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Beyond The 'Middos' In The Soul

We will now try to touch upon a certain inner point about the *middos* (character traits) of the soul - a point which is really the root of the study of our *middos*.

In the Torah, we find the word "*middah*" in a few instances. There is a tractate of *Mishnayos*^[1] called "*Middos*", which describes the measurements of the *Beis HaMikdash*. But the more common use of the word "*middos*" is referring to our character traits; our *avodah* of "*tikkun hamiddos*", improving our *middos*.

However, we must know that just as human beings have certain *middos*, so does Hashem have *middos*. There is Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people. There are *middos* in Hashem, for Hashem has 13 attributes of mercy; there are 13 *middos* to expound the Torah; and the Jewish people contain their intrinsic *middos*. We will reflect into this.

Hashem has *middos*. The word "*middah*" means "measure", which implies some kind of limit. But we know that Hashem has no limits; that is part of our belief. So what does it mean that Hashem has '*middos*'?

There are 13 *middos* to expound the Torah, yet it is also written about the Torah, "*It is longer in measurement than all of the earth.*" The Torah is beyond measure. If we can conceptualize that Hashem has *middos* as well as the Infinite, and that Torah has *middos* but it is also endless, that can help us understand as well that the Jewish people, who contain *middos*, also contain a point in their soul which is beyond any measure.

Usually, when we think of working on our *middos*, we remain confined within our own *middos*, but we don't look beyond our own *middos*. Although it is true that we need to work on our *middos*, and it is part of our life's mission (as the Vilna Gaon said, "If a person does not work hard to break his *middos*, there is no purpose to his life"), still, although this is certainly a crucial aspect of our *avodah*, there is more to our *middos* than just the *middos* we recognize, which are limited. Just as we need to work on our *middos* and improve them, so do we have a simultaneous *avodah* to reveal in ourselves an **unlimited** point in the soul.

When it comes to our *middos*, we usually pay more attention to the part of improving our *middos*, whereas the point that is above our *middos*, the "unlimited" point in the soul that is not bound to any

measurement, often remains hidden from us. Rarely is it ever spoken about.

“No Measure” In Place, Time, and Soul

Everything in this Creation can be found in place, in time, and in soul[2].

We already mentioned that *middos* are present in Hashem, in the Torah, and in the Jewish people. There are also *middos* measurements of the *Beis HaMikdash*, of which an entire tractate is devoted to explaining. However, even in the *Beis HaMikdash*, where everything had a specific measure, we find something that had no measurements. The place of the *Aron* (the Holy Ark) had no specific measurements.[3] The *Aron* was really too big to fit into the *Kodesh Kodashim*, but there was a miracle that allowed it to fit there.

Inside the *Aron*, the *Luchos* were stored; the Torah was placed inside the *Aron*. The depth of this was because the Torah is beyond all measure, thus, it was fitting to place it in the *Aron*, which also had no measure. From here we can see that there is a concept of a place that is not bound to any measurement.

In time, we can also find a certain time in which there is no measure. Normally, times have measurements to them: the day is 24 hours, the week is 7 days, and the month is either 29 or 30 days, a year is 354 days, every 7 years is *Shemittah*, and every seven cycles of *Shemittah* is *Yoivel*. But if we reflect, each day has in it a point which cannot be measured. It is called *bein hashemashos*, (twilight), and we are not sure at what point the day ends and it becomes night.[4] It is treated as both the day and night with regards to *halacha*, but we are not sure exactly what it is.

In addition, on Shabbos there is a concept of *Tosefes Shabbos*, to add onto Shabbos, and according to most opinions of our Sages, there is no exact measurement to it. Thus, Shabbos is a kind of time which is not limited to any specific measure.

Thus, we have seen how there is a concept of “no measure” in time. Now we need to see how this is true with our own soul as well. In the soul, there is also a point which is beyond measure; let us reflect where it can be found.

The most secret power in all of Creation is: the power of *da'as*. The concept of *daas* implies that for every concept that exists, there is always an opposite concept; each thing is comprised of itself as well its opposite (“*dovor v'hipucho*”). For example, there is night and day, man and woman, above and below.

We are aware that our soul has “measured” *middos* to it, therefore, if there is a part in our soul which contains measurements, there must also exist a point in our soul which has no measurements. We only need to know how we can reveal it.

A Clarification

However, we will emphasize at this point that just because there is such a concept, this does **not** negate our *avodah* to work on our *middos*, *chas v'shalom*. Rather, the intention here is that just as Hashem is unlimited, yet He also has the 13 *middos* of *rachamim*, and just as the Torah is unlimited yet it also contains 13 *middos*, so too does our soul contain an area of *middos*, as well as an area that is beyond the *middos*.

The Point of “No Measure” In The Soul

It is upon us to understand what this point of “beyond measure” in our soul is.

If we deeply reflect, we can discover that all of the soul's abilities are all somewhat limited. For example, the trait of compassion has its limits. Chazal said that one must not be compassionate to the cruel. Compassion must be limited, or else one will come to feel sorry for even cruel people, and this twists around compassion and turns it into a form of cruelty.

Another trait is kindness. How much kindness is a person capable of doing? If a person wants to give charity to others, he cannot give money that he doesn't have. If he writes out a check with no money in his account, it is not *chessed*. A person can only give what he has; we are limited in how much we can give.

The trait of love also has its limits. A person loves his family, and therefore he strives to give to them their needs. As much as he would like to give to them, though, he cannot give to them beyond his limits. He can spend up to a certain amount of money on them and buy them gifts, but not beyond his budget. So our love as well is limited, because if love is defined by how much we want to nourish the person we love, we ultimately find ourselves limited, for there is only so much we can give. And even if we could define love as something that goes beyond giving and nourishing to others, it is still limited, because we are only human, and a human is limited.

So, being that we are human, our soul's abilities are limited as well. Even the deepest ability which we recognize ourselves has its limits.

It would seem that we cannot reveal from ourselves anything that goes beyond our limits. It is clear, from the viewpoint of our "I" at least, that we are clearly limited in our abilities. So what does it mean, then, that we have in us a point that is unlimited?

The Torah is "wider than all of the earth", as the possuk states; yet, if we were to look at the Torah as a body of knowledge by itself, without being part and parcel with the Creator, it would definitely be limited. The unlimited aspect of the Torah is because "Hashem and the Torah are one", and just as Hashem is unlimited, so is the Torah unlimited. So the only reason why the Torah is unlimited is because it is interconnected with Hashem.

The same can apply to the Jewish soul, if we deeply reflect. If we look at ourselves as an existence apart from the Creator (*chas v'shalom*), then indeed, we would be totally limited. We would be limited just as a chair and a table is limited. Working on our *middos* would be all that there is to our *middos*.

But there is a point in our soul which is unlimited, for the soul is interconnected with Hashem. Hashem dwells in the soul, as it is written, "*I will dwell amongst them*" - Hashem dwells in each person. So when the presence of the Creator is revealed in the soul, and a person feels nullified to Hashem as a result of this recognition, it is as if he becomes one with the Creator, so to speak, and then the unlimited in his soul is revealed.

So as long as a person views his existence as being essentially apart from the Creator, then indeed, he will be limited. Just as his hands and feet are limited, so will the abilities of his soul be limited. A person indeed cannot be endlessly giving and compassionate; he has limits. Our entire nature is to be limited. How much are we limited? This is different with each person. But we are all limited.

However, when a person reveals the Infinite within, when he reveals the Creator's presence inside himself, he reveals the unlimited aspect in his soul with this.

How Will We Reveal It?

This concept is describing the purpose of life! Everyone will eventually reach it, but the only issue is: If this will be reached willingly by a person, through his free will, or if it will have to be forced out of

him...

To illustrate: we would have left Egypt anyhow after 400 years. It wasn't up to Pharaoh; we were getting out of there anyway, whether he let us or not. What, then, was Pharaoh's test? Pharaoh was given the choice to let us go willingly. He didn't, so in the end we went out by force. There was no way that we would be left in Egypt. The only question was when and how, and if it would happen according to Pharaoh's wishes or not. Everyone will eventually have Hashem revealed within himself, where His light will dwell. We will all have this revelation in the future, may it come speedily in our days, with the coming of Moshiach. Then, this point will be revealed to all.

If so, where is our free will in all this?

The Gemara^[5] states that if one merits it, he will merit Moshiach to come before the set time, but if he does not have merits, he will not merit Moshiach before the set time, [and instead he will have to undergo suffering in order to be purified so that he can merit it.] In other words, if a person doesn't merit, if he isn't purified, Hashem will have to bring upon him suffering (reminiscent of the ten plagues in Egypt, which forced them to recognize Him, parallel to the ten main abilities in the soul), until he is eventually purified and nullified to Hashem. If a person merits to purify himself, however, he will merit **through his own free will** the revelation of Hashem in himself, and he will not need to undergo any suffering.

Even the wicked will eventually see the revelation of Hashem, but they will be forced. Their souls will have to undergo Gehinnom in order to be purified, and "they become the dust underneath the feet of the *tzaddikim*" - they will be connected to the revelation, but in the form of being dust underneath the feet of *tzaddikim*.

It is impossible for any of us to evade the eventual revelation that will come upon Creation, for it is that we were created for. Hashem created all of, without exception, to reach this purpose. The only question is how each individual will get to it: Either through choosing to get there, by purifying oneself, and if not - one will have to be purified through the purification process of Gehinnom.

This is really the depth behind our entire power of free will, and I hope that every person will choose the right decision. But there is no room for doubt about this. We will all get to the revelation of Hashem's presence, and the only question is when and how.

It is man's nature to think of himself as an entity that is apart from the Creator. A baby is selfish, and it can only connect with its mother; it cannot connect with Hashem. As a child gets older and more mature - each on his own level - a person can eventually get to the point of recognizing Hashem's existence inside himself, and then he reveals the point of "no measure" inside himself; the point beyond the *middos*.

Revealing Our Point of Endlessness

So we have the power of free will to decide if we will just live with our limited aspect - our *middos* - or if we will also live with our unlimited aspect, which is to reveal Hashem's presence in our soul.

If one views himself as only being a limited creature, then he views his soul in the same way that he views his physical world: He has a house, money, children - which are all limited - and so too, in his spirituality, he has a good heart, knowledge in the Torah - areas which are really limited to him.

When one only knows of limitations, he will never get to the goal of life. If he lives only with physical limitations and never explores his spirituality, he definitely will never get to the purpose of life, but even if he is spiritual and he has made a lot of spiritual progress with his soul, he still will not get to

the purpose of life, if he does not know about the unlimited aspect in his soul.

One must know that the purpose of Creation is: **to reveal the Endlessness of Hashem within himself!** It is there that point of “no measure” can be revealed to a person.

Understandably, revealing the Endlessness of Hashem in oneself is a lifelong task. We have no other avodah on this world other than to reveal the existence of Hashem in our hearts. It is just that there are many ways to get there. We are currently discussing the avodah of improving our *middos*, which is one of the ways of how we can reveal the Endlessness of Hashem within ourselves. Therefore, we will try to explain how fixing our *middos* is a way to reveal the Endlessness of Hashem.

Again, we will repeat and emphasize that this is only one aspect of our *avodah*; it is like a drop in the ocean amidst the broad scope of our *avodah* on this world. However, since we are discussing it with regards to fixing our *middos*, we will try to explain it.

Endless Love

All of us have the power to love. Love is the root of all the *middos* (for the “world is built on kindness”, and kindness is the outcome of love). The biggest egoist will love only himself. Usually, someone with even minimal good *middos* will love his\her spouse, children, parents, and close friends; and the levels of love vary with each person.

Where does the power to love come from?

To know this, here is the following illustration. Let’s say a worker gets paid for his job. When his boss pays him, does the boss feel like he is giving away a part of himself, since he used to own this money? No. he used to own this money, but now he is paying his worker with the money.

But there is another kind of giving, in which a person will give something to another as a sign of being remembered. A person might give someone as a gift so that their friendship will always be remembered. When he gives the other this gift, the gift is a way of saying, “I am giving you my self.” He didn’t just give it to give it – he gave it so that he will be remembered by the person.

The Sages describe the Torah as “*Ana Nafshi Kesavis Yehavis*” – “I gave My soul in writing to you.” The Torah was the covenant that Hashem made with us, so that we will always remember Hashem. It is as if Hashem told us: “I am giving over to you My soul - in the form of the written Torah”.

Now we will return to the example of love, which we are using as a mere example of the concept we are describing. There is not one of us who does not feel what it means to love. Even the most superficial kind of person in the world, even a person who has no *emunah* (may Heaven have mercy on him), can love; but he never thinks about where love comes from. Just as he never thinks about where his hands and feet come from, so does he never think about where his love comes from. He feels simply “I am able to love, because that’s part of who I am.”

Baruch Hashem, most of us do not think like this. We all know clearly that the power of love inside us is enabled by Hashem. (We are not talking about the power to love Hashem, but the ability to love each other).

Hashem, Who has an endless amount of love, has cut for each of us a piece of His love, so to speak, and has given it to each of us. So our ability to love comes from Hashem. Does our ability to love each other have anything to do with Hashem? The simple answer is, yes, because Hashem wants us to use our ability of love for love of Hashem.

But the truth is that it can be compared to a person walking in the street when it's raining and he has an umbrella, and he sees that his friend doesn't have an umbrella, so he lets his friend join him underneath the umbrella. He didn't give his friend the umbrella; he is letting him underneath it.

The Gemara says that Hashem said to Moshe, "I have a good gift in My treasury, and its name is Shabbos. I want to give it to Yisrael. Go and inform them." The Lakewood Mashgiach^[6] explained that it's not that Hashem wants to take out the gift of Shabbos from His treasury and give it to the Jewish people. Rather, it means that Hashem wants to bring us into His treasury.

It seems that Hashem gave us all a power to love, and that He allows us to use a spark of His endless love and placed it into each of us. This is a superficial perspective, however. Hashem did not take His own love and plant it in us. He has instead taken us and allowed us to enter His own love. And since Hashem's love is unlimited, the love that is found in us is unlimited. It is just that we only see the part of it that is limited. But in essence, the ability in love in us is unlimited, for it comes from Hashem.

Thus, the understanding is not simply that each of us received an ability to love from Hashem. The word of love is the same for each person, and we are all identifying it on the same level. It is just that each person sees only a part of it. Hashem brought each of us into His own treasury, into His world of love. The love itself is unlimited, but we only see the limited part of it.

The Sages gave a parable to explain this. Once the Caesar asked Rabban Gamliel, "You say that whenever there are ten Jews, the *Shechinah* dwells. How much *Shechinah* is there in the world?" He said to him, "How does the sunlight enter your home?" The Caesar replied, "The sun lights up the whole world." Rabban Gamliel then said to him, "The sun is only one of the many servants of the Blessed One, yet it lights up the whole world. Surely the *Shechinah* of the Blessed One can light up the whole world."^[7]

The root of all *middos* is *ahavah* (love). There is only one force of love which Hashem created, and that love is unlimited. Hashem is endless, thus His love is endless. All that we know about the *middah* of love is a partial revelation of Hashem's endless love. A *middah* is essentially a specific part of Hashem's Endlessness that is revealed to us. There is a limit to what can be revealed, thus we only see a limited part of it. But in essence, love is one unlimited force.

These are very deep words. A person naturally thinks of his *middos* are limited. Why is this so? It is because we know we are human and limited, therefore we think our *middos* are limited. More specifically, we can actually see how our love is limited. You love something and then one day you stop loving it. A couple who loved each other might get divorced one day. Children are loved by their parents, but sometimes they anger their parents and they disturb them very much, to the point that the parents' love for the child can go into hiding. We see that there are limits to our love, and it does not seem to us that our love comes from the unlimited love of Hashem.

But the truth is that the love which we are capable of is really unlimited. We only see a part of Hashem's love, thus, we come to feel that our love is limited. But the reality is that the love inside us is really unlimited.

This is not my own novelty. These are the words of our holy Sages, which we mentioned earlier concerning the matter of the *Shechinah*^[8], and it is the depth of the entire reality of *middos*.

"A King Can Break Fences"

When a person can identify this concept and internalize it, he gains an entirely new soul perspective.

There is a statement, "Nothing stands in the way of the will." Don't our limits get in the way of

actualizing our will, though? But it is because our soul's abilities are really unlimited! This is like what Chazal say of a king: "a king can break fences and no one can protest him."^[9] In addition, the Sages said that the Jewish people are called *bnei melochim*, "sons of kings."^[10] All of us have a point of "king" within us – an unlimited aspect.

Every Jew's soul contains this power. "Hashem, Yisrael, and the Torah are one" – in other words, Hashem's endless is contained in our own soul!

Why is it, though, that we often don't relate to our "endless" aspect? It is because we tend to think that we "live in the real world". We are aware that in the tangible world in front of us, there are limits to our *middos*, both to our positive and negative *middos*; we identify ourselves as limited beings. The Ramban writes that Aristotle's mistake was that he only followed his feelings; he didn't believe in something he couldn't feel. If a person would just believe that his soul's abilities are not given to him by Hashem, and that it is rather Hashem bringing us into His unlimited world – this would entirely change a person's perspective towards himself and towards all others.

Fixing Our Middos, Together With Striving To Reveal The Endless

So first, we need to have the correct perspective on working on our *middos*. We have started to explain that we have an *avodah* to work on our *middos* as well as an *avodah* to reveal the point that is above our *middos* (our unlimited aspect). It seems simply that we have two tasks before us: to work on our *middos*, and to reveal that which is above our *middos*.

But according to what we have explained here, if a person tries to work on his *middos* but he is unaware of the "unlimited" aspect of *middos*, he is not able to really work with his *middos*. This is because he does not recognize what he's working with. Thus, whenever one works on a *middah*, he must not think that it is solely a *middah*. Only when you recognize the depth of what you are working with and what it's made up of can you be successful when you work with it.

Fixing Our Middos: "Remove Yourself From Evil" and "Do Good"

All of us, more or less, are familiar with the external part of working on our *middos*. I believe, with Hashem's help, that each person here will grow to some level, as he studies the *middos*. But I also know that the growth here you will achieve is totally unpredictable and beyond anything you can plan.

In other words, there is a way for you to gain a 'shortcut' as you are working on your *middos*, where you can jump straight to the end of the road. Let me emphasize that I am not implying in any way that there is no value to practically fixing our *middos*; there is no way to skip it. But it is just that we must understand that in any *avodah*, there are always two sides to it. There is a part of it where we remove the darkness ("Remove yourself from evil"), and there is a part of it where we reveal light ("Do good").

Until now we have spoken about positive *middos*, such as *ahavah*. But when it comes to working on our negative *middos*, such as *gaavah* (conceit) – which is the root of all negative *middos* – how can we do it?

The external part of fixing *gaavah* lies in lowering oneself and realizing that one's abilities are not his own. But there is also a more inner aspect which we need to make us as we work to uproot *gaavah*. Is *gaavah* a bad *middah* or a good *middah*? We have explained in the past that there is no such thing as a good *middah* or a bad *middah*. Every *middah* depends on how it is used. If it used appropriately, it is good, and when misused, it is bad. To illustrate, an apple is normally a good thing. But if you feed it to a one-year old, it is a choking hazard. The same is with the trait of *gaavah*. If we use it in the wrong

place, it becomes bad, and if we use it correctly, it is good.

What is the root of *gaavah*? Is *gaavah* a human trait, or is it also a trait of Hashem? It is stated openly in the verse: "*Hashem has reigned, He has donned grandeur.*"^[11] When a person misuses the power of *gaavah*, this is not the kind of *gaavah* that Hashem has. The Creator has the root of *gaavah*, and the root of *gaavah* is pure and holy. A person is able to misuse that root and exercise *gaavah* in the wrong places. But as for the *middah* itself, where does it come from? From the Creator!

When a person realizes that *gaavah* comes from the Creator, he has found the spiritual light of this *middah*, and he will have an easier time uprooting the negative aspects of *gaavah*.

By contrast, if a person thinks that *gaavah* in essence is an evil trait, because he recognizes it within himself and he doesn't know that it stems from Hashem, then he is dealing with nothing but darkness, and "darkness cannot be chased away with sticks." But if a person is working to uproot his negative *gaavah* and at the same time he realizes that the root of *gaavah* is in Hashem, he is applying light to the darkness. When the spiritual light of the *gaavah* is accessed, the false side to the *gaavah* will disappear.

To emphasize, there are two perspectives needed at once, when working to fix the trait of *gaavah*. There is an aspect of "*Remove yourself from evil*", and an aspect of "*Do good*". Just as we have an *avodah* to remove the darkness from our *middos*, so do we have an *avodah* to shine the light of that *middah*: to reveal the G-dly root of the *middah*. Both of these aspects are interdependent on each other in order for one to succeed at working on his *middos*.

Even when a person recognizes *gaavah* within himself and he doesn't attribute its root to Hashem, there is still an *avodah* to sanctify *gaavah*: "*And his heart was high in the ways of Hashem.*" There is a positive and holy kind of *gaavah*. This can certainly access the spiritual light that is contained in *gaavah*, but the higher spiritual root of it is accessed only when we are aware that *gaavah* is rooted in Hashem, "*Hashem has reigned, He has donned grandeur.*"

The Difficulty In Working On Our Middos

Therefore, when we come to work on our *middos*, we need to bring the "unlimited" aspect into our "limited" *middah* aspect. This means that for every *middah* we work on, there are always two sides to the coin: the *middah* itself that we are working on, and the "unlimited" aspect of the *middah* (its root in Hashem's Endlessness).

When we are only aware of working on the "*middah*" and we don't reveal its unlimited aspect, this is but half the *avodah*. This is actually one of the reasons why people have such a difficult time when it comes to working on their *middos*.

Working on our *middos* is never easy. There are no shortcuts. But we are able to make it easier for ourselves, to a certain degree. This is when we are not entirely focused on the negative aspect of the *middah* – that in addition to working to uproot the negative aspect of the *middah*, we are also working to reveal the root of the *middah*, its unlimited aspect, which is rooted in Hashem's Endlessness.

Our *avodah* in working in our *middos* is thus a two-fold job. We need to fight the evil and darkness contained in the *middos*, but we also need to reveal the G-dly source of each *middah*, and then we can succeed in removing unearthing the beauty of our *middos* from the pile of dirt that initially covers them.

Our *avodah* of *tikkun hamiddos* can be compared to the following scenario: A valuable object falls into a pit, and we want to retrieve it, but it is stuck inside the pit, and it is heavy. How do we get it out? We

send someone down into the pit to tie a rope around it, and another person stands at the edge of the pit, and together they move it. The person inside the pit tries pushing it upward, and the person at the edge of the pit pulls it toward him, until they eventually get it out. That is how we can relate to how we must work on our *middos*: we need to deal with the lowliness of each *middah* before it has been rectified - "climbing down into the pit" - and at the same time, we also need to stand at a higher place, "at the edge of the pit", so that we can elevate the *middah* from the place that it has fallen to.

Example: How To View The Trait of Gaavah (Conceitedness)?

To apply this concept: all of us have a *middah* called *gaavah* (to be prideful), which, when we first discover it in ourselves, we see that it has fallen into the lowest depths of *kelipah* (the evil forces). How do we elevate and sanctify our *gaavah* from the low place it has fallen into? On one hand, we need to battle the negative uses of *gaavah*, pushing it upward to the higher place that it belongs in. At the very same time that we work on our *gaavah*, we also need to stand above it, and to lift it upwards from the higher place we stand.

Usually when a person discovers that he has *gaavah*, he thinks of it as a bad thing, and he would like to get rid of it. He wishes simply to erase it and destroy it. But *gaavah* cannot be erased, just like you cannot erase anything else on the world. We don't have a *mitzvah* to destroy and erase *gaavah* just like we have a *mitzvah* to destroy idol worship. Rather, *gaavah* stems from a G-dly light, and it can fall into the wrong places, and we need to uplift it and reveal the G-dliness of this trait, when we fight its evil uses and we also channel it in its holy and proper direction.

If one wishes to simply "break" his *gaavah* because he wishes to rid himself of its presence, it will only prove detrimental. There is a famous statement of the Kotzker Rebbe that, "If you break a *middah*, you will end up with two pieces of it." If until now the person only had one piece of *gaavah*, he will now have "two" pieces of *gaavah* to deal with!

So, how do we fight our *gaavah*? Should we not fight it? *Chas v'shalom*. We should fight it. But we need to fight it with the proper perspective. Our *avodah* of fixing our *middos* is always to return the *middah* to its source, to its holy root.

When is *gaavah* evil? When we use it for the ego. When is it holy? When we recognize it as a G-dly spark that needs to be channeled to its holy direction. Instead of seeing *gaavah* as a function of our private ego, we need to return it to the G-dly spark that lays within it. We should not be uprooting the *gaavah* that is in us. All we need to do is to change our perspective towards it and how we approach it. We need to relate to it as a creation of Hashem.

Revealing "The G-dly Light" In Our Souls

All that has been said here is not meant to be a purely intellectual discussion. The words here are certainly enlightening to the intellect, but they have a lot of practical use.

How we can practically work upon these concepts here? First of all, we must reveal the "G-dly light" from within our soul and bring it to the fore. The G-dly light can raise any negative use of the *middos* from the ego and bring it back to its holy source, but if we haven't revealed the G-dly light yet, there is nowhere to elevate the *middah* to!

The Baal HaTanya said that there are some people wish to elevate all the G-dly sparks that have fallen into evil, but they don't know how, because they need to know what it is like to be below in order to be able to stand below and push it back up. But if someone is only below and he has never developed the higher space to go to, he has nowhere to raise the G-dly sparks to. He first has to elevate himself to the higher plane, and then he can do the work of raising the G-dly sparks upwards.

Thus, if one has not yet revealed the G-dly light from within his soul and he is trying to work on his *middos*, he is missing the inner tool that is necessary to work on the *middos*. He will be trying to uproot the *middos* from within himself, but he has nowhere to connect the *middos* to; he is unaware of their source. Even if he can find a way to use the *middah* for holiness, this is still not yet the source of the *middah*, and he fails to connect the *middah* to its stable source that it comes from.

When one reveals the G-dly light of the soul, the light of Hashem's Endlessness will be shined upon the *middos*, and the point of "no measure" will then be revealed in the *middos*. On one hand, the person needs to fight with the negativity present in a *middah*, and at the same time, he shines the G-dly light upon it. Through these two aspects together, the *middah* is taken out of the negative place it has fallen to and it is elevated back to its source.

It's not enough to just "know" about your Godly light in your thoughts; you can't work with an ability of your soul unless you feel it. It is written, "*And you shall know today, and you shall settle the matter upon your heart.*" The knowledge is just a tool that we need to use in order to integrate anything into our heart, where it becomes a real feeling to us. If we just know about something with our minds, it will not be enough to work with.

Therefore, the first thing we will need to is to sense Hashem's existence, in our heart. After we attain that real sense of His presence, our *avodah* of fixing our *middos* will become much deeper.

What Comes First - Emunah Or Tikkun HaMiddos?

The problem we face, however, is that if we haven't yet fixed our *middos*, it is hard to feel the G-dly light of our soul! And as long as we do not feel the G-dly light in our soul, it is very hard to work on our *middos* at the same time that we are trying to reveal a sense for Hashem in our heart. Isn't this a paradox?

Yet, this is the secret of our life. The Gemara says that a slave is freed when he receives the divorce document from the owner, even though he previously doesn't have a "hand" of his own, for everything he receives belongs to his owner. If so, the Gemara asks, how is a slave ever freed? The Gemara answers, "His document and his hand come simultaneously." Our own inner *avodah* is also a "simultaneous" *avodah*, where we must do two things at once. On one hand, we need to work on fixing our *middos*, and then we can reveal the G-dly light, and from there, we can return to fix our *middos* in a deeper way.

The Baal Shem Tov gave a parable to explain this. A person takes a barrel of wine full of sediment, drains the barrel from the sediment, and pours the wine into a cup and drinks it. Then he takes the wine and pours into a thinner strainer, and now we can see that there is still some sediment left over on the strainer. We can ask: Did the sediment not get emptied the first time around? The answer is that it did, but the quality of the straining differed. The first time it wasn't strained as well, and the second time it was strained much better. Either act of straining was important, though, because they both refined the wine.

The more a person reveals the G-dly light within, the deeper he can fix his *middos*. The more and more one keeps revealing the G-dly light, the more refined his *middos* will become, and the cycle can keep continuing.

Realizing That Our Middos Come From Hashem

We can now have a deeper understanding of the words of the Vilna Gaon, that "If a person does not

fix his *middos*, what is the point of him living?”

If we just view the *middos* as a separate entity unto themselves that have nothing to do with a G-dly source, then it is too difficult to understand the words of the Vilna Gaon. But if we have the understanding that working on our *middos* is about revealing the G-dly light in them, when we understand that each *middah* is but a partial revelation of what that *middah* really is as a greater whole, and that it is really rooted in the infinite, in “no measure” – then it is much easier for us to understand why the whole *avodah* of our life is about fixing our *middos*.

It is because working on our *middos* doesn't just mean to uproot their negative uses. Even our good *middos* need to be understood properly. We need to know that all of our *middos*, all of the abilities of our soul, do not really belong to us. Not only are they each a gift from Hashem, which Hashem can take back any moment; they are even more than that. Our good *middos* do not come from ourselves. This is not just about being grateful to Hashem that He gave to us these *middos*. He implanted in us these good *middos* - Hashem has entered the good *middos* into us, and that is how we have them!

Even the negative sides to our *middos* were implanted in us by Hashem. Sometimes a person adds onto them on his own volition, and when that is the case, he must run from those parts he has added on, which are not from Hashem; just as Yosef ran away from the wife of Potiphar. One needs to enter into the good *middos* in his soul and leave behind the negative aspects of them. But in either case, the *middos* are not our own.

When these concepts are absorbed deeply (first in the mind and then internalized in the heart), one will begin to live with the proper, truthful perspective towards life.

What is that perspective? It is not like how some people erroneously think, to believe that Hashem does everything and therefore he is not responsible for his *middos*. This cannot be true. The abilities He implanted in our soul are His, not our own, and our *avodah* is to remember this, and use the part of our *middos* which is revealed to us, to keep connecting to our good *middos*, and to run away from the negative sides to our *middos*, by removing them from the place they have fallen to and returning them to their holy root.

Coming Closer To Hashem Through Working On Our Middos

Thus, the introduction of working on our *middos* is, to understand what a “*middah*” really is.

Before we enter any endeavor, we try to learn about it so that we know what we are getting into. We don't start driving a car if we have never learned about the basics of the gears. So too, when entering the *avodah* of *tikkun hamiddos*, we need to understand its nature beforehand.

We all want to work on our *middos*, and indeed, we have begun to enter this *avodah*, each person on his own level. But there is a fundamental introduction we need, of how to enter this *avodah*: We need to understand that our *middos* are not our own. They are not “my” *middos*, but *middos* of the Creator of the world, Who has revealed to us but a partial layer of the *middos* that we see in ourselves.

When we have comprehended this concept, first with our mind and then with our heart, we then receive a great new depth of our bond with the Creator. Why? Let's say that I view love as a *middah* as “my” *middah* and I do not realize that it is really Hashem's *middah*. I may thank Hashem for giving it to me as a gift, but I might still think that the love is “my” *middah* now, and I do not see it as an offshoot of Hashem's *middah* of love. If that is the perspective I have towards my ability to love, then my ability to love does not connect me to the Creator.

But if I am aware that love does not come from myself, but from the endless love of the Creator, Who

is infinite – that will mean that every time I feel love, the love is connecting me to the endlessness of the Creator.

Although human love is limited, and although we do not always love appropriate things, the love in essence can always be seen as a power that comes from the Creator, and not from me. Our *avodah* is to remove the negative uses of the love, but the love in its essence is still coming from the Creator. Hashem allows part of it to be seen in ourselves, but it is really stemming from the endlessness of the Creator. Hashem allows us a partial revelation of His endless love to be seen in us, and that is what we see in ourselves as the ability to love.

Sometimes we do not always use this revelation correctly, where we use love for the wrong reasons. When that is the case, we need to limit the ways we are using our love, so that we aren't misusing the revelation that Hashem has allowed in us.

We began this chapter by explaining the concept of “no measure”. We find the concept of “no measure” by Hashem, by Torah, and in our own souls as well, there is a place of “no measure”, a place of the unlimited and infinite. Where is this unlimited aspect of our souls?

While we recognize the limitations of our own souls, at the same time, we can also reveal the aspect in our soul that is connected to the unlimited. The only issue is how we view our own limitations. If we simply view our limitations as nothing but human weakness, then all we will see is the fact that we are limited. But if we view each “limited” *middah* in ourselves as part of the Endlessness of Hashem, and that the limited part we see in ourselves is but a revelation of Hashem's Endlessness, we then reveal the G-dly light within, and in that way we are connected to the *EinSof*, to the Endless of Hashem, through our *middos*.

In Conclusion

Understandably, this connection we can have with the *EinSof* (the endlessness) of Hashem through the work on our *middos*, is but one of the many different ways we attain a bond with the Creator. The truth is that all of Creation is like a giant system of so many different strings, bonds, and bridges of how we can connect ourselves to this reality of endlessness, of Hashem.

In these words, we attempted to explain the end of just one of those ‘strings’, which we can use to grab onto as a means of connecting ourselves to the Creator. It is how we need to view all of our *middos*, of how man connects himself to the limited *middos* that are found within our soul, whether they are positive or negative – and to connect them to the endless reality of the Creator.

[1] *The Six Orders of The Mishna, authored by our Tannaim (early Sages), which includes Zeraim (Laws of agriculture in Eretz Yisrael), Moed (laws of festivals), Nashim (laws pertaining to women and marriage obligations), Nezikin (laws relating to monetary disputes), Kodashim (laws of the sacrifices and the Temple), and Taharos (laws of ritual purity and impurity).*

[2] “*Olam, Shanah, Nefesh*” – “World (Place), Year (Time), and Soul” – *sefer Yetzirah: III*

[3] *Bava Basra 99a*

[4] *Shabbos 23b*

[5] *Sanhedrin 98a*

[6] Rav Noson Wachtfogel zt"l

[7] *Sanhedrin 39a*

[8] *ibid*

[9] *Bava Kamma 60b*

[10] *Shabbos 111a*

[11] *Tehillim 93:1*

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