

What It Means To Be a Giver

In an incredible story cited by Rabbi Yechiel Spero in his book, "Touched by a Story," we see how the saintly Chafetz Chaim exemplified this idea. The cold, harsh winters in Radin, Poland, home of the Chafetz Chaim, were a challenge for the poor Jews due to inadequate heating. As bad as it was at home, it was much worse outdoors. Consequently, they would remain at home, unless they had to take an occasional trip to the market.

Warm clothes were a scarce commodity. Gloves, especially were a sought after item. Once a wealthy man came to visit the Chafetz Chaim and, after spending some time with the sage, left him a precious gift: an expensive pair of fur-lined gloves. The Chafetz Chaim was not one to accept gifts, nor was he inclined to wear such fancy gloves. After seeing how much it meant to the man, the Chafetz Chaim acquiesced and accepted the gift.

A few days later, the Chafetz Chaim, accompanied by a few of his closest students, traveled by train to a neighboring town to attend an important meeting. The compartment on the train in which they sat was small and compact. The trip was short, so the Chafetz Chaim sat in his coat with his new gloves stored in his pockets. After a short while, it became stuffy in the compartment, so one of the students opened the window to let in some fresh air. The Chafetz Chaim moved to another seat, and, in the process, his coat brushed against the open window, causing one of his gloves to fall out of his pocket and out the window. A student noticed this and, when he told his rebbe, the Chafetz Chaim, to the amazement of his students, took the second glove and immediately threw it out of the window as well.

Noticing the puzzled stare of his students, he explained, "Someone is going to be walking along the tracks one day and will find the beautiful glove, but since it is a single glove, it will have very little use for him. I asked myself, what benefit would I derive from a single glove. I might as well provide another person with a pair of gloves, so at least he will benefit from them.

The Chafetz Chaim was the paradigm of the ish hachessed, man of loving kindness. His thoughts before he acted were even more impressive. He saw an opportunity to perform chesed, and he acted immediately. Wasted opportunities are lost opportunities.