

**D'var Torah**  
SINAI TEMPLE, SPRINGFIELD  
SHABBAT EVENING, 2 SEPTEMBER 2016

***It's All about Heart***

I came across a *chesed*-story this week that I want to share with you. But first I want to say a few things about the very notion of *chesed* itself. Does anyone here this Shabbat evening know how to translate the word, *chesed*, into English?

I don't. While the word, *chesed*, is often translated as lovingkindness, the fact is that the word, lovingkindness, itself is a made-up word, and it doesn't appear in the dictionary. Loving-kindness, as a hyphenated word though, appears in Merriam-Webster with the meaning, "tender and benevolent affection,"<sup>1</sup> but that isn't the meaning of *chesed* at all. *Chesed* is a Hebrew word that you have to understand in the Hebrew.

Nelson Glueck, *alav hashalom*, the HUC-JIR president when I was a student and who ordained me as a rabbi some 49+ years ago, wrote his doctoral dissertation on the meaning of *chesed* in the Hebrew Bible (I did a search on the word, *chesed*, including suffixes, prefixes, and various conjugations; the word in some form comes up 297 times). That got him a doctorate. But still, what is *chesed*?

Wikipedia says about *chesed* that it "is a common term in the Bible for describing God's love for humankind and God's special relationship with the Children of Israel."<sup>2</sup> But from that I don't know what *chesed* is.

But here's a start:

Moses Cordovero, a sixteenth century philosopher living in Safed,<sup>3</sup> gave a number of examples of *chesed* in his kabbalistic work *Tomer Devorah*. What he cited as acts of *chesed* were:

1. [to] love God so completely that one will never forsake God's service for any reason;
2. [to] provide a child with all the necessities of his sustenance and love the child;
3. [to] circumcise a child;
4. [to] visit and heal the sick;
5. [to] give charity to the poor;
6. [to] offer hospitality to strangers;
7. [to] attend to the dead;

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/loving%E2%80%93kindness>

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chesed>

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses\\_ben\\_Jacob\\_Cordovero](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses_ben_Jacob_Cordovero)

8. [to] bring a bride to the chuppah marriage ceremony;
9. [to] make peace between a man and his fellow.<sup>4</sup>

And from these we begin to get an idea of what *chesed* is. Certainly, this list isn't comprehensive, and maybe, over the course of this year, we'll grow to gain a greater understanding. And certainly, we in Sinai Temple are engaged in it at various levels. In short, *chesed* is an act which does something for someone that in some way makes his/her life – and beyond that the world – better.

And now I'll share the story. I found it in the Jerusalem Post Wednesday of this week. It is a story about a man named Yeuda Losky who performed an act of *chesed* at Yad Sarah in Israel.

What is Yad Sarah? I checked that out on the internet. I learned from the Yad Sarah website that it is “the largest voluntary organization in Israel, providing a spectrum of free or nominal cost services designed to make life easier for sick, disabled and elderly people and their families...almost four decades after it was founded...it is run by more than 6,000 volunteers and saves the Israeli economy several hundred million dollars per year in hospitalization and medical costs.”<sup>5</sup>

Yehuda Losky is one of the 6,000 volunteers. On Wednesday, which was his birthday, he spent the day doing “what he usually does – repairing wheelchairs for lending out to patients.”

Who is he? Well, from the article,

“Losky was born...in White Russia and came [to Israel] on aliya in 1932. As a soldier in the British Army during World War II, he was a metal worker and mechanic in Jordan and Syria and even reached Iraq. Before 1948, he built armored vehicles for the Israel Defense Forces, and it is likely, he says, that those installed as a memorial at Sha'ar Hagai on the road to Jerusalem are his handiwork. After the war, he opened a metalwork shop that he ran for decades...Twenty-seven years ago, he saw a newspaper ad looking for volunteers for repairing Yad Sarah medical equipment and established the first repair facility at the Rishon Lezion branch. He has repaired and rehabilitated tens of thousands of wheelchairs, walkers, crutches and more...He still does some repairs, but he also counsels and advises other volunteers – and has no thoughts of retirement. ‘All my life, I helped people, and as long as I am able to stand on my own feet, I will continue to do it. Everybody can volunteer,’ he said.”

And how long is that? Before I tell you, here are a couple more quotes from the article about Yehuda Losky: “Hanna Wasserman, head of medical equipment loans at the Rishon Lezion branch, said that... Yehuda stands straight and doesn't use a cane. He

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<sup>4</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chesed>, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.yadsarah.org.il/RichText/GeneralPage.aspx?nodeId=446>

comes here early every Friday – our busiest day. We are very fond of him, and when we have time, we enjoy listening to the fascinating stories of his life.” And Yad Sarah director-general Moshe Cohen...added “that he [is] an excellent model whose knowledge and experience should not be put into retirement. ‘He has golden hands and a big heart.’”<sup>6</sup>

So what is the deal here? We all know people who spend hours and hours volunteering for organizations they believe in. Sinai Temple is among them. While synagogues today are decrying the drying up of volunteerism we, to the contrary, are blessed. For me it is a privilege to be rabbi of a congregation as ours and to see, day after day, the truly significant number of people who step forward “to make it happen.”

And I even know people – and I’m guessing you do as well – who make it a point to do some act of *chesed* each year on their birthday. What a way to celebrate!

But Yehuda Losky? Well, as Paul Harvey always said on his radio shows, “And now for the rest of the story.” Wednesday, the day Yehuda Losky as always was out volunteering, he turned 100. That’s right. It was his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday! *Chesed* for him was and is a life-long (and in this case a long-life) *way* of life. It’s not just that he has “golden hands.” That’s a blessing that was bestowed upon him by the greatest bestower of all of *chasadim tovim*, of good acts of *chesed*, the *Kadosh Baruch Hu*, the Holy-One-of-Blessings (and we make mention of God’s *chesed* work in the Amidah three times a day). Rather, Yehuda Losky does the *chesed* work he does because he *truly* has “a big heart.”

And that’s the point, not only of the story, but of the whole notion of *chesed* itself.

May we all be doers of *chesed*. More, may we be blessed to be able to continue doing *chesed* for long lifetimes, giving full meaning to ourselves as, at the same time, we continuously strive to make the world a better place.

-- Howard A. Kosovske

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.jpost.com/Business-and-Innovation/Health-and-Science/100-year-old-Israeli-with-golden-hands-and-big-heart-spends-birthday-volunteering-466487>