

Shabbat Shalom,

This week, we read how Abraham was sitting in his tent, the rabbis speculated recovering from his circumcision and the day grew hot.

And as the text says: וַיֵּשָׂא עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו

“He looks up and behold sees three figures standing by him” (Genesis 18:1)

וַיַּרְא

“Looking again...”

וַיָּרֻץ לִקְרֹאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֲרָצָה

“He runs over to them [while still in pain] bowing low” and urges them to stay (Gen. 18:2). He ensures that they have food and he also washes their feet. We, the reader, know that these men are angels, or at minimum in the service of God because often in the text we see this same narrative of a stranger encountering a patriarch, and the stranger is often revealed as an angel or God. But Abraham doesn’t know at the time who they are, especially that they are angels. So why is this significant?

Abraham extends kindness and offers comfort to the strangers, in the midst of his pain. This reveals a deeper trait of Abraham that caused God to seek him out---he is by instinct a kind person. Abraham is the *modus exemplar* for *chesed*, kindness. In Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, *chesed* is one of ten sefirot, or attributes of God that are the ways that God is manifested into the earthly world. *Chesed* is the fourth of the ten sefirot, and more importantly it is the only one that is unconditional and unmotivated. Meaning, that kind actions and extending kindness--true *chesed*--are done without expecting anything in return.

In fact the person who extends kindness, doesn't often see the dividends of their investment; kindness, like a pebble dropped in a pond, ripples out across the expanse, in ways the person doing the acts of kindness had no way of knowing how far it will extend.

Abraham showing this innate and instinctive kindness with the strangers, does actually reap rewards like causing him to heal more quickly and with the birth of his son Isaac. But, none of that would have happened had Abraham not shown this kindness. See, Abraham treats all strangers to his tent as if they have the potential to be an angel, or at minimum he recognizes the divine spark in every stranger he meets.

Most of us can think of one person who is what we might call completely selfless, who just constantly gives of themselves. My Aunt Kay was one such angelic human being. She was the kindest woman I ever met and her acts of kindness were so large for someone so small, it felt that many times

her heart must've been two sizes too big with the way that she gave of herself.

She and her husband Arnold, both of blessed memory, were philanthropic, donating and raising millions of dollars for City of Hope in their cancer research department. But her kindness before being in a financial position to be philanthropic, was always present. See Aunt Kay was a school teacher and the only school teacher serving a one room schoolhouse in the Leona Valley--a small isolated town in southern California. She drove from Los Angeles up to Leona Valley, a distance of 50 miles each way daily to teach. Now, teaching is a selfless profession with educators giving their time and oftentimes money for classroom supplies to give to others. But Aunt Kay did even more! Her schoolhouse was so isolated that many of the farmers couldn't take their children to school. Undeterred, she decided to pick up her school children from their homes to take them to school and drive each of them back at the end of the day. She never once complained of the added hours, the depleted gas, or the bone weary exhaustion she must have felt on that 50 mile drive back to her home in Los Angeles.

When I was born, she came over almost daily to babysit. She baked my favorite dessert, "nuclear pie" being my absolute favorite. And yes, she spoiled me rotten with toys. But she also just loved to have fun, I remember going to her house for Halloween when I was 6 years old. As my family approached her door, it burst open and with a flash of light and a puff of smoke she appeared as the Wicked Witch of the West. It scared the pants off me and she being 80 years old was so proud of herself for pulling off quite possibly the best prank ever.

As I aged, and our physical visits became less frequent, we still talked daily. When she couldn't drive, I made sure to visit her whenever I could. She was as special to me as my own grandmother and when she died on November 13th 1998 the day before my 15th birthday, of an enlarged heart. I felt wounded. When we knew that our second would be a girl, I immediately wanted to give Georgina a name of kindness to live up to, and in honor of aunt Kay, Georgina's Hebrew name is Kelilah meaning "queen." Just like Aunt Kay was a queen of kindness, we hope that our daughter is just as intrinsically kind as my Aunt Kay.

Judaism inspires us to be angelic human beings like Abraham, or Aunt Kay. Whether it be financially through philanthropic works, or giving of your time like Aunt Kay driving her students to and from school, or washing the feet of strangers, kindness is so needed to make this world a better place. We have Abrahams and Kays in our Beth-El community, who give selflessly to our temple family, through time, handing out materials for services, making soul food to share, singing in our volunteer choir or graciously underwriting programs, and to those who give to other communities--many of whom are here this evening. We see you and thank you. Without you, we would not feel God, in this place. We also recognize there are many who would like to extend their kindness but are unsure of where or how to start. See tonight as an opportunity to let your clergy or members who are on any of our volunteer committees know. We will help point you in the right direction. The temple would love more volunteers regardless of if you are 9 or 99 (like Abraham), and it is never too late to spread kindness.

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