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## Tefillah - 032 Our Middos Enable Hashem's Middos

### **Hashem's "Might" - His Attribute of Judgment**

The second blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* starts with "אתה גיבור לעולם" "You, Hashem, are eternally mighty." Later in the blessing we praise Hashem for His kindness and mercy, that He supports the world through His kindness and revives the dead. What does the beginning of the blessing have to do with the end of the blessing? What does praising Hashem's strength have to do with His kindness and mercy upon Creation?

The Midrash reveals that first Hashem wanted to create the world with *middas hadin* (the attribute of judgment) and He saw the world wouldn't last, so He "included" in it the *middas harachamim* (attribute of mercy). The Sages also state that the way a person acts is the way Heaven deals with him. If someone acts merciful, Hashem is merciful towards him; if he is not merciful to others, he does not merit Hashem's mercy.

However, just because Hashem created the world with *middas harachamim* doesn't mean that Hashem stopped using the *middas hadin*. The *middas harachamim* was "included" into Creation, but it didn't cancel out the *middas hadin*.

That is the meaning of אתה גיבור - first we praise Hashem's *gevurah* strength, which is describing His *middas hadin*, and then we praise His kindness and compassion, which is His *middas harachamim*.

### **Our Middos - The Tool to Receive Hashem's Sustenance**

There are all kinds of *middos*. Our "*middos*", our behaviors, are not the same as the 13 "*middos*" of Hashem and the 13 "*middos*" which the Torah are expounded with. Rather, our *middos* are a tool to contain the 13 *middos* of Hashem and His Torah. If we have good *middos*, Heaven deals us with accordingly, as we brought earlier from Chazal.

Our avodah with our *middos* is not just to fix our bad *middos* and use our good *middos*. That is just the superficial perspective. It is also superficial if a person thinks that "Hashem will hopefully purify my *middos*." Fixing our *middos* is not just another subject we add to our list of learning Torah and doing mitzvos. Rather, it is part of the general picture of our life's mission; it is not just another subject of our life.

To illustrate, when we are missing something in the house, we still realize that we have a house, and it is just that the house is missing something. If the house is missing the door, this is unpleasant, but the house is still livable. But if our house is missing a roof, we are not just missing a roof; we basically

don't have a house. Without a roof, a house is unlivable.

Fixing our *middos* is therefore not just "another" part of our life. When a person doesn't take out the garbage, the house begins to smell bad. Neglecting to take out the garbage is not just a lack of a certain detail in one's life. It ruins the whole house. In the same way, fixing our *middos* is necessary in order to live our life. It is not just another one of our obligations in life.

Through having good *middos*, Hashem's good *middos* are able to shine through to us, and then our Torah learning will look different. When a person learns Torah but he doesn't work on his *middos*, it might seem like he's learning Torah, and he's just missing good *middos*. But the truth is, his bad *middos* are preventing him from having success in his Torah learning. Without good *middos*, a person doesn't receive Hashem's mercy.

All success that comes to us can only come through Hashem's *middos* which are being channeled down to us from Heaven. Anything we see or sense can only be enabled through Hashem's *middos*, which keep the world going. Therefore, if a person doesn't seek to purify his *middos*, he is missing the tool to receive Hashem's *middos*, and his life will be very shaky.

Whatever we do, without exception, depends on Hashem's *middos*. Therefore, if we do not have the tool to receive Hashem's *middos* - in other words, if we don't have good *middos* - we won't succeed in our life.

When a person gets angry, he can feel it very strongly. But there is more to the *middos* than the emotional response that we feel from them. A good *middah* means that Hashem's good *middos* are being channeled into us, and a bad *middah* is the absence of this.

It is not only our *middos* which get affected by this concept, but even our actions can only be enabled by Hashem's *middos*. When we eat breakfast, we can only do so because of Hashem's *middos* of mercy that allow us to do anything and have it good. (The source for this concept is in *sefer Chovos HaLevovos (Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh, Chapter 5)*)

We must come to an inner recognition that our *middos* are constantly at work, and therefore, we must constantly work on them to fix them.

If a person's *middos* are left unfixed, he won't be able to properly understand the Torah. Working on our *middos* is thus not a 'separate' issue from our Torah learning. It has direct ramifications on our understanding of our learning. Everything is enabled through *middos*, thus, we cannot succeed in our learning if we don't have good *middos*. Our tefillah and our chessed as well is affected by our *middos*, because every single action we do is affected by the *middos*.

If a person doesn't work to fix his *middos*, he might think he understands his learning, but his learning is all superficial. His Torah learning is like Achitophel and Doeg, of whom the Sages said that they only learned Torah externally and superficially. Bilaam also knew a lot of Heavenly secrets, but all of his vast knowledge about spirituality was impure, because he did not purify his character.

If Hashem's *middos* are working for us, we will succeed with our actions and understand our Torah learning. But this is only if we have good *middos*, when we seek to purify our *middos*.

### ***In Conclusion***

This is the meaning of *אתה גיבור* - when we realize the *middas hadin* of Hashem, that Hashem only sustains us when *we act accordingly* [by having good *middos*] we can then merit His mercy, which we describe later on in the blessing.

The Vilna Gaon said that if a person doesn't break his bad *middos*, there is no point in living. What does this mean? Isn't the main thing on this world to learn Torah? But the depth of this is that if a person doesn't fix his *middos*, he doesn't really understand the Torah and he can't be close to Hashem. Maybe he will know a lot of Torah, intellectually, but he doesn't really understand it, because without good *middos*, a person is missing the tools that enable him to understand the Torah.

May we merit to fix our *middos*, whereupon Hashem shine His *middos* into us. May we merit to connect ourselves and cleave to the *middos* of Hashem, which will give the tools to reach any success.

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**Source:** <http://bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-032-our-middos-enable-hashem's-middos>