

GEMILUT CHASSADIM

There is a famous quote from Pirkei Avot that says:

"Al shlosa devarim ha olam omed: al ha Torah, al ha avodah, veh al gemilut chassadim"

"The world stands on three pillars: the Torah, Worship, and acts of lovingkindness".

1. What is Gemilut Chassadim?
2. Why do you think Gemilut Chassadim seems to be such an important value of Judaism?
3. What are some examples of Gemilut Chassadim?
 - a) clothe the naked, visit the sick, comfort mourners, bury the dead
4. Why is it important to do these things?
5. When is it our obligation to do acts of kindness?
6. What is a time you have had to perform an act of kindness?
7. Were you rewarded for this?
8. Do you think everyone should be rewarded if they do something nice for someone else? Or is it something that you just do out of the kindness of your soul?
9. Are there any time in the Torah that someone performed an act of kindness?
 - a) Avraham welcoming the angels
 - b) pharaoh's daughters retrieving Moshe from the Nile/basket

Story:

It once happened that Rabbi Akiva Eiger was travelling from his city to a town in order to fulfill the function of sandak [one who holds the baby during the circumcision] at a brit milah. It was the rainy season, the road was muddy and slippery, and the hour was late at night, with darkness and thick cloud all around. The wagon driver had to get down from his seat on the wagon, wade through mud up to his knees and support the wagon, so that it would not topple over. When they reached dry ground, the wagon driver went back up and sat on his seat, stomping his boots to rid them of the mud that entirely covered them. After a few moments, Rabbi Akiva handed him a pair of socks and said, "Change your socks, lest you catch cold; you're completely wet". The wagon driver did so and said, "Rabbi, you have saved my life!". With the coming of morning, Rabbi Akiva climbed down from the wagon. The driver, remembering how Rabbi Akiva had given him his socks last night, felt that he (Rabbi Akiva) was now wearing shoes without socks on his feet. He said to him, "Is it really so, rabbi? Had I known...". "So what?" interrupted Rabbi Akiva. "Is it right that I should sit with shoes and socks while you sit exposed and with wet socks?"

Questions:

What was the act of kindness in this story?

What do you think should have been done in this situation?

Should the wagon driver do anything in return for the socks?