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## Tefillah - 168 Emulating Hashem's Love and Kindness

### **Ahavas Chessed: A Love For Kindness**

In the blessing of **שִׁים שְׁלוֹם**, we ask Hashem to receive His light, to receive his Torah of life, and to receive His **אהבת חסד**, loving-kindness.

*Ahavas chessed* is not just the strength to be able to do *chessed*, but the trait that is called *ahavas chessed* - a trait which is deeply ingrained in the Jew's soul.

### **The Roots of Ahavas Chessed**

How do we see that *ahavas chessed* is ingrained in the Jew's soul?

One of the reasons given for why Hashem created the world was because Hashem is the ultimate good, and thus He desires to bestow good. (This is explained by Ramchal in *sefer Derech Hashem* and in *sefer Daas Tevunos*). In other terms, it is described as "The law of good is that it bestows good." Hashem's desire to bestow good and thereby create the universe is a reason that preceded Creation. Unlike the *chessed* of people, where people do *chessed* with each other now that they are existing, the *chessed* of Hashem is to *chessed* even before there is anyone around to do *chessed* with.

The *ahavas chessed* which Hashem implanted in us is through His *ohr panim*, as we say here in *Shemoneh Esrei*, **כי באור פניך נתת לנו ה' אלוקינו תורת חיים ואהבת חסד**. In other words, the *ahavas chessed* which Hashem implants in us stems from His ultimate goodness, which desires to do *chessed* even before there is a Creation to do *chessed* with. That holy desire for *chessed* has been engraved into our souls, and that is our trait of *ahavas chessed*.

### **Ahavas Chessed: Altruistic Kindness For Others**

To understand it better, we can analyze the difference between *chessed* and *ahavas chessed*.

*Chessed* is the act of the kindness to another, while *ahavas chessed* is the desire to bestow *chessed* upon another. Since Hashem has implanted in our souls the nature of *ahavas chessed*, which is a spark of His own sublime *chessed*, it is thus our nature to do *chessed*, and therefore, we have a love to do *chessed*.

Although we see that gentiles can also do *chessed* for others, this does not come from an actual love for *chessed*; it is not *ahavas chessed*. A gentile, even when he performs a kind act for another, always does it "*l'garmi*" (for himself).<sup>[1]</sup> Only a Jew is capable of acting *lishmah* (with altruistic motivations),

because *chessed* has been engraved onto our *neshamos* from Hashem.

### ***Chessed Out of Ahavah (Love)***

We are not capable of Hashem's level of *chessed* (which is a desire to bestow *chessed* even before there was no one to do *chessed* for), and we need someone to receive our *chessed* in order for us to be able to accomplish *chessed*. But besides for our nature to want to do *chessed* for another person (*ahavas chessed*), we are also able to form connection to others, through doing *chessed* for them.

Let's first clarify that when a person gives *tzedakah* (charity) to another, this is *rachamim* (compassion), not *chessed* (kindness).<sup>[2]</sup> But when it is indeed an act of *chessed*, either Reuven does *chessed* for Shimon because he wants to bestow good upon another human being, just as Hashem wants to bestow good upon others; or, it is because he has *ahavah* (love) for him, so he is kind to him. (The highest level of giving is a gift, for a gift represents endearment of the relationship).

### ***Combining The Two Motivations In Our Chessed***

Altogether, we have said there are two reasons why one would do *chessed*. One reason is because there is a nature in our soul to want to bestow good upon others, which Hashem has implanted in us, as a spark of His own *chessed* to bestow kindness. The second reason why one does *chessed* is when he loves the person he is doing *chessed* for; and this in turn causes one to love to do *chessed*.

When is doing *chessed* for another due to the first reason, he is kind to others whether he loves them or not, because he is not motivated by love, but by the nature in the soul to want to bestow good upon Creation, which is independent of love.

In actuality, in order for a person to perform true *chessed* with others, he needs to reveal both of these motivations in his *chessed* and combine them. On one hand, one must do *chessed* for others because just as Hashem bestows good upon creation, so is there a nature in our soul to bestow good upon others. According to this understanding, I should do *chessed* for others whether I love them or not, because it is not about love. It is about altruistic kindness that reflects the perfect kindness of Hashem, which is independent of any factors. But on the other hand, one must also do *chessed* with a motivation of love for other Jews, which is the *mitzvah* of *ahavas Yisrael* (on a deeper level, there is a concept of *ahavas kol haBeriah*, to love all of the creations).<sup>[3]</sup>

### ***Two Types of "Chessed" People***

If we reflect, we can see that there are two kinds of *chessed* which people are drawn towards.

One kind of person will do *chessed*, but only for people whom he is close with and whom he is friendly with, such as family, relatives, or close friends. The closer he is to the person, the more *chessed* he will do for him. This kind of person is motivated by the second reason we mentioned: *ahavah* \love.

There is also another kind of person who does *chessed*, but with an opposite motivation than the above example: he will do *chessed* for absolutely anyone, whether he feels a love for the person or not, because he simply has a desire to bestow good upon others. He is not motivated by love, but the deep nature in the soul to benefit other people, which is a spark of Hashem's sublime *chessed*.

(Here we are not speaking of people who do *chessed* for others purely for the sake of gaining honor and to get a good name in the world. These people are immersed in an imaginary and false world. We are speaking about truthful people who do *chessed*).

### ***True Chessed: Through Ahavas Yisrael***

In our own reality, these two motivations really need to become combined. We shouldn't only do *chessed* for people we like, but we shouldn't either do *chessed* in a detached way which doesn't lead to any love.

When a person increases his love for other Jews (*ahavas Yisrael*), he will find that he is able to do *chessed* with both of these motivations at once: out of a love for all Jews, whether he knows them or not; and because he has a desire to bestow good upon others. This is true *chessed*, and it is the depth of *ahavas chessed*.

### ***Expecting Others To Reciprocate***

Now we can understand the following.

Often there are people who will do a lot of *chessed* for others, but they are silently expecting something in return for all of their kindness that they do. Sometimes a person is awaiting actual payment or compensation for what he did, and this is not even considered *chessed*, because he had no intention at all for *chessed*; he did it solely to get something in return. But even if a person is simply awaiting some sign of gratitude from the other person, or if he wants the other person to show him some love in return, it is agonizing to the person when he doesn't get back what he's expecting. Expecting others to reciprocate our acts of kindness causes us to greatly resent the other person, and if the resentment festers, a person might decide to stop doing any more kindnesses for that person who didn't reciprocate.

Sometimes a person has a very giving nature and he is very used to doing nice things for other people, and as times goes on, he begins to realize that others don't reciprocate, and he is very disappointed in others for not acknowledging his favors. He might become hardened from this realization one day and he decides that it's not worth it for him to be kind anymore to others.

What people find most difficult is when the recipient is not only passive in showing appreciation, and he is openly grateful. If we are kind to another person and the person hurts us one day, we are naturally filled with rage at the person: *how ungrateful this person is!* A person finds that he absolutely cannot tolerate such abhorrent ingratitude, after everything he has done for the other person. A person grows very resentful of the kindness he did for that person, and he finds it impossible to be nice to that person again.

When one gives to others out of love for others, he usually is expecting the person to reciprocate, and if he doesn't get it, he will have a hard time giving more to that person. Surely it is hurtful when another person does not reciprocate the kindness of what we have done for him and he is clearly not acknowledging what we have done for him.

Is there a way for a person to get over this feeling and to be able to give to others, even when they are not grateful in return?

### ***The Two Kinds of Love***

We must know that there are two kinds of love.

One kind of love is where we give love to others because we want a reciprocal relationship with them. This is also called "*ahavas shavim*" (love of equals). It is when we feel love with others in the sense that we want to be at an equal state with all others. When love is stemming from the desire to reach equality with all others, it will mean that we want to good to others because we desire a relationship with others.

When this is the intention, we are clearly desiring a reciprocal relationship with the others, and it is then very hard for us to continue to be loving and giving to the other person when we see that we are not getting back any love from him. It's a simple equation: We want reciprocal feeling from the other person for what we've done, and we aren't getting it. The result is frustration, disappointment, and a lack of willingness to further bestow any love or kindness upon that person.

But there is a deeper kind of love we can reveal than this. Look at the love that parents have for their baby. Does the baby reciprocate? The baby does not give back any love at all, yet the parents shower love and kindness upon their baby, even though they know they won't be getting anything in return for it. This is a love that comes from oneness (*echad*) with another. On a deeper note, the child feels the love of the parents and loves them in return, but he just can't express it yet. It is because the oneness is there, and it is just very concealed and covered over.

It's not a coincidence that Hashem made the world like this. There is a love of wanting to reach equality with others, which is a love that stems from a motivation for a reciprocal relationship. This kind of love will last based upon how much the other is reciprocating. But the higher kind of love is when one can bestow love even when there is no chance of reciprocating.

The higher kind of love can be visualized as one who views himself standing on a higher plane, feeling a responsibility to love those who are on a lower plane than him, who are in need of his assistance. He is above them, they are below him, and they are in need of receiving from him, for they live on a lower plane than him and therefore they are helpless. So he extends a helping hand downward to them.

We see this concept clearly in a parent's love for his child. The parent lives on a higher plane of reality than the child. The child lives on a far lower plane than the parents; he is very needy of receiving their kindness. The parent naturally bestows love upon the child, because deep down, he sees the child as a receiver who is in total need of his kindness. Thus a parent is capable of unconditional love that is not awaiting any reciprocation.

When one can reveal that love for others and he is giving to others from this place in himself, he has no expectations from others, and he saves himself from all of the would-be anguish disappointment of others not reciprocating his kindnesses.

Thus, true love for others, or "higher love", does not come from the wish to enjoy a reciprocal relationship with others, but from a love that spills over from our heart to others, out of *Ahavas Yisrael* for others; and on a deeper level, from a love for other creations. It is a love that has absolutely no agendas. It is not a love based upon a yearning to feel connection and equality with others, but a love that is reached when we realize that we are meant to bestow.

(Of course, any concept can be used wisely or inappropriately, as with all other abilities in our soul. One should be careful that this thought of "higher love" - to love and be kind to others out of seeing others as lower than him and who are in need of his bestowal - that it shouldn't lead to becoming haughty about himself and imagining that he lives on a higher plane than others; this is a negative trait, *gaavah*).

To summarize, true love is when we see ourselves as being on a higher plane than the ones who are below, who are in need of receiving our love and kindness - the very same reason that motivates a parent to bestow unconditional love upon his child.

### ***The Ability To Love Unconditionally***

Such love, when revealed, enables a person to bestow continuous love and kindness upon others. It is

a bestowal of kindness to others that stems from a deeper kind of love for others.

With this kind of love for others, we can be kind to others even if others are ungrateful to us. We can once again draw upon the parent-child analogy to deal with this. Just as a child will misbehave sometimes towards his parents as he begins to enter the toddler years, and the parent can easily forgive the child because it is understood that the child is simply immature, so can we view others who act ungrateful to us as the child who misbehaves to his parents.

### ***Altruistic Giving***

There is also another reason that motivates our *ahavas chessed*, as we mentioned earlier: Hashem bestows kindness upon Creation, and this nature was engraved in our own souls. When we are in touch with this concept, we are able to be kind to others, all on the same level, whether we feel close to them or not, because it is coming from an intrinsic desire to bestow good upon Creation.

This is a subtle point to understand. Sometimes a person is very kind to all people, but it's not stemming from the deep nature in the soul to bestow good upon Creation. It is instead coming from a lack of love for Creation, and because there is this void of love in himself, he is not able to access this love, so he ends up being kind to all people - because there is no one in the world whom he feels a real love for.

Of course, the deep root of why we are kind to others stems from Hashem's sublime ability to be kind to others with no agendas. But when a person is not connecting to others when he gives to them, it is a sign of a void in his heart. His heart lacks a feeling of love for the Creation, so he never makes use of the ability to give out of love for others. Every person has people in his life whom he loves, but his kindness to others is not necessarily stemming from a love for other Jews and for the people of this Creation.

We can see this from the fact that there are people who can run *chessed* organizations, which services the public in countless ways, yet the people running it don't feel that much love for the people they do *chessed* for. They feel a desire to bestow good upon others, but it doesn't increase their feeling of love of others.

When love for others is not revealed in a person's life, his acts of bestowal upon others are not stemming from a true and pure place in the soul. The lack of love for others detracts from the truthfulness of the acts of bestowal.

### ***Purifying Our Motivations In Chessed***

Additionally, when one bestows upon another but he lacks love for others, he becomes resentful if the recipient doesn't show gratitude.

Also, there are some people who are simply born with a deeply ingrained nature of desiring to give to others, but it doesn't always stem from the trait of *ahavas chessed* that was implanted in us by Hashem.

Therefore, it is insensible to expect others to reciprocate, because we must realize that we are anyways not giving totally out of pure intentions. There is usually something a person is expecting in return for all his kindnesses.

When a person keeps reflecting into the concept of Hashem's sublime *chessed* and how He had a desire to bestow good upon Creation even before there was a Creation to do *chessed* with, he becomes more in touch with this deep ability that is implanted in the soul, and then his desire to do

*chessed* for others will come from a purer place in himself.

This is the depth of “*chesed shel emes*” – the kind of *chessed* where a person doesn’t expect any compensation. *Chessed shel emes* stems from a place in the soul which desires to do *chessed* even if there would be no one in the world to do *chessed* with. Where does this power come from? It comes from the trait of *chessed* of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, who desired to do *chessed* even before there was a Creation. In our own soul, it exists as a desire to give to others simply because we have a yearning to bestow good upon others.

Some people are natural *chessed*-doers, and others are less inclined towards *chessed*. But even those who are natural *chessed*-doers must be aware that the motivations have to be purified. The ego’s expectations become mixed into with the Divine nature of the soul to bestow *chessed*, and one must therefore go through his motivations and give some inner order to his soul. One who gives *chessed* from the pure place in himself that expects no reward for the *chessed* is one who is acting *lishmah*, and he will be able to endure the ingratitude of others when they don’t reciprocate.

With most people, there is more *shelo lishmah* involved in the act than the amount of *lishmah*, and therefore they cannot tolerate the ingratitude of others whom they do *chessed* for, because they were expecting gratitude and they didn’t get it. Indeed, there are very few people in the world who are capable of acting totally *lishmah* in their acts of *chessed*, and that is why there are only a few people in the world who are able to stomach others’ ingratitude and lack of reciprocation - something which most people cannot handle.

### ***In Summary***

To summarize, there are three kinds of *chessed*:

**(1)** Doing *chessed* for others out of love for others, where a person wants the other to reciprocate somehow, because he wants to enjoy a reciprocal relationship with the other person. He wants some sign of gratitude or some sign of love in return for what he has done for the other person. This usually results in being disappointed in others.

**(2)** There is *chessed* that stems from a higher love for others, where one can be kind to others out of unconditional love for them, resembling a parent’s love for a child. This kind of *chessed* enables a person to give continuously to others, even when they don’t express their gratitude.

**(3)** The deepest kind of *chessed* is when one is giving out of the desire to bestow good upon others because Hashem has planted His own nature of *chessed* in us, and he also combines this motivation with a love for others. This is “*chesed shel emes*” in which a person has no expectation of reward for what he did, and it resembles the sublime *chessed* of Hashem which came before Creation.

### ***In Conclusion: Aspiring For Purer Acts of Kindness***

These are very subtle words. They describe the power that we inherited from Avraham Avinu. There is a statement in Chazal that the world was created for the sake of Avraham Avinu, for it is written, “*The world is built on kindness*”, and Avraham Avinu is the personification of the trait of *chessed*.

His *chessed* for others stemmed from the *chessed* that came before Creation, when there was no creation yet to *chessed* with. Avraham Avinu sought people to do *chessed* even if there was no around to do *chessed* with, because his desire for *chessed* stemmed from both a love for Creation as well as the deep desire of the soul to bestow good upon Creation.

The Sages state that each person needs to say, “When will I reach the actions of my forefathers?” We

cannot be as perfect as the Avos, but we can *touch* upon the level of our forefathers, and do *chessed* for others out of a pure motivation, which combines love for others as well as a desire to bestow good upon Creation. This love for others will activate our power of *ahavas chessed*, as well as the deeper power in the soul to do *chessed*, which stems from “*The world is built on kindness.*”

When we merit to touch upon the level of Avraham Avinu’s *chessed*, we are coming into contact with the innermost depths of *chessed*, and this is the depth behind **כי באור פניך נתת לנו וכו' אהבת חסד**.

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[1] Tractate Bava Basra, Chapter One

[2] See ***Tefillah #0158 - Deeper Kindness and Compassion***

[3] See ***Tefillah #0145 - Accessing The Future’s New Light***

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