids in the house for me?"

Sometimes, the residents would laugh at her and say, "Our kids are all grown up already!" To which she'd reply, "So maybe you have a grandson or granddaughter for me?"

But people didn't understand why she needed children—to adopt them?

So then she would explain that she wanted to open a religious kindergarten and was looking for students—and indeed, within a year, the rebbetzin succeeded in opening a kindergarten.

Today, in our Torah reading, in the Book of Devarim, we read about the Shalosh Regalim, the three holidays on which Jews had to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem during the Temple era.

In our reading, the Torah commands us to celebrate the holiday of Pesach, the holiday of Shavuot and the holiday of Sukkot. On Pesach, the Torah tells us to go up to Jerusalem and there, to offer up the Korban Pesach, the Passover Sacrifice. As the Torah says: “And you shall roast [it] and eat [it] in the place which the L-rd, your G-d, will choose, and you shall turn away in the morning and go to your dwellings.” In plain English, that means: You need to go up to Jerusalem to eat your Passover sacrifice, and only then can you go home.

But when it comes to the holiday of Shavuot, the Torah adds a command that it’s not enough to just go up to Jerusalem—while you’re in the Holy City, you need to gladden not just yourself but also “the Levi, the stranger [meaning, the convert], the orphan and the widow” (Devarim 16:11). And the Torah again repeats this in the command to keep the holiday of Sukkot—meaning, that the holiday of Shavuot includes the special command to invite guests, to see to it that the convert, the orphan and the widow have food to eat.

In the commentary Avos D’Rabbi Nasan (7:1), we are told about Iyuv (the legendary Job), who regularly hosted many guests. We are told that Iyuv’s house had four doors, one door for each of the four winds. “And why did Iyuv make four doors for his house? So that poor people wouldn’t have to bother to go around the entire house—and Iyuv himself testified on himself (Iyuv 31:32), “A stranger did not lodge outside; my doors I would open to the road.”

And the commentary continues describing Iyuv’s house, saying that when all of Iyuv’s legendary suffering began raining down on his head, one tragedy after another, Iyuv turned to G-d in amazement and asked, “Master of the Universe! Did I not feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, and did I not clothe the naked?”

But G-d answered him: “Iyuv, you have not arrived at half the measure of Avraham. You sit and wait in your house and guests come in to you; those accustomed to eat wheat bread, you feed wheat bread and those accustomed to eat meat, you feed meat... but Avraham didn’t do so. Rather, he would sit and watch the world [passing by outside], and when he would find guests, he would bring them into his house.”

In other words, Avraham didn’t wait for guests to come to him. Rather, he took pains for those who were not likely to show up and those who were embarrassed to need the help of others—and not only that, but right after his own circumcision, while he was still in great pain, he sat himself down outside the door of his tent and waited for guests.

And what’s more, he even “built great palaces on the roads and left food and drink, and anyone who came by and entered would eat and drink and bless Heaven, and thus caused G-d pleasure, and anything his mouth would request would be found in his house.”

So Avraham Avinu didn’t wait for guests to come to him but rather, he went after them, setting up tents to feed travelers, and so he was so beloved by G-d that he got from G-d anything for which he asked.

This is true with regards to material needs. Human nature for most people is that when someone asks for their help, they’ll be happy to help—but they won’t seek out headaches for themselves. They won’t look for “mitzvah cases” to assist—for example, Iyuv, who gladly hosted guests, but only those who came to him. He didn’t go out to find them.

However, those unique souls who walk in the footsteps of Avraham Avinu do go out and hit the streets, seeking out the hungry and homeless and helping them.

And if that's true for helping people materially, it's all the more true for helping people spiritually. With material needs, the hunger will force the poor person to search for food—but with spiritual needs, people who are spiritually hungry typically don't know how to satisfy their hunger, or even that they are spiritually hungry in the first place.

Throughout the generations, rabbis were always happy to help anyone who came to hear Torah from them. There were always Torah centers in the Jewish Nation, and the Jewish Nation would trudge the greatest distances to learn Torah. Also, in every city and town, the door of the local rabbi was always open to any Jew, no matter who he was.

But what the Rebbe innovated over the last 70 years was a different approach altogether. Now the rabbi no longer sat ensconced in his house, waiting for students to come seeking G-d. The Rebbe said that anyone who is capable of teaching Torah to another Jew is obligated to go out and find that Jew in the nooks and crannies of life, and anywhere else where a Jew could get lost.

So the Rebbe sent his shluchim, representatives, to anywhere you could find Jews—and the more that shlichus grew and expanded, the more the Rebbe sent shluchim even to very far places where you'd have difficulty finding a Jewish community.

Now, if any one of these shluchim simply sat at home, no one would come and knock on his door. He could dry out, sitting there for years without meeting even a single Jew. Instead, he goes out and knocks on doors at homes and offices, hospitals and prisons, seeking out Jews precisely as Avraham did.

And then, in the merit of the joy that he causes to G-d, he will earn the same blessing of Avraham Avinu that “anything his mouth would request would be found in his house.”

Good Yom Tov!