

## CHESSD WITH THE UNLIKELY

### FINDING THE GOOD AMIDST THE BAD

In this week's *parshah*, Hashem destroys the city of Sodom for their wickedness. Avraham Avinu *davens* for the people of Sodom to be saved, pleading with Hashem to save the city if there will be 50 *tzaddikim*, or 45 *tzaddikim*, or 40, 30, or 20 *tzaddikim*, or at least 10 *tzaddikim* – and when Hashem tells him that that are not even 10 *tzaddikim* in the city, Avraham finally retreats.

The city of Sodom was a wicked place, the epitome of sin and wickedness on the world, yet Avraham

Avinu *davened* to Hashem to save them, on the grounds that there might be some *tzaddikim* there. It appeared that Sodom was an entirely wicked place, but Avraham Avinu knew that nothing in Creation is totally evil; everything mixed with good and evil. There is always evil mixed with good, and there is always good mixed with evil. Even the most depraved place on earth, Sodom, had to have some good in it. Therefore, Avraham Avinu hoped that it could be saved, in the merit of some *tzad-*

*dikim* whom he hoped were living there.

True, in the end there were not even 10 *tzaddikim* to be found there, but there was still Lot, the nephew of Avraham, who had practiced hospitality with guests even as he dwelled in Sodom. So there was some degree of good to be found there. Therefore Avraham persisted in prayer to Hashem that the people of Sodom should be saved, because he knew that there must be some good to be found even amongst the bad.

### SAVING THE WICKED

Avraham was praying to Hashem not only to save any righteous men who are living there, but to save even the wicked. In asking Hashem to find any righteous people that are living there, he wanted the wicked to be saved in their merit. This is in spite of the fact that the wicked people of Sodom were a constant source of spiritual impurity on the world.

Had Hashem let them live, perhaps Avraham would have taught them how to repent or make converts from them, as he did with all oth-

ers in the world. But when Avraham was asking Hashem to spare the wicked, it was a loftier kind of prayer. It was not like praying for the recovery of an ill person, whom we hope will continue to live and be healed from illness. The wicked people of Sodom, if they were allowed to continue living, would only cause ruination to the world. Their continued existence would not bring any good, and they would have only worsened. True, there was a possibility that they could always repent. After all,

Hashem awaits each person's *teshuvah* until the day of his death, no matter how wicked he acts. But this was highly unlikely with the people of Sodom, who were very entrenched in spiritual impurity, for they were very consistent with their evil.

So when Avraham was praying for their survival, this was a very high level of prayer, for their continued existence would likely further their evil, and even so, Avraham wanted them to live and he prayed to Hashem to spare them.

### PRAYING TO SAVE THOSE WHO OPPOSE YOU

Even more so – and this is the main point here - it wasn't by chance that the people of Sodom lived in Avraham's generation. His nephew Lot who went to live there had gone

his own separate ways from Avraham's family, so he was regarded as the impure seed of Avraham's family; and even so, Avraham prayed for his survival. Avraham and the

people of Sodom were total opposites of each other, and even so, Avraham prayed for their survival. Avraham was entirely kind and compassionate, whereas the people

of Sodom despised kindness and compassion. They hated the very idea of hospitality with others, as Chazal describe at length. Lot's wife didn't even want to give salt to the guests. In contrast to the kind and giving person that was Avraham Avinu, who revealed G-dliness on the world, Sodom was the total antithesis to whatever Avraham represented. They were opposed to kindness, giving, and revealing any G-dliness on the world. Sodom was a terrible and impure place that concealed any light of G-dliness. It was the

root of impurity on the world, which stood to conceal the reality of the Creator from the world.

They were precisely placed in Avraham's generation, because the forces of impurity are always challenging the forces of holiness, for that is a rule which Hashem has designed the world with [in order to allow free will]. Similarly, when we had a Moshe Rabbeinu who took us out of Egypt, there was also the "Erev Rav" who came out with us, who stood to oppose the side of holiness. Avraham was on

one side of the world, and Sodom was at the opposite end. Avraham was building the world by spreading holiness and knowledge of the Creator into it, whereas Sodom was the root that was causing destruction to the world.

We can now understand that Avraham's prayer to save Sodom was not only a prayer to save wicked people, but to save the very people in the world who were opposing everything that he stood for. He was praying that his very opposite should be saved!

#### THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CHESSED AND TEFILLAH

This was the great *chessed* that Avraham Avinu epitomized. It was not only a *tefillah* to save them, but an act of *chessed* on its deepest level.

We learn in the beginning of this *parshah* of the *chessed* of Avraham Avinu, which he showed towards his guests. But from Avraham's prayer for Sodom, we see even more depth of his *chessed*.

Avraham also enacted the *tefillah* of *Shacharis*, according to one of the opinions in the Sages.<sup>1</sup> Avraham is therefore the pillar of both *tefillah* and *chessed*; his *tefillah* stemmed from *chessed*. He was the first to ingrain *tefillah* into his descendants, *Klal Yisrael*, as a part of his trait of *chessed* that he exemplified. *Tefillah* is therefore a branch of the *chessed* of Avraham.

For this reason, a person's *tefillah*

is only answered when he *davens* for others, and not if he is self-focused. It is because *tefillah* must flow from *chessed*, and without a desire for *chessed* for others, without *davening* for others' needs, a person's *tefillah* is self-absorbed and his *tefillah* does not have its power. One must not only *daven* for his own family; he must *daven* even for others as well, and for his others relatives, and even more so, for those whom he doesn't even know.

But the depth of how *chessed* empowers *tefillah* can be seen from Avraham's prayer to save the people of Sodom, who totally opposed his essence. He had told Lot to separate from him, when he saw that Lot wanted to live in Sodom, and yet he was now *davening* for Lot, and even for the people of Sodom, who were to-

tally wicked. He was *davening* for those who totally opposed all that he stood for, and this is the depth of his *chessed*.

Chazal say that "Prayer accomplishes half." Just as man and woman are each half-completed without each other until they marry, so is prayer a necessary half that one needs, in order to get anywhere. Just as a wife is a "help-mate" to her husband if he merits it, and she opposes him when he is not meritorious, so is there a concept in prayer, to pray for one who opposes you. Prayer is not so much about praying for yourself. It is mainly meant to pray for others, and as we are explaining here, it is mainly meant as a means to join with others, even with those who oppose our very essence.

<sup>1</sup> Berachos 26b

### THE DEPTH OF AVRAHAM AVINU'S KINDNESS

We can see this concept reflected as well from the beginning of the *parshah*, where Avraham shows hospitality to guests who were far from his taste. They looked like lowlife wanderers, who worshipped the dust on their feet. Avraham told them to wash their feet from the dirt that they worshipped, so he knew that they were idol-worshippers, and even so, he was hospitable to them, although they totally opposed all that he stood for. Avraham Avinu was the one who fought against all of the idol worship of his father Terach, and there was no one more opposed to idol worship than he. But when it came to being hospitable to others, he was kind even to those who totally opposed all

of his ideals, even to those who served the dust on their feet, who didn't serve Hashem.

Avraham *davened* for those who opposed him, and he did actual *chessed* with those who opposed him. These two aspects show us the depth of his trait of *chessed*. Unlike the bird "*chassidah*" [the stork] which is only kind to its fellow birds and not to other birds, the *chessed* of Avraham Avinu was that he did *chessed* even with those who were his opposite.

Furthermore, Avraham *davened* for the survival of Yishmael, whom he knew very well was a "wild man" that is dangerous to others, the very opposite of his be-

nevolent nature. Unlike the simple understanding, which is that he was a father simply praying for his child, his prayer for Yishmael's survival was really a great act of kindness, for he was *davening* for the survival of a child whom he was in complete opposition with. In contrast to Yitzchok Avinu, who loved Esav because Esav had fooled him by always trying to please him, Avraham's prayer for Yishmael was entirely an act of kindness, to save a person who totally opposed his being.

In light of the above, the *chessed* of Avraham Avinu shows us what *chessed* really is: *chessed* is mainly about being kind to those who oppose you.

### BECOMING A GIVER & EXPANDING THE QUALITY OF YOUR CHESSED

Let us bring out this concept in sharper terms.

When a person is a child, he is mainly concerned for himself, and the center of his life is one's own "I". If something is not "me", it feels like a contradiction to one's self (to be specific, it challenges one's lower self, which is the *nefesh habehaimis*, the "animal soul"). Everyone is born like this, with a tendency to be self-focused. But there are some people who are born with a nature that completely does not want to be kind to others. It is a pitiful situation when one is born with such a nature, but there are many people like this.

A person with a very self-focused nature doesn't like to do *chessed*, and every act of *chessed* feels like a contradiction to his personality. This kind of person lives entirely for himself, and everything must revolve around him and suit his own needs; everything he comes into contact with must serve some kind of self-gain for him. He hates the very idea of *chessed*.

But the souls of *Klal Yisrael* are blessed with a benevolent nature, in addition to being compassionate and shameful, traits which were all inherited from Avraham Avinu. Thus there is a nature ingrained in every Jew's soul to be kind to others. It is not always

clearly revealed, because the "animal soul" can conceal this nature from coming to the fore, either totally or for the most part.

The Sages make a distinction between the *chessed* practiced by *Klal Yisrael*, with the *chessed* that other nations perform. A gentile can only act kind to others if it will involve some kind of self-gain, but a member of Yisrael has a very nature ingrained in his *neshamah* to do *chessed*, which was inherited from the *Avos*. But it is very possible that the "animal soul" conceals the nature. If one is born with a nature that is totally opposed to doing *chessed*, he has an *avodah* to get back his long lost nature of

*chessed*. After traversing that stage, or if he is already born with a liking towards *chessed*, the *avodah* of a person is to deepen the quality of his *chessed*.

To review and summarize, the first step is to become aware of the nature to do *chessed*. One must start with doing *chessed* with at least those who are closest to him, so that he is at least like the *chassidah* bird, which does *chessed* exclusively to its friends and to no one else.

But after one has gotten used to doing *chessed* with those who deserve his *chessed* the most, the next step is not simply to do more acts of *chessed* (that is certainly praiseworthy, but it is not the point here), but to expand the quality of his *chessed*, by doing *chessed* even with those whom he does not feel an affinity for. It can be an actual act of *chessed* to the person whom he doesn't like, and if a person cannot find this opportunity, one

When a person wonders "When will my actions reach those of my forefathers?" (each person can contemplate this on his own level) and he wants to emulate the *chessed* of our Avos, how indeed can he begin to perform true *chessed*?

The first step, as we explained, is to do acts of *chessed* in order to counter the nature of the ego, which tends to be self-focused.

Avraham Avinu kept his tent open in all four directions so any passerby from any of the directions could come. This was not just another attempt to do more *chessed*.

### IN SUMMARY

should *daven* for another person who is very much his opposite.

The point is not to *daven* to get rid of the opposition he has with others and to make peace with them (that is a separate topic). The point is to *daven* for the welfare of others, who are taking a direction in life, who live differently than you.

When one *davens* this way, it is as if he is opening up his own 'tent' in all four directions, as Avraham Avinu did. If one can only be kind to certain types of people, though, but he cannot be kind to other kinds of people, his 'tent' is not open to all four directions. Avraham Avinu's tent was open to all four directions not only because

### EMULATING THE CHESSED OF AVRAHAM AVINU

The second step is to do *chessed* even with those who are not to your liking, who oppose your way of living.

This is the meaning of the verse, "*The world is built on kindness.*" What is it that destroys the world?

When two forces contradict each other, they cause destruction to something. Kindness not only prevents the destruction of the

It was rather an expression of his *chessed* that was open to all of the directions – to do *chessed* in any possible manner.

his *chessed* spanned all of the directions of the world, but because his *chessed* extended even to those who were going in an opposite direction than he. It was even towards Lot, who had gone separate ways than he.

Avraham Avinu *davened* for those who opposed his way of life – the people of Sodom, and Lot. He was hospitable to people who were idol-worshippers, who were in total contradiction to all that he stood for. He went to save Lot in war, even though Lot had gone separate ways. All of these acts were examples of the depth of Avraham Avinu's *chessed*: to be kind to even those who were totally opposite than he.

world, it builds the world. Instead of war, opposition, hatred, and dissension, there can be kindness that builds the world. One can build the world, in the place of doing things that demolish the world.

If a person only does *chessed* with others who are to his liking, he is not performing *chessed* with those who are opposite than him, and such *chessed* is not emulating the

*chessed* of Avraham Avinu. Only when a person actually does *chessed* with others who are not

to his liking – whether he does kind deeds for them, or whether he prays for their welfare – only

then is he connecting himself to the *chessed* of Avraham Avinu.

### ELEVATING OUR CHESSED

The physical body, and the “animal soul” connected to it, are in total contradiction with the *neshamah*. When a person can only do *chessed* with others whom he finds it easy to do *chessed* with, his *chessed* is on the level of the “animal soul”, and it is like the *chessed* that the *chassidah* bird performs, which only does *chessed* for its friends.

But when a person does *chessed* with those who are oppose him, who are not to his liking, such *chessed* will break his natural character traits, and it rectifies the “animal soul”, which is at first in an imperfect state. After a person gets used to doing *chessed* to even those who are opposite than he,

and it becomes second nature to him, such *chessed* will reveal the light of his *neshamah*.

*Chessed* is therefore not just to perform kind deeds for others. The deed of kindness that one performs with another is but a vessel, which must be used to activate an inner light within.

As long as a person can only be kind with those who are to his liking, he does not access the light of his *neshamah*, and such *chessed* is on the level of the “animal soul”. But when a person does *chessed* with even those who are opposite than he, such *chessed* goes above the level of his animal soul, for the animal soul is not on the level to

do this. It is breaking his nature, and it causes one to rectify his character traits, of hatred, anger, dissension, revenge and grudges on others.

After one has gotten used to doing *chessed* with those who are opposite than him, the light of the *neshamah* will become illuminated within him, and then he will be able to do truer and truer *chessed* with others, which will be enabled from the light of his *neshamah*. Such *chessed* will then be emanating from the depth of one's *neshamah*, and such was the *chessed* of Avraham Avinu, who shined the light of *emunah* upon the world, who was the paradigm of *chessed* on this world.

### IN CONCLUSION

If one can work on these two steps – by first getting used to doing *chessed* for others [in order to counter the nature of one's ego], and then to get used to doing *chessed* with even those that are not to one's liking, which smashes the “animal soul” – after traversing these two steps, with the help of Hashem, one can then reach the third step, which is to do *chessed* that stems from the light of one's *neshamah*. This is the main goal.

If one reaches it, a person merits the light of his *neshamah* to

shine, and the *chessed* that he performs for others will be the kind of *chessed* that produced Yitzchok Avinu and Yaakov Avinu (who represents Torah) - the offspring of Avraham Avinu and the holy results of his great *chessed*. There is a path that leads from Torah to *chessed* (“Torah begins with kindness and ends with kindness”) and there is a path that leads from *chessed* to Torah, but the common denominator between these two paths is that they both bring a person to the light of the *neshamah*.

May we merit with the help of Hashem to connect to the *chessed* of Avraham Avinu, but not to the external acts of *chessed* which are on the level of the “animal soul”, but to the trait of *chessed* that Avraham Avinu exemplified, which was a nature of the *neshamah*. Through this, may we merit that the light of complete *emunah* be shined upon the world.

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## Q & A [FROM BILVAVI Q&A ARCHIVE]

### HOW MESIRUS NEFESH & MATNAS CHINAM WORKS

#### QUESTION:

1) The Rav has said that it is not within our power to change the generation, except through mesirus nefesh (*sacrificing our will for Hashem*), which comes from Above. It sounds like we can indeed change the generation, if we have mesirus nefesh – so what did the Rav mean that it's not within our ability to change the generation? It seems that we can, if we have mesirus nefesh.

#### ANSWER:

It is not within our power to do anything that can bring about change. But if we show mesirus nefesh, we awaken a great light. When we have mesirus nefesh below on this world, our awakening from below causes an awakening above which brings a great light from above to come down to the world, and through that light, changes will happen on their own, not through us.

#### QUESTION

2) How is mesirus nefesh a light that comes from above? If each of us has the power to awaken ourselves and have mesirus nefesh, then it's an awakening from below, from us, and it's not coming from above.

#### ANSWER

See previous answer: Mesirus nefesh is an awakening from below, from us, which then brings about a light that comes from above, which then brings about change.

#### QUESTION

3) If Moshe didn't get answered when he asked Hashem for a matnas chinam (*a free gift*) to be allowed into Eretz Yisrael even if he isn't deserving, then how are we able to receive a matnas chinam from Hashem when we are undeserving? If Moshe, the greatest tzaddik, didn't get answered when he asked Hashem for a matnas chinam, then certainly we can't get it, so how can it be that we all have a power of matnas chinam to receive salvation from Hashem when we are undeserving because we are all children to Hashem?

#### ANSWER

Matnas chinam is a light that comes from the Next World. That light is shining strongly now. When tzaddikim aren't answered even when they requested a matnas chinam, in each case there was a very specific unique reason why they weren't answered. It is very possible that Moshe wasn't answered because that mode of conduct (*matnas chinam*) wasn't good for him, but for every other individual, whatever he needs he can get at the time he needs it.

#### QUESTION

4) Why does the Rav say that those who remain connected to evil, to the 50th level of tumah, won't be by the Geulah? According to the concept of matnas chinam which the Rav explains so beautifully in the derasha "Asking

Hashem For A Free Gift" (*Tefillah 051*), it seems that anyone can be zocheh to the Geulah even when they are undeserving, if they ask Hashem to be by the Geulah even though they are undeserving, and in that way they get a matnas chinam from Hashem, as long as they awaken this deep perspective in the soul, the fact that we are all children to Hashem, making anyone able to receive any salvation from Hashem even if he is undeserving due to his deeds and due to his low level? So how can it be that those who remain connected with the 50th level of tumah won't merit the Geulah? Why can't they ask all Hashem for a matnas chinam, to get it even though they are undeserving, simply because they are Hashem's children?

#### ANSWER

The 50th gate of tumah is a total contradiction to the Geulah. If those who remain connected with the 50th level of tumah will indeed merit a matnas chinam, the first part of their 'free gift' would be that they will first have the merit to disconnect from the 50th gate of tumah, and only after that would their 'free gift' from Hashem enable them to receive the 50th level of kedushah.

## MESIRUS NEFESH ON A PRACTICAL LEVEL

### QUESTION

In the Rav's derashah "The Avodah of Our Generation", the Rav writes that the way to overcome the "50th Gate of Defilement" in our generation is only through mesirus nefesh [*self-sacrifice*]. However, in other derashos, I have heard the Rav say that there are always different paths to traverse: to go step after step, and the path of mesirus nefesh. But according to what the Rav has said in the derashah of "The Avodah of Our Generation", it seems that there is only one path to take – mesirus nefesh.

I would be happy if the Rav can clarify what this means for me, practically. Let's say we have a person who has difficulty with learning Torah, and he likes to sleep a lot. Does such a person need to give up his entire being, in one moment, in order to serve Hashem [*by overcoming his difficulty in learning and*

*his desire to sleep*]? How can he do this, if he's not on that level?!] So what does the Rav mean by the words "mesirus nefesh"?

### ANSWER

**Throughout** all of the generations, there were always two paths: 1) Hadrakah, to progress step after step. 2) Mesirus nefesh, self-sacrifice, as Rabbi Eliezer ben Dordaya did [*see Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah 17a*].

In our generation, where the "50th Gate of Defilement" is in full force, the only way to counter it is through mesirus nefesh. Therefore, each person needs to exercise mesirus nefesh on [*at least*] one area of his life. However this does not mean that a person needs to do all of his actions with mesirus nefesh. It just means that a person needs to have some connection to the level of mesirus nefesh. It is possible for one to

implement this idea by taking the area of his life in which he finds his greatest struggle in, and to have mesirus nefesh in that area.

**Practically** speaking, though, this is unfeasible for most people, so it is not close within reach of most people. So instead, one can try to find other areas in his life [*where he struggles in*] – each person on his own level and according to his own unique situation – and to exercise mesirus nefesh in those areas [*in which he struggles in*]. In that way, one can become connected to mesirus nefesh, and thereafter, one has a connection to the "50th Gate of Holiness", and he is no longer held captive by the "50th Gate of Defilement". Once a person accesses this spiritual illumination, it will be shined onto all other areas of one's avodah.

## SKIPPING LEVELS

### QUESTION

1) Does a person need to go in a certain order of steps [*in avodas Hashem*], or is it possible for a person to skip and go straight to the desired level? 2) Did the

tzaddikim throughout the generations reach the levels which the Rav describes?

### ANSWER

1) By way of mesirus nefesh (*self-*

*sacrifice*) a person can skip levels. This is only for individuals.

2) Each one reached it, according to his level and according to his soul root.

## ABOUT THE ROLE OF TEFILLAH

### QUESTION

**Rebbi** Nachman says that many tzaddikim reached all that they reached through tefillah, while he reached everything through hisbodedus together with tefillah. Does every person need to do this? Does a person need tefillah in

order to gain self-recognition?

### ANSWER

**A:** Statements of Rebbi Nachman are the "illumination of Mashiach", and Mashiach is linked with tefillah, because Mashiach is from the word masiach, "to

converse", to talk to Hashem through tefillah. So there were tzaddikim who built their avodas Hashem largely through tefillah. But it makes perfect sense that other tzaddikim did not begin with tefillah, though they did make use of tefillah. There was no tzaddik who

ever reached anything without tefillah, but does that mean that every tzaddik's main aspect was tefillah? Certainly there were tzaddikim who didn't. For example, the Chazon Ish. The Chazon Ish didn't mainly reach his growth through tefillah. Did he not daven? Of course he davened. He himself writes that a person has to daven before he wants to understand anything. But did he base everything on tefillah? It's hard to say that tefillah was his main aspect. He based everything on working hard at learning Torah, with mesirus nefesh, and along with this he also davened from the depths of his heart. But he didn't base everything on tefillah, he didn't make everything hinge on tefillah alone.

#### QUESTION

**But** perhaps we can say that the Chazon Ish reached mesirus nefesh in Torah only because he davened so much. Especially because someone said that the Chazon Ish emphasized tefillah even more than learning Torah, and in addition, the Chazon Ish wrote in a letter, "I put more

effort into tefillah than into my Torah learning."

#### ANSWER

**That** is true, but it was only a result of something else. The reason why he put more effort into davening than learning was because he testified on himself that because he is so immersed in his learning, he can't focus as much on his davening, because his mind is immersed in whatever area of Torah he was learning about, and therefore he had to overcome his love for the Torah in order to be able to daven properly. All of his davening and crying were a result of his Torah learning. Did he have a very strong ability of davening? Yes. And it seems that as the years continued, he davened even more. But what was it all based on? His Torah learning. Why did he have to put more effort into his davening than into his learning? It was because his Torah learning came natural to him, it was more his nature to learn than to daven, and therefore he found it difficult to daven. That is why he had to

put in more effort to his davening, but not because tefillah was more important to him than Torah.

**Sometimes** people read stories of the Gedolim, and not always are the stories accurate. Even when the story is accurate, it is hard to understand the meaning of the story, and it is this lack of understanding which changes the whole picture.

#### QUESTION

**But** he would often cry with tears when he davened. It seemed that this was because of his feelings and d'veykus, not because he had difficulty concentrating on his davening due to his learning.

#### ANSWER

**His** power of thinking was even stronger than his emotions. It's true that he davened and cried, but his strong point was his power of thought and being immersed in learning, much more than his power of davening.

## HOW TO RECTIFY "EREV RAV" IN MYSELF

#### QUESTION

**What** should I do if I recognize this "Erev Rav" aspect in my soul? How do I rectify it?

#### ANSWER

**First** of all, let's understand that if someone has a large percentage of "Erev Rav" in his soul, he won't be that insulted from the words here. However, there are

people who do have some "Erev Rav" aspect in their souls. This is the part of the soul upon which we have a "mitzvah to erase Amalek". If a person recognizes that he has some trace of 'Erev Rav' in his soul, he should daven to Hashem that he merit to die al kiddush Hashem. If a person is truly willing to die al kiddush Hashem, that very decision to have mesirus nefesh for Hashem is like

a "death" to that evil part of his soul; just as the neshamah leaving the body is considered to be 'death'. In this way a person is left with an entirely holy soul.

**The** question you have asked is very important, because there are indeed many people in this generation who contained a mixture of good/Jew and evil/Erev Rav in their souls [as explained in *sefer Shomer Emunim and others*].

