

Kind Leadership: Shavuot and Choosing Giving Over Taking

Sulam Texts: Shavuot 2019/5779

1. Megillat Ruth 2:20.

וַתֹּאמֶר נְעֻמִי לְכַלְתָּהּ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָזַב חַסְדּוֹ אֶת־הַחַיִּים וְאֶת־הַמֵּתִים וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ נְעֻמִי קָרוֹב לָנוּ הָאִישׁ מִגְּאֻלָּנוּ הוּא:

Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “Blessed be he of the LORD, who has not failed in His kindness to the living or to the dead! “For,” Naomi explained to her daughter-in-law, “the man is related to us; he is one of our redeeming kinsmen.”

- *What is the specific blessing Naomi says about God in this passage?*
- *What does it mean for God to show “kindness to the living or to the dead”?*
- *How would you define the term “kindness,” in this context?*

2. Rabbi Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, Part 3, 53:2.

...we have explained the expression *hesed* as denoting an excess [in some moral quality]. It is especially used of extraordinary kindness. Loving-kindness is practiced in two ways: first, we show kindness to those who have no claim whatever upon us; secondly, we are kind to those to whom it is due in a greater measure than is due to them. In the inspired writings the term *hesed* occurs mostly in the sense of showing kindness to those who have no claim to it.

- *What does Maimonides identify as the two ways that loving-kindness can be practiced?*
- *What does it mean to show kindness “to those who have no claim to it”? How is this different than the other form of kindness identified by Maimonides?*

3. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, eds., *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ruth*, xlix.

Benevolence towards others and toward the world generates good acts even when they are not earned, and it certainly demands good acts when they are. But sometimes this force weakens and even fades away. Then, both we and God need to forget about the idea of measure for measure and simply perform good deeds--acts of random lovingkindness.

- *What do Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky see as the generative power of benevolence towards others?*
- *Why do you think that a person needs to show benevolence even when that kindness is not earned?*

4. Adam M. Grant, Ph.D., *Give and Take: Why Helping Others Drives Our Success*, 5.

...givers and takers aren't distinguished by how much they donate to charity or the compensation that they command from their employers. Rather, givers and takers differ in their attitudes and actions toward other people. If you're a taker, you help others strategically, when the benefits to you outweigh the personal costs. If you're a giver, you might use a different cost-benefit analysis: you help whenever the benefits to others exceed the personal costs.

- *What does Adam Grant identify as the key difference between givers and takers?*
- *Can you think of a time in your congregational leadership when you acted as a giver? As a taker?*

Final Question: As we approach Shavuot, how might you use the holiday as an opportunity for your synagogue to notice moments when a taking mentality dominates the leadership thinking, and transform that taking language into a giving mentality of leadership?