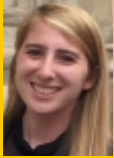


## Chesed begins at home



**Hannah Gerson**

US Chesed

In this week's parasha, Lech Lecha, God tells Avraham to leave his home and go to the land of Canaan. "Go forth from your native land... and I will make of you a great nation" (Bereishit 12:1-2). On his arrival in Canaan, and later when he moved again to a mountain east of Bet-El, Avraham pitched his tent and then built an altar. Avraham had been given this land and a promise of becoming a great nation; why does he not immediately settle there? A tent is surely temporary, for a traveller, not a settler.

To answer this question, it is important to contextualise this story. Just before we read about God's words to Avraham, we read about the

Tower of Babel. Whilst these stories have similarities, they also differ in important ways.

In both stories, the main characters travel east. However, whereas the builders of the Tower of Babel use bricks to build a city and a tower up to the sky, Avraham uses bricks to build an altar. Why? Confronted by their own impermanence and marvelling at their own creativity, the builders of the tower wanted to make a name for themselves, a legacy. Avraham, however, was not interested in his own legacy and built an altar to worship God and in doing so God made Avraham's name great. Avraham does leave a legacy - a legacy of kindness, or *chesed*. A symbol of Avraham's great *chesed* was his tent; its four openings meant that he and his wife, Sarah, were able to welcome people coming from all directions. This was a true 'open home' - not only would Avraham wait

for his guests; when guests did not arrive, he would search for people to help with food, drink and somewhere to sleep.

The Torah's messages are relevant for all Jews, at all times, from Avraham, the first Jew, to those of us living today in 5783. Not only should we open our homes like Avraham opened his tent to others; equally, we should open ourselves up for the benefit of others.

My mother always taught me that no matter how full your home might be, *chesed* meant that there was always room for one more person at the Shabbat or Yom Tov table. Real *chesed* means that we should be proactive like Avraham, we should approach people and not wait for someone to seek out or ask for an invitation.

Whether in a tent or in a building, *chesed* begins at home.

## Did you know? | **The United Synagogue have a department dedicated to practicing chesed. Here are some examples of what they do:**

- Most United Synagogue shuls have a 'Community Cares' team to look after the welfare of all their members.
- US Chesed cook 250 healthy and nutritious meals for Jewish families across London every week.
- Thanks to the United Synagogue's Essential Food Parcels scheme, the Chesed department supports 120 households per week by providing them with Kosher groceries, fresh fruit and vegetables and cleaning products.
- This year, US Chesed provided 2,050 honey cakes for elderly, bereaved and isolated members of the community.
- US Chesed along with an organisation called Jewish Visiting cover 46 hospitals to ensure that Jewish patients have access to Kosher food and rabbinical advice.
- It is important to not only help those in the Jewish community but also those in the wider community. Seven United Synagogue shuls open their doors to support countless refugees from Ukraine and asylum seekers from a total of 23 countries.

