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The Difference Between “Chessed” and “Gomel Chessed”

"גומל חסדים טובים" - We daven in Shemoneh Esrei, *“Gomel Chassadim Tovim.”*

What is the meaning of *chassadim* (kindness) and what is *chassadim tovim* (good kindness)? If Hashem is kind, why do we also say that He does kindnesses that are “good”? Are there any kindnesses that aren’t good?

The answer to this lies in the following.

The Gemara says that the Jewish people contain three good *middos* (character traits) – compassion, shame, and loving kindness (*gomlei chassadim*). It is understandable that compassion and shame are called *middos*, but how is kindness a *middah*? Kindness are **acts** that we do, but how is it a ***middah***? Yet, the Sages say that kindness is a *middah*, not merely an act.

What does it mean to be *“gomel” chessed*? There is *chessed*, and then there is *“gomel” chessed*. **Chessed** implies when we simply do an **act** of kindness. But to be **gomel chessed** is to use the ***middah*** of one’s soul that is *chessed*. When a person is *gomel chessed*, it is a deeper *chessed* – it is to do something for another person with the understanding that “Whatever is mine, is also his.”

A person must know that whatever he has is not only here for himself to use. Rav Chaim Volozhiner writes (in the introduction to *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*) that “A person was not created for himself, but only in order to help others.” This described what it means to be *“gomel chessed”* – to realize what life is about: that life is entirely about helping others.

The *chessed* that Hashem does for us is thus *gemillas chessed*, not just *chessed*. This is because whatever Hashem does for us, He has no intention of receiving anything in return. He is kind to us unconditionally. This is the meaning of **גומל חסדים טובים**.

Living For Others

In our own soul, there is a power to have *gemillas chassadim* – to realize that whatever a person has must be used to help others. It is a trait of our soul, not just an act that we do.

Some people think that the depth of *chessed* \ kindness is about love, *ahavah*. This is true, but there is a deeper reason of why we should do *chessed*; according to this understanding, a person can only give to others when he loves them. This is true, but there is more depth to kindness.

The depth of kindness goes even further than love. It means for a person to feel that one's entire existence was created in order to help others! It is an attitude of "What's mine isn't mine" - therefore, I must be kind to others.

It is written, "*I am asleep but my heart is awake*" - the Sages said that the words "I am asleep" applies to the *mitzvos* (that people are asleep from doing the *mitzvos*) and "my heart is awake" applies to doing *chessed*. This especially applies to our generation: our hearts are very awake in this generation to doing *chessed*. There is a lot of *chessed* in the world. Baruch Hashem. What is motivating us to do all this *chessed*, however? Are we doing it mechanically, or to get reward? This is not real *chessed*. It's self-serving.

Real *chessed* seems to come from our love for others, but the more subtle understanding is like how Yosef took care of the entire Egypt; he didn't live for himself and realized that he needs to give to others, and he felt that this was his whole existence.

When a person does *chessed* - is he doing it to get reward, or to help others? If a person is doing *chessed* because he wants to be rewarded in the Next World, this is not *chessed*, because it is self-serving; it is like how a gentile does *chessed*. Our Sages state that the gentiles do *chessed* entirely for themselves.

How indeed is *chessed* of a Jew different than a non-Jew's *chessed*? The answer is: there is *chessed* among the non-Jews, but *gemillas chessed* is only in a Jew's soul. (If a non-Jew ever does *gemillas chessed*, it is only if he is affected by the spirituality of a Jew). *Gemillas chessed* is to realize that one does not for himself. One who lives for himself is living for his desires; the way he is living his life will be a barrier that holds him back from holiness.

When one reaches the deep recognition (not just intellectually) in his heart, that he does not live for himself but that he exists for others - he has reached the power of *gemillas Chassadim* within himself.

Let us reflect into how we can utilize the potential of our *gemillas chassadim*.

When We Want To Give, But Others Don't Want To Accept

Hashem established in Creation to bestow good upon creation, and that *middah* is stamped into our *neshamah*. However, our body causes us to be selfish and live for ourselves. One whose body controls him cannot have *gemillas chassadim*. One who reveals his soul can do *gemillas chassadim*.

Besides for the fact that the materialism of our body can prevent our soul from utilizing its power to bestow good upon others, there is another obstacle that prevents us from bestowing good upon others: Even if you are in touch with your soul and you wish completely to bestow good upon another, it can be prevented because the other person doesn't want to receive what you want to give.

When you are trying to bestow good on another's soul, it might not happen, because if the other person is entrenched in the materialism and in bad middos, his body is preventing you from giving of your soul to his.

Why Don't People Smile Back?

There is a famous rule that people reciprocate your own feelings, and this is a possuk in Mishlei: "*Just as water reflects a face to a face, so does the heart of man reflect one to another.*" It works like a reflection. A person "reflects" back to you when you want to be good to him; the way a person feels about someone else is the way the other person feels toward him. If a person likes another person, the other will like him back, and vice versa.

That is the way things are supposed to be, but this is only true when there is a true reflection – and only “clear water” can give a reflection. If a person’s “water” is black, dirty, and murky, he cannot reflect back the feelings of another person, just as dirty water cannot give back a reflection.

Therefore, even if one wants to bestow good towards someone else, the other person’s body can oppose what the giver is trying to give him, and it can prevent him from giving to him. This is due to the bad *middos* that can be present in the one I am trying to give to, and since bad *middos* are rooted in the physical body, the body of the other person is getting in the way of me trying to give to him.

There is a deep term discussed by our Rabbis known as *panim v’achor* – when a person receives *achor* (the back) after he gives of his own *panim* (face) to another. This is when I want to smile at someone, I want to give him some *he’aras panim* (an illuminating countenance) but he doesn’t even give me his face to me. Instead of giving his face to me, he turns to the side, and I get his neck instead of his face. Instead of reciprocating my *panim*, he gives me his *achor*. Sometimes a person simply doesn’t show face to others and he doesn’t smile at others, and that is why he isn’t giving to others. But sometimes, a person can want very much to give to another and reveal love and connection with another, but the other person refuses the connection; this is due to the bad *middos* or materialism of the other person’s body that is getting in the way.

Any person with even a little sensitivity sees this going on every day. A person can smile at others, yet he doesn’t get a smile back. It is often because other people, who are wrapped up in their physicality, don’t want to receive the connection that we wish to have with them!

If a person wants to give something physical to other, he can give it even if the other isn’t giving him face. The reason for this is because something that is external and superficial can be received by the other even if the other is being superficial. But when one wants to give another of his soul, like when he wants to give another a feeling of love, of connection, and the other refuses the connection – the one trying to give won’t be able to give him of his soul, because giving of the soul requires the other soul to be prepared to receive what is being given.

When a person is ready to give *he’aras panim* [an “illuminating countenance”, otherwise known as a smile] to others and he wants to bestow good upon others, many times, he discovers that the other person doesn’t want to accept the connection. Maybe for a little bit of time the other person will be ready to accept the connection, but only for a fleeting amount of time.

One of the Roshei Yeshivos, before he opened up a yeshivah, consulted with a renowned Mashgiach (spiritual mentor) for advice. The Mashgiach told him that he should be aware of three key points, and one of them was the following: That even when you invest so much in your students, and you give and give to them, still, the students might act ungrateful towards you and not realize what you are doing for them. Therefore, don’t become upset when you see this happen, because it is to be expected, for it is unfortunately a nature in people that they aren’t prepared to realize the good that others are doing for them.

Self-Absorbed In Spirituality

If a person lives entirely for himself, even if he is immersed in Torah and spiritual growth all day, but he’s self-absorbed, then he is still not living a life of holiness! He is very far from it. A person who lives only for himself, even if he is very spiritual, is simply not bothered by the kind of pain we are describing, [because he does not have emotional sensitivity, due to the fact that he’s not in touch with his soul]. He doesn’t go through the kind of painful feeling we are describing here, but, that itself should be painful – more than anything! It shows that something is really missing in himself.

A Real Reciprocal Relationship Is Rare

If a person is *zoche* to have a true friend who reciprocates the warm feelings back – he is very fortunate.

Many times, though, it is not a true feeling between them, and it is just in one's imagination. Even if he's not imagining it, the other person often will lose his reciprocal feelings.

Filling The Void

How indeed can we leave in a world in which we often cannot bestow good upon others because they are refusing? Love is the natural expression of the soul, and when a person lives a truly spiritual kind of life, his love will flow from him naturally. How can we deal with the pain we have from others who refuse to have a connection with us?

If a person is not familiar with this kind of pain we have described here, it shows that he hasn't yet revealed the depth of the power of love; or even worse than that.

Again, let us emphasize that *gemillas chassadim* is not merely to do actions of *chessed*; it is to give to others because one wants to radiate outward to others, to give to others out of *he'aras panim*.

The Source of The Pain

The first aspect of this pain is to realize: it is true pain of our very soul. It is the pain of the *Shechinah* in exile. It only bothers one who lives an internal kind of life.

The pain we are describing is not referring to when we don't get what we want. We are referring to the very inner will of the soul, which naturally wants to give *he'aras panim* to others, and when others don't want that from us, it pains our very soul.

When a person does *chessed* for others and he doesn't get back *he'aras panim* from others, and he's bothered by this, he might calm himself down by reminding himself that Hashem will reward him in the Next World for being kind; but this is a superficial reaction.

A person needs to seek a truer solution to the pain. Our soul longs for *he'aras panim*, as we see from our prayer in *Biras Kohanim*, that we ask Hashem to bestow us of His *he'aras panim*. It is a need that we cannot suffocate. We will have to get it from somewhere.

Why Do You Want People To Smile At You?

First of all, we will point out that that some people long for others to smile at them and give the *he'aras panim* (a radiant countenance) and that others should say "Good Morning" to them, because they are simply depressed, or because they need recognition from others. This is a need that comes from the *nefesh habehaimis* (the animalistic layer of the soul), and is not the kind of pain we are discussing. It is merely anxiety that comes from a need to feel recognition; it has nothing to do with what we are talking about.

We are talking about a different kind of pain, a deeper kind of pain that is entirely spiritual: when a person has pain because no one tells him "Good Morning" because he wants to feel **connection** with others, which is an inherent need of the soul. He wants to be connected with that power of *he'aras panim* in a person, which is a power of the soul – and not because he wants to **get** a "Good Morning" from others. He doesn't want to live in a cold world where each person only cares for himself!

When a person has pain from others' coldness, it is a true longing and desire of the soul – a longing for the kind of life that is in the World to Come.

The Solution

If a person longs for *he'aras panim* for others, although this is a deep need coming from our inner soul, still, it is terribly painful to live like this. A person will keep waiting his whole life for others to smile at him and greet him, and this is not a way to live. We cannot wait for others to come greet us. People are waiting and waiting for others to give them *he'aras panim*, in a world where everyone is bogged down and too busy to give it.

Instead of waiting to receive it from this world, we can get our need for *he'aras panim* fulfilled when we **long for the *he'aras panim* of Hashem**. This will give our soul what it needs and then our soul will feel calmed.

Of course, because we live in a physical body, we won't be entirely satisfied if we just get our soul's needs fulfilled. We are clothed by a physical body, therefore, we will still want people to come give us *he'aras panim*. We cannot deny our emotional needs for attention from others. But if we acquire *he'aras panim* in our soul, we will definitely acquire a degree of *he'aras panim* which will calm us down a bit.

Awaiting A Smile From Others: A Need That Can Never Be Filled

When a person wishes that other people give him *he'aras panim*, and he wishes very much that he could get it, the simple advice that people try is to put on smile at others, in the hope that eventually, everyone else will smile at him back.

But we must know the following: there is a large amount of souls today who are from the "Erev Rav", and souls of Erev Rav will never give you real *he'aras panim*. Even if an "Erev Rav" soul smiles at you for 1000 years, he will never be able to give you a true *he'aras panim* that comes from the purity of the soul. Only a Jew's soul can give you real *he'aras panim*, and if you give another Jew *he'aras panim*, you might be able to penetrate the obstacles covering his soul and perhaps he'll smile back at you; but it's not definite.

So the advice of "smiling at others so that others will smile back at you in return" is not an inner kind of solution. The yearning that our soul has for *he'aras panim* simply cannot be fulfilled by people on this world!

The He'aras Panim of Hashem

So how indeed can we get our need for *he'aras panim*? Again, we aren't speaking about a person who is depressed and he needs others to smile at him. We are speaking about the inner will of the soul for *he'aras panim*; how can we get it?

If one is always awaiting the *he'aras panim* of others, he lives a life of pain, as we explained. What, then, is the advice we can do?

The answer lies in the understanding of the words, "*Gomel Chassadim Tovim*". It means to use the middah of *gemillas chassadim* in your soul.

In the end of Shemoneh Esrei, we daven, "*For in the light of Your Face, which You gave us.*" If we feel *he'aras panim* from Hashem, we are able to have a degree of *he'aras panim* even as we live on This World.

This really cannot be described in words. But the soul in us, which recognizes its Creator, can long for that *he'aras panim*, and through the longing, it can get it - even if it's not completely.

"*Gomel Chassadim Tovim*" refers to the *middah* of *he'aras panim* of Hashem; (and that *middah* can be extended to others when we smile at others). It is a *middah* of our soul.

One who feels this *he'aras panim* of Hashem is not having aware of it intellectually; it is an experience of the soul.

One who doesn't long for this *he'aras panim* lives in cold world. On the other hand, one who longs for *he'aras panim* from other people lives a life of pain. One who receives his *he'aras panim* from Hashem, though, will have a calmed soul, and he will get his needs for *he'aras panim*, even though it's not complete (because he still has a body, which can't gain from the soul's experience). And in this way, a person will even find that he has the strength in himself to smile even at others who don't smile at him.

The depth of *gemillas chassadaim* - to give *he'aras panim* to others - is as the Sages said, that "A person who shows the white of his teeth to his friend is greater than giving him milk." This is not referring to the need for others to smile at us, which comes from our *nefesh habehaimis*; it is a longing in the soul to live in a world of *he'aras panim*.

In Conclusion

I hope that your hearts have actually become opened to hearing about this; otherwise, they will just sound like sparse, intellectual definitions.

May we merit the *he'aras panim* of Hashem - and through that, we will be able to give the complete *he'aras panim* to others.

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