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[Home](#) > Bilvavi Part 3 - Section 4 Kindness

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Bilvavi 3, Section 4: Kindness (5 chapters)

Section Four: Kindness: Chapter One

Six Reasons Why We Are Kind

Is today's generation practicing real kindness?

Our generation has merited to do a lot of acts of *chesed* (kindness). There are even many types of *chesed* organizations (*gemachim*) in which you can borrow anything without charge.

At first glance, this seems like perfect kindness. But upon more reflection, we will see what it means to practice true kindness, and we will see what is lacking in the kindness of today's generation.

Six levels of kindness

At first we will establish the six levels of kindness and explain each one.

- 1) There is kindness that we do by rote.
- 2) There is kindness that we give only in order to receive something back.
- 3) There is a kindness that we give to our children and those who are close to us, because we love to give to them.
- 4) There is a type of kindness when a person recognizes in his mind that this is the right thing to do and therefore he gives to others.

5) There is kindness when people give because it is in their nature to give.

6) There is a type of kindness that people give, simply because Hashem created a person to give to others.

We will explain each one, and each person should determine for himself which type of kindness he is practicing.

Kindness by rote

Let's say a person grew up in a religious household where acts of kindness were commonplace. It became part of his own nature to be kind, and it is a part of his life to be kind; it is ingrained in him from how he grew up to always do *chessed*. However, such a person never contemplated its depth: why do I have to be kind? What should I feel when I am doing an act of kindness?

Kindness without such thoughts is just acting robotic (*melumadah* - "by rote").

It could even be that a person is in charge of wonderful *chessed* organizations that do great acts of kindness, and he is engrossed in it many hours of the week. But it can all be just by rote - mechanically and with no inner meaning to it.

Giving in order to receive

Another type of kindness is when people give to others -- in order to receive.

There are many examples of this type. Reuven's neighbor is knocking on his door and he needs 200 dollars. Reuven thinks to himself, "Tomorrow I also need to borrow money; if I don't let him lend me the money now, I won't feel right asking him tomorrow to lend me the money, so I'll lend him the money now..." If he lends him the money now, he is doing kindness by lending him, but his whole intention is so that tomorrow he can get a favor and borrow money from him. It is not an act of giving, but it is more like a simple business deal.

Another example: a person is praying, and a collector is around to receive charity handouts. He doesn't want to really give anything, but he sees everyone else giving, so he gives also - out of shame if he doesn't give. So he is only giving charity to save himself the shame that people shouldn't think he's stingy. Even though he is giving, his intention is not at all to give, but just so that he won't look stingy. So really he isn't giving at all; he just doesn't want to feel like a bad person.

There are many such examples in which we act very giving and it appears that we are being very kind, but it's all based on external factors, and not because of a will to truly give.

Giving to those close to us - because we love them

A third type of kindness practiced is when we give to our children and those who are close to us, because we love them.

Why do we only naturally give to our children and close ones? Because we feel that our children are part of us; so when we give to them, we are giving to the part of ourselves that is in them. This is not yet true giving; it's giving to oneself.

There are people who "give" and give their entire lives, but only to their children. If you would ask them for a donation, they will respond that they already have financial responsibilities to their married children. Such people, who give only to their children, think that they are "supporting Torah". They never stop to think that all their giving is really steeped in egoism. They have no desire to really give; they only give to those whom they love and are close to, because it feels like they are giving to themselves.

Giving intelligently

There is a fourth type of kindness: Some people give because they realize in their minds that it is "the right thing to do".

For example, a person is sitting and contemplating the purpose of life, and he comes to the conclusion that the world stands on three pillars: Torah, prayer, and kindness. Therefore he makes sure to connect to these pillars, from an intelligent viewpoint. But he still doesn't feel a love for it in his heart; it is just an intellectual thing.

It is definitely better to think this way than all the other types of kindness that were mentioned, because the other three types were not called giving at all, while this category is indeed a true act of giving. But it is only a mere knowledge to the person - "*And you will know today.*", and it lacks the heart of the matter, "*And you will place it on your heart.*" He is lacking the true approach to doing kindness, for his kindness only stems from his intellect, and his heart isn't it.

Natural givers

A fifth type of kindness we see is in some people is that they give because they are natural givers by nature. These people have been born with a gift from Hashem: a “good heart.” It is in their nature to love to nourish others with goodness. What could be missing here?

But the truth is that a lot is still missing from the picture. **Hashem** is missing from the picture!

We will explain. Everyone’s purpose is to act in the ways of Hashem, because that is His will. It is not enough to just do actions, even though one enjoys doing them. Of course, a person has to love doing *mitzvos*, but there are two conditions for this.

- 1) That he do it because it is Hashem’s will.
- 2) That he loves to do it.

If a person only fulfills one of these conditions, he is missing a lot. In the next chapter we will explain the sixth category of kindness, which is the true type of kindness.

Chapter Two

The True Kindness

True kindness: Giving for the sake of Hashem’s will

Now we will explain what true kindness is. True kindness is when a person is good to others because he recognizes that his purpose on this world is to be a giver, and not a taker. This is why Hashem created a person. Anything that a person is does is because it is the will of Hashem that he should do it; not out of fear of being punished, or because he enjoys doing it, but because this is how is serving Hashem. It is from a recognition that “I am servant, and I do whatever Hashem wants, and Hashem wanted me to be good to His creations; therefore I must do so.”

The difference between Jewish kindness and non-Jewish kindness

This is the fundamental difference between a Jew's act of kindness with a non-Jew's kindness. Non-Jews also do kindness. If you would ask them why, they would say because it is good and proper. It has nothing to do with Hashem; it is something which the intellect obligates any normal person to do, when you think about it. It makes sense to be nice to people.

A Jew's attitude, though, is supposed to be much different. The Torah's reason for kindness has much more meaning to it. A Jew doesn't act kind simply because his intellect tells him to, nor because of his feelings to do so. He does it because he knows that there is a Creator, and he is His servant. A true Jew's thinking is, "I am serving Him, by doing kindness, because that is His will." A Jew serves Hashem; he is not merely following his mind or feelings.

The book *Nefesh HaChaim* writes in the introduction, "This is the entire existence of a person: he is not created for himself, but only in order to help others, however he can." The entire purpose of life is to be a giver, and this is what our lives are all about.

How can I help others?

We will say a practical example of this. Rabbeinu Yonah writes (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 3:53), "A person is obligated to think of ways of how can help his friend, and this one of the main acts of kindness, for it says, "*Oil and incense give joy to the heart...*" (*Mishlei* 27: 9).

We find similarly in the words of the *Mesillas Yescharim* (Chap. 19), "A person should always bestow good to others and not be bad to them, in his body, money, and soul. He can help with others with his body by trying to help others in whatever he can and ease their burden. This is to bear the yoke of his friend. If his friend suffers any physical damage, and he can eliminate or remove it, he should exert himself to do it. He should help him with his money by helping him with whatever he has and save him from damage as much as he can. Surely he must make sure that no damage result from him to any individual or group. Even if right now there is no incoming damage, he should remove anything that may affect him. The Sages say, "Your friend's money should be precious on you like your own." One can do kindness with his soul to others by doing anything to your friend that makes them feel good, whether it is honoring them or other things. It is a pious act to do whatever one knows that gives enjoyment to his friend."

The Alter of Slobodka: A Life of Giving

There is a story that is a great description of kindness, told of the Alter of Slobodka. "All his thoughts were on how could do kindness with people. He was ready to give himself up for anyone's good. He would look for opportunities to do kindness. Anyone who would come to him would be showered with all his goodness. If he did not have the opportunity to do a kindness, he would express it with his mouth: he would bless anyone, and pray for everyone's peace."

One who goes in this way will eventually open his heart to another, and he will begin to love another; not merely because it is a truthful thing to do, Hashem's will - but that it should be second nature to want to give to another.

But we shouldn't forget that we need these two things together - a love to give, and a will to give because it is Hashem's will. The main thing is that the reason why we are giving is not just because of a love to give, but from the recognition and the feeling that we are doing so because it is Hashem's will.

It is a big deal, though, to get our feelings to become in line with Hashem's will. A person shouldn't just do things because Hashem wants it and just that! His feelings also have to be happy that he is doing this, and he should love what Hashem's will is. It shouldn't just be Hashem's will alone to him; it should become part of his nature. These are deep words.

(In a deeper sense: from the viewpoint of free will (*bechirah*), a person should do so because it is Hashem's will. And from a viewpoint of knowledge (*yediah*), a person should do so because it is rooted in him to so...)

In the next chapter we will see how to do true kindness.

Chapter Three

How To Practice True Kindness

How to achieve true kindness

In this chapter we will explain how to achieve true kindness.

In anything involved when it comes to serving Hashem, a person has to fulfill the *possuk*, “*And you will know today, and you will place it on your heart.*” A person first has to clarify in his mind what he is doing, and why. Only after this can he internalize it in his heart.

The same goes for kindness. First a person should understand well what kindness is, and why he does kindness. We will now explain what kindness is, and how to do it.

Defining kindness

The concept of kindness is that a person bestows good to another; it can be physically, financially, or spiritually, as stated before in *Mesillas Yesharim*. But there are two types of bestowing good: compassion (*rachamim*) and kindness (*chessed*). Compassion is to give to another because the other is lacking something. Kindness is to give even if he isn't lacking; it is to give just to make another's situation better in any way, and it is thus a greater level of bestowing good upon others.

The necessity for kindness

Why do we have to do kindness? There are two answers. One is for someone who serves Hashem not for His own sake, but for other motives, and the other answer is for someone who serves Hashem for His own sake.

First we will address someone who serves Hashem not for His own sake. Why do we have to practice kindness? This itself has two reasons.

1) It is like any other *mitzvah*; one will receive reward if he does it.

2) A deeper reason is to raise a person's level, so that he should be treated better in Heaven's records.

The Sages say, "In the way a person measures others, he is treated." If a person doesn't do any kindness and never goes above his ordinary obligations, Heaven will judge him the same way and not be kind to him. But if he is truly good to others, Heaven will react accordingly to him, and be good to him even if he is undeserving. So someone who gives and bestows upon others opens up for himself the gates of heaven, and it is a wonderful way to abundance from HASHEM, even if he lacks enough merits.

By doing kindness one can receive abundance

We explained before that there is kindness, and then there is compassion. Compassion is when someone sees his friend suffering, and it is hard for him to see him like this; therefore he gives to him. But kindness is to give to another even if he isn't lacking.

Someone who has compassion to another will get Heavenly compassion in return, but this has its limits. Only when something is hurting him will he receive Heavenly compassion, for that is how he acts to others. But someone who practices kindness in addition to compassion will receive Heavenly kindness; he will receive abundance even if he doesn't need it. Is there anyone who wouldn't want this??

But it should be noted that these words only apply to someone who serves Hashem not for His sake, and now we will explain the level of one who serves Hashem for His sake – *lishmah*.

Why should we do kindness for HASHEM's sake?

To give to others for the sake of Heaven means to **give for the sake of giving**. It is to not await something in return, "kindness of truth" (*chessed shel emes*). True kindness is to not await any reward for the act.

Why should I do this? Why should I just give if I won't receive anything back?

There are two answers for this. One answer has to do with the intellect, and the other has to do with the heart.

From the viewpoint of the intellect, the answer is as follows. We know that there is a *mitzvah* to do kindness for others. A person is obligated in the Creator's commandments.

But there is a deeper aspect, and it is a viewpoint from our heart. The Sages say, "Cleave to His traits. Just as He is compassionate, so should you be compassionate, etc." The first trait of Hashem is that He bestows good on others. It is the reason of creation, because His whole desire is to bestow good on His creations. So if someone wants to cleave to the traits of Hashem, he should first cleave to the trait which is the main focus of life: kindness to others.

Although a person should cleave to all of Hashem's traits, this is the main trait that he must cleave to all his life. Just as when Hashem does kindness He doesn't await any reward in return, so must a person do true kindness and not want anything in return. He should do kindness for the sake of being kind; this is the way for one to cleave to the Creator.

The soul longs to give

Until now we explained what kindness is, on an intellectual knowledge – something which our mind can know of as a fact, but not necessarily internalized in our heart. Now we will explain it in a way that is only reached upon internalizing what kindness is in our heart - how to be kind out of the pure goodness of one's heart.

The true, internal reason to do kindness is because the soul has a longing to give to others. This is because the soul is a part of G-d from Above, and has in it imbibed traits of the Creator. Our soul therefore resembles the longing of Hashem to give to creation. When a person reveals his soul, he looks for ways to give. In doing so he is like Avraham our forefather, who was always looking for guests in every situation. (To know how to reach the soul, see *Section I, Ladder of Growth*).

In the next chapter we will explain how a person can actually work to internalize these matters in his heart.

Chapter Four

Practical Ways To Become Kind

Practical ways to do kindness

In this chapter we will explain how to take what we know in our minds and to internalize them into our heart. We need to give a few examples in order to feel what it means to truly give, and to give for the sake of giving.

Kindness with neighbors

1. A person often lives in an apartment building, and he has a next-door- neighbor. One should set aside some time to think, and reflect: "What can I do for my neighbor? Is there something I can help him with? Does he have where to learn?"
2. Does he have a job? If he doesn't, maybe you can help him find a job.
3. If he has children, one should think: does he need help in raising his children? Are they all taken care of properly?
4. So should a person reflect, on all details of life, and maybe he will find that his neighbor indeed lacks something vital and that he should be helped somehow.
5. A person should also wonder if his neighbor is happy enough. Maybe he can strengthen him by talking to him sometimes.
6. Besides for offering ways to help him physically, you should make sure that he is well spiritually. Is his spiritual situation doing okay? If not, is there a way how I can help him? After thinking about this, one should reflect that maybe his neighbor does indeed need spiritual help, even if he is religious and keeps the Torah and does mitzvos; if he is a man or woman, maybe his\her faith could use some strengthening, and if she is a woman, maybe she could use some help in becoming more modest (If you're a woman who can help her out an encourage her). There is no greater kindness than to help someone in spiritual matters. Someone who helps another in material matters helps only for a short time, while someone who helps another in spiritual matters does a kindness with him eternally.

Kindness with your wife

2. A person lives with his wife, so if a person wants to work on kindness, he should first practice improving kindness toward his wife, before anyone else. (However, a person should not loaf around in his house just to do kindness with her; the point is that one's wife comes first before anyone else). One has to reflect on what his wife is lacking. He shouldn't have to wait for her to need him and only then help her; one has to set aside some time to think how he can do goodness with her. Think: What is she lacking? Does she have all her needs being met? First a person should think what she does from morning to night, and go through all the details of her schedule, and see if maybe she is missing something. Then he should think, maybe she needs new clothing, or other things that a woman needs. He should reflect on details in her life and see if she has everything she needs.

After he reflects on her material needs, he should think about her spiritual needs. A husband should think: "Is my wife happy with life? From where does my wife derive her pleasure from? Is it hard for her to bring up the children and run the house?" He should help her if she needs it.

All these things a person needs to think about, **before** the problems start - not because it is better to think about it to prevent problems, but because he should want to do kindness with his closest person possible - his wife!

Someone who is kind only to strangers, but not to his own wife, is not really kind. True kindness begins in the house, and only then can it spread outwards.

Kindness with a chavrusa

3. One who has a *chavrusa* (study partner) should think that his *chavrusa* is not just a learning partner. A *chavrusa* is mainly someone that one shares a relationship just in learning, but although the main thing is to learn with your *chavrusa*, there is supposed to be a personal connection to the other and to take a true interest in him. There should be a real feeling of caring toward a *chavrusa*.

If it becomes known to a person that his *chavrusa* is having difficulty in anything, he should immediately think how he could help him, and that he is personally responsible to help him. Even if one's *chavrusa* doesn't have difficulties, he should think how he can benefit him, and how much he can still help him in some way.

Kindness with anyone you meet

4. With anyone a person meets, one should try to show a pleasant looking face, take an interest in his situation, ask about his welfare, and try to compliment him with true good things about him.

Compliments have to be given sincerely. Don't tell someone compliments that aren't true. He will know that what you are telling him isn't true, and he will then not believe any compliment you give him.

Try to show him the good things in his situation and make him view the "cup" as "half full" rather than "half empty", and in general, give him over a good and positive feeling.

If in middle of conversing with him you see that he needs something, help him, and do whatever you can to help.

However, you should know that the biggest kindness you can do for someone is to help him in spiritual matters. You should try to strengthen one's simple faith (*emunah peshutah*) and his other spiritual matters. You should help him in both physical and spiritual matters. But there is no bigger kindness than helping him spiritually.

We will mention a short comment. When it comes to kindness, a person needs to be careful not to become immersed in other people's lives. The point should be for one's personal growth, in developing his own soul - and not to become caught up in other peoples' personal lives.

Chapter Five

Sacrificing for Others

Self-sacrifice to do kindness

After a person works on how to be good to those that he meets, and he becomes used to helping others the whole day, he should now progress to a higher level: to be self-sacrificing for another (*mesirus nefesh*).

R' Yechezkel Levenstein on how to reach this level

We will quote for this the words of Rav Yechezkel Levenstein (*Ohr Yechezkel: Middos*, p. 170): “How can a person come to this level of having self-sacrifice for another? The only way is at a time when he loves to do kindness. Loving kindness is to worry for a friend even if he doesn’t need something; it comes from a burning desire to bestow good on another, and this is included in “loving your friend as yourself”. A person should be self-sacrificing physically for his friend, and it is really very difficult to reach this level. How can a person ever reach it? It must be that only if a person ascends above his nature, he can reveal the hidden internal part of him, which is a Godly piece of Above.”

Nullifying our personal interests for others

We see from his words that in order to reach the level of self-sacrifice for another, a person needs to reach the Godly part of him, his soul, and in it lies the power.

(In the first section, Ladder of Growth, we spoke of how a person can reach his soul, and we spoke of this level of self-sacrifice, only after writing about the level of serving HASHEM for His own sake. The reason is because only someone who serves HASHEM for His own sake can reach his soul, and only then can he be self-sacrificing for another.)

However, even someone who hasn’t yet reached the level of serving HASHEM purely for His sake can reach sparks of his soul by doing acts of kindness for HASHEM’s sake, and we will explain.

How to reach this level

We will try to give practical examples on how to be self-sacrificing for others.

Firstly a person should know that self-sacrifice is a vast concept. “Soul” is *nefesh*, which can also mean “desire”. So to be self-sacrificing means to give up our personal interests for others, and there are many points contained in this. A person has many desires; some are weaker and some are stronger, and everyone is different in this aspect.

An example: no one wants to sleep in the street. This is a strong will in a person. However, the difference between a nine-room apartment and a ten-room apartment is a weak type of desire.

Giving up personal desires for others

In order to be totally self-sacrificing to others, a person has to give up even his greatest desires for

another. He should begin though by giving up even small desires for others. For example, one should give five dollars to charity, in order to get used to the act of giving. Slowly he should nullify his desire more and more for another and give more.

He should continue this for a few years until eventually he reaches a point that he can give up even big desires for another. One who trains himself in this way and recognizes what giving is will be able to come to a situation of self- sacrifice to another.

Many righteous people sacrificed their lives in death as an atonement for their generation, and they left this world before their time.

Be prepared to sacrifice your own portion

in the World to Come for another

After reaching this level, one can add on another level. One has to be willing to give up not only this life's pleasures for another, but even to give up even his portion in the World To Come for another. There were great righteous people who gave up their portions in the World To Come for others.

Achieving true connection to HASHEM

One who lives in this way will be able to totally nullify himself, and then he can become very connected to HASHEM. This is because the thing that holds a person back from being connected to HASHEM is egoism, as it is written, "I am standing between HASHEM and them"; the explanation in these words is that egoism holds back a connection between HASHEM and a person.

One who nullifies his ego can be connected to HASHEM all 24 hours of the day, a super strong connection to the Creator of the world.