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The Pillar of Chessed (Kindness) - A Nature of A Jew's Soul

The world stands on three pillars - Torah, service (prayer), and *gemilus chassadim* (kindness). Each of the Avos personified one of these traits\pillars.

Chessed, kindness, is but a result of *ahavah*, love, which is the trait exemplified by Avraham Avinu. Love is at the core of performing kindness for others; hence, kindness (*chessed*) is but the external outcome of love (*ahavah*).

Torah is ingrained in a Jew's soul, for "Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael are one"^[1]; Torah is not something new for a Jew and it is not an external attainment, but part of a Jew's essence. *Tefillah* as well is ingrained in a Jew, to turn outward for his needs. Just as Torah and *Tefillah* are ingrained as part of a Jew's soul, so is *chessed*.

Simply speaking, we must do *chessed* in order to emulate Hashem's *middos*. Just as Hashem is *gomer chessed* (benevolent) to His creations, so must we be *gomer chessed*. The Gemara says that "the Torah begins with *chessed*, and it ends with *chessed*" - the Torah begins with Hashem sewing clothing (*kosnos ohr*) for Adam and Chavah, and the Torah ends with *chessed*, when Hashem Himself buries Moshe on the mountain in Gai.

But when we do *chessed*, it is not that we are to simply attach ourselves to the trait of *chessed* of Hashem, so to speak. Rather, the *chessed* of Hashem is ingrained in us because of the concept that "Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael are one"; therefore *chessed* is ingrained as a nature of our soul. In other words, the actual trait of *chessed* of Hashem is in a Jew's soul, and that is where our ability to do *chessed* stems from.

If a person truly reaches the pillars of Torah and *Tefillah*, the result will be that he also reaches the pillar of *chessed*. "Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world" - as the Ramchal (in *Daas Tevunos*) explains, the *reason* that Hashem looked into the Torah to create the world was "to bestow good to His creations." Thus, Torah begins and ends with *chessed*.

Chessed is therefore not just another *middah* that we need to cleave to. If that was the case, *chessed* wouldn't be one of the three pillars that specifically uphold the world, and there would be many other traits which the world stands on. Clearly it is because the root of all good *middos* is *chessed*, as Chazal explain, and therefore, the only *middah* which the world stands on is *chessed*, and not the other *middos*. *Chessed* is thus the *reason* that Hashem wanted to create the world.

Therefore, the more a person enters into Torah and *tefillah*, it will follow that he will also reach *chessed*, because the entire root of Creation is *chessed*. So if one doesn't reach *chessed*, it is a sign that something is lacking in his Torah learning.

The Torah is called a "*Toras Chessed*", a "Torah of kindness"; as it is written, "*A Torah of kindness on her lips.*" Chazal explain that "*Toras Chessed*" is when one teaches Torah to others, and another explanation of *Toras Chessed* is one who learns Torah *lishmah* (for the sake of Torah). When one learns *shelo lishmah* (for ulterior motives), he is learning Torah to receive some gain, but when one learns *lishmah*, he is learning in order to give. If one reaches "*Toras lishmah*", he has revealed *chessed*, and this is the "*Toras of kindness on her lips.*"

Thus, the pillar of *chessed* must be the outcome of the other two pillars, Torah and *Tefillah*. If a person learns Torah and he *davens* with fervor, the direct byproduct from this will be *chessed*.

The soul, in its pure state, will yearn for Torah, when it becomes awakened; it will delight in the sweetness of Torah and it will feel that the Torah is the lifeline. Anyone with some holiness and purity can feel this way towards the Torah when he learns Torah. The soul also yearns for *tefillah* on a true level. It doesn't just want superficial prayer, but to pray from the depths of the soul to Hashem; it is a yearning for Hashem, to cling to its Source. "In between" these two pillars of *tefillah* and Torah is the pillar of *chessed*. When one has exertion in Torah and he reaches inward, he is not just connected to Torah and *tefillah* superficially, but he has a deep connection in his soul to Torah, and to *tefillah* (as a son who talks to his Father and enjoys the relationship, or at least yearns for it) – the same goes for the third pillar, *chessed*: it is a deep connection to *chessed*, and not just a superficial act of *chessed*.

Chessed With An Inner Awareness Vs. Chessed Performed Superficially

In most cases, though, *chessed* is performed on an external level. A person will do an act of *chessed*, but it is often missing an inner intention.

We can see that those who haven't merited to live a life of Torah learning in the *beis midrash* are able to do *chessed*, and gentiles as well can do *chessed* (although the Gemara says that they do it for themselves, it is still a degree of *chessed*). If so, we see that there is *chessed* that isn't connected with Torah, and we might have an attitude because of this that *chessed* doesn't need to be performed with depth to it.

After all, anyone in the world can do *chessed*, whether they learn Torah or not, whether they are Jewish or not. Women can do *chessed*, so you don't have to learn Torah in order to do *chessed*. And even those who aren't always learning in the *beis midrash* can do *chessed*. It seems that *chessed* doesn't need to be an outcome of learning Torah, and that anyone can do it.

Sometimes people do *chessed* because they feel like they are selfish if they don't become involved with others, and therefore they turn outward from themselves, by being kind to others. When that is the case, a person isn't doing *chessed* out a sense of inner fulfillment, but out of an inner void. Because he feels empty inside himself, he seeks others whom he can help....

We aren't even referring to people who do *chessed* for the purposes of *kavod* (honor) and to get a good name for themselves in the world. That is a completely external kind of *chessed*. But even if one does *chessed* from within himself, and not in the same way that gentiles do *chessed* or how unlearned people do *chessed* – even so, if a person is doing *chessed* because he would rather spend his time doing *chessed* versus sitting and learn in the *beis midrash*, although this is a better way to utilize his time than to do nothing, such *chessed* is still not genuine.

What is the true way of how we need to do *chessed*?

Revealing Our Nature To Do Chessed

Just as the soul yearns for Torah and *Tefillah*, so does the soul naturally yearn to do *chessed*, which is based on *ahavah*, a love, for others. It is a deep yearning contained in a Jew's soul. Anyone who has a Jewish soul has inherited *middos* from the *Avos*, and from Avraham Avinu we inherited a love – for the Creator, and to help other Jews, out of a love for them.

But this deep nature of the soul is usually concealed from us since we are born. Most people do not get to actualize their soul's yearning for *chessed* that much.

A person starts out life as a child, where *chessed* does not play an active role at that point. A child is only concerned for himself, and everything he does is for himself. When a person gets past childhood, he makes friends, but it's possible that he is still just using all of them for his own needs.

When a person matures and he gets married, and he has children, there is certainly a love he has for them, but often this remains as a "hidden love", and although he does *chessed* for his family, it is usually performed monotonously, following the motions of life.

The truth is that Hashem gives a man a wife and children as a gateway for him, to actualize his soul's yearning for *chessed* and bring it out from its potential. But without being aware of this perspective, a person will help and support his family simply because he has a love for his family, and he will provide all of their needs, but only the exact needs, and nothing more than that. He will end his kindness towards them at that rigid level.

But when a person thinks about what *chessed* is on a deep level, and he wants to emulate the *chessed* of Avraham Avinu (as one must say, "When will I reach touch upon the level of my forefathers?", and indeed, one can touch upon the *chessed* of Avraham Avinu), he realizes that being kind to his family is not simply like a contract to support them, but as a gateway in his own soul that allows him to open up his soul, and to keep expanding his circle; to desire to bestow good upon Creation, just as Hashem desires to bestow good to Creation.

One should want to reveal the deep desire in the soul to do *chessed* for others, to bestow good upon others. That should be where we are directing our life towards. Understandably, if one only does *chessed* and he ignores his Torah learning, he is exchanging one pillar for another. There are three pillars of the world, not one. Therefore, one needs all three pillars – Torah, *avodah*, and *gemilus chassadim*. When one is strong in Torah and in *tefillah*, his pillar of *gemillas chassadim* can then have a firm foundation, for it will then be balanced with his pillars of Torah and *tefillah*.

Such *chessed* will be a "Torah that begins with *chessed* and ends with *chessed*", and not a *chessed* that becomes a means to its own end. *Chessed* that is performed from one's innerness is a *chessed* that is balanced with Torah and *tefillah*, and that is "*chessed shel emes*" (true kindness). On a deeper note, this is also called "*Toras Chessed*" – as in the verse, "*The Torah of kindness on her lips*", which refers to one who teaches Torah to others, or even more so, one who learns *lishmah* – such *chessed* stems from the innermost depths of Torah. From there can come *chessed*.

One can actualize this deep *chessed* by teaching Torah to others, but this act is just the gateway towards *chessed*. "Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world" – everything began from Torah, but afterwards, there was a Creation. Therefore, *chessed* needs to extend from Torah and into "creation" – it needs to come from the innermost depths and extend all the way into this "world of action" itself, practically speaking, and to be performed in proper and balanced amount.

"Man Was Not Created For Himself, But Only To Help Others"

Reb Itzele of Volozhin, in the introduction to *sefer Nefesh Chaim* [written by his father, Rav Chaim of Volozhin] writes that his father would always say: **“This is the entire person: man was not created for himself, but only to help others, as much as he is capable of.”**

The *Nefesh HaChaim* definitely was not weak when it came to Torah study or *tefillah*, *chas v’shalom*; so his emphasis on *chessed* is clearly not coming from a compromise one the areas of Torah and *tefillah*. This clear perspective, that man was not created for himself and only to help others, could only have been reached by a person who lived his life correctly and with the right attitude.

Now, if a person tries to develop an attitude in which he has no *negios* (personal self-interests) and he does everything only for Hashem’s sake and out of *Ahavas Yisrael*, this is a level that is only for the times of Mashiach. The attitude in our current era must be that we are simply not living for ourselves and that we are created to help others; that we should not think that the world all revolves around “Me”. We must instead know and feel the reality that we are not created for ourselves. This is the deep perspective towards life!

Rav Itzele of Volozhiner says that we need to do whatever is in our capability, to help others. This is not just an external act of helping others that we need to do. It doesn’t mean simply that we need to decide to do *chessed* for 3 times every day, or more. That can only be a result of something that comes before it - the attitude that we are not living for ourselves. When one has deeply reached that perspective, from there, he can bestow good upon others and do *chessed* for others, each to his own level, and as long as he is balanced with Torah and *tefillah*.

Leaving Self-Absorption

The first step one needs is to reach the point where self-absorption is repulsive to him.

None of our Gedolim ever lived a self-absorbed kind of life. When one lives a life in which everything or almost everything revolves around his own “I”, and he never does anything for others, and when asked if he did *chessed* that day, he has to think hard if he did anything that did for others - this is not a truthful way of living.

“A person was not created for himself, but to help others, as much as he is capable of” - *Chessed* is not just about the act of *chessed* itself for another; it results from an internal attitude, of love of others, of a deep desire to bestow good upon others. It begins with leaving self-absorption. This is not just something to know about intellectually; one has to internalize in his heart and feel disgust towards a self-absorbed kind of life.

Sometimes we can see people who do not feel anything in their surroundings, and they are entirely absorbed in themselves. We are disgusted by this when we see it. Sometimes we can have a “good eye” towards such a person and judge him favorably, and sometimes, we can’t help but be sickened by another person’s self-absorbed behavior, and we feel a disgust towards him. When that happens, we can use this disgust for holiness, when it awakens us to realize that the central aspect of our lives must be about Hashem, and His nation Yisrael - and that our life is not about our own private selves.

When one realizes that the world was not created for just himself, and that the concept of “Therefore man was created individual” and “The world was created for my sake” is perhaps being overdone in his life, he can form a disgust for self-absorption.^[2] Then he will begin to bestow good with his family, from a more truthful place than before; and then he extends this towards those around him and towards those whom he is close with.

Eventually, when one keeps going in this way, he will reach the pillar of *chessed* - no less, and no more, than the pillars of Torah and *Tefillah* in his life.

Three Contemplations To Deepen Our Chessed

In order to deepen our perspective towards *chessed*, one needs three factors: **(1)** *Yishuv hadaas* (calmness of mind) about this concept; **(2)** *Taharas HaLev* (purity of heart), **(3)** and, finally, to do active *chessed*.

These three factors together are the true kind of life, of the “three pillars which the world” stands on. To elaborate:

1) The “*yishuv hadaas*” aspect here is to come to the realization, intellectually, that we are not created for ourselves, but to help others.

2) The “*taharas halev*” aspect is to feel a yearning to bestow good upon others, after one has become aware of this perspective. It is to yearn to bestow good to others just as the soul yearns for Torah and Tefillah. Just as a yearning for Torah doesn’t come in one day, and it is a drawn out process which must start from childhood, so too when it comes to *chessed* – if we didn’t merit to have a desire for *chessed* in our childhood, now we can now merit it. If you already merited it, that is wonderful. If not, you still have the chance.

3) The depth of *chessed* must come from the yearning of the soul to bestow good upon others; then we can actualize the yearning for *chessed*, in a sensible way which will not infringe on our Torah and Tefillah pillars; a “Torah that begins and ends with *chessed*”.

When we have these three factors together, we can come to the depth of life, to the true way life is supposed to look.

Practically Actualizing This Idea

If we want to make these matters practical, as we already mentioned, we first need to make sure that our Torah learning is solid, and then we need to make sure that our pillar of Tefillah is solid; our “Torah learning and our Tefillah must be intertwined with each other”.^[3] The next step after that is to build our third pillar, *chessed*.

One needs all three pillars in his life; each of these should not be compromising on the other. One’s *chessed* should not be compromising on his Torah and Tefillah – to the contrary, it should be revealing more depth to his Torah and Tefillah. The actual times of doing *chessed* might take up time, though, as everything takes time; there will inevitably be some time compromised of the other areas, as one is focusing on one area. But it should be causing more depth to one’s connection to Torah and to Tefillah. When one has Torah, Tefillah and *chessed* in his life, he has the “three-tiered rope, which is not quickly severed.”

Part of building a home [marriage] entails doing *chessed* on a permanent basis. But as we explained, that is the outcome, and it is the third step, which must be preceded by two other stages, which anyone can do.

The first step to acquire this perspective, as we explained, is *yishuv hadaas* – to contemplate the perspective described by Reb Itzele of Volozhin, that **“man was not created for himself, only to help others, as much as he is capable of.”** One should review this statement many times until his mind has absorbed it and he realizes it. He should review it tens of times, hundreds of times – even thousands of times – until it sinks in. One can also review other statements of Chazal that are similar to this point, and it doesn’t have to be this particular statement of Reb Itzele of Volozhin; each person finds different points that speak to his soul.

Without reviewing statements of Chazal about this point - for thousands of times and with passion - a person won't be able to awaken the perspective. This is not to say that you should spend your entire *Bein HaZemanim* reviewing statements of Chazal until you reach 1000 times. Rather, throughout your schedule, keep awakening the desire for *chessed*.

So first absorb the perspective, with *yishuv hadaas* - through contemplating it in your mind until you are at peace with this attitude - that there must be three pillars in your life that are each given prominence: Torah, Tefillah and *chessed*.

Just as it is important to any sensible person that a day cannot go by without Torah and without Tefillah, so should it be clear to a person that a day should not pass in which he doesn't do actual *chessed*. It should be very clear to a person, that "*The world is built on kindness.*"^[4]

[1][1] Zohar III Acharei Mos 73a.

[2] See ***Fixing Your Wind_ 015_ Self-Absorption*** and the *derasha* of ***Coming Out Of Yourself***

[3] As written in a letter of the Chazon Ish. See ***Bilvavi Part 6 - Chapter 09***

[4] For more on the Rav's talks on *chessed*, see ***Bilvavi Part 3 Section IV - Chessed***; and ***Tefillah #020 - The Longing For A Smile***, and ***Tefillah #021- Inner Love***, and ***Tefillah #022 - Becoming Connected***; and ***Tefillah #0158 - Deeper Kindness and Compassion***, and ***Tefillah #0168 - Emulating Hashem's Love and Kindness***.

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