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IN MEMORY OF CLARA CHOPP A"H

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

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לעילוי נשמות

מרת פאגלא בת מורינו ר' ישראל ע"ה
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PARSHAS SHEMOS

THE EGYPTIAN AT THE WELL

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PARSHAS SHEMOS

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

THE EGYPTIAN AT THE WELL

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Part I. The Jackpot

The Receiver

If we would want to properly analyze the subject of doing a mitzvah *bein adam lachaveiro*, a good deed towards a fellow Jew, it would take quite a long time because there are various components that go into creating a successful mitzvah and each one requires its own study. The perfection of a mitzvah is a very long subject and it would require many nights, many lectures, and even then, there would be a lot left to say.

Tonight however, I'd like to skip over a big part of the subject and speak with you about one of the highest levels of the mitzvah of *chessed*; one of its most elusive components, something that is quite often overlooked and even disregarded. And that's the subject of *who is the beneficiary of your chessed.* A very important part of the mitzvah is who it's being done to, and I want to take some time now to explain that subject.

Saving the Oppressed

And we'll begin with an episode, an example from our parsha. When Moshe Rabbeinu fled from Mitzrayim to save his life and he went to Midyan eventually, so the *possuk* tells us that he arrived there at a certain well, and an incident took place where he helped a few girls. The daughters of Yisro were being harassed by the other shepherds who didn't allow these girls to water their sheep.

And so Moshe, when he saw this injustice—after all the girls also were waiting in line; it's their turn, and their flocks should get water too—he wasn't the type of person who tolerated injustice. And he was a big strong man too. You remember how he gave a punch to the Mitzri taskmaster and right away, there was a funeral. And so וַיָּקָם מֹשֶׁה וַיּוֹשִׁעָן – Moshe drove away the shepherds and he allowed these girls to water their flock (Shemos 2:17).

Yisro's Chessed

Now when they came home and told their father what happened, אִישׁ מִצְרִי הִצִּילָנוּ מִיַּד הָרֹעִים – "*An Egyptian man came along and saved us from the shepherds*" (*ibid.* 18), so Yisro didn't say, "Is that so? That's so nice." He also didn't just thank Moshe. He could have given his hand and thanked the 'Mitzri' and then he said goodbye and walked into his house again.

Oh no. Yisro said, "What kind of business is this?" He chided his daughters. "Somebody helped you and you just let him pass by? לָמָּה זֶּה עֲזַבְתֶּן אֶת הָאִישׁ – *why did you let that man go*? That's how you treat a man who helped you?! קְרֶאן לוֹ! וְיֹאכַל לָחֶם – *Call in that Egyptian man and let him eat with us*! (*ibid.* 20)."

Reward According to the Recipient

Now, Yisro didn't know that he was helping Moshe Rabbeinu. "A *Mitzri saved us*." That's what the daughters told their father. So he didn't know who he was inviting to eat. It was an Egyptian, that's all. But because he was inviting the greatest man in the world, he therefore gained a tremendous reward. Our Sages tell us that Yisro, at that time, earned the *zechus* that first of all, he gained a son-in-law. Oh ho! It was some son-in-law!

And Yisro's family became incorporated in the Am Yisroel forever. His descendants were among the greatest sages of our nation later in our history; they sat in the Lishkas HaGazis in Sanhedrin for generations and generations. And all a reward because when he invited someone in to eat, it turned out it was Moshe Rabbeinu. And so he wasn't just feeding anyone off the street. That's good too, but it doesn't compare; you can't compare feeding a good person with a great person.

Hashem's Rare Kindness?

And we'll listen to a Gemara in Mesichta Sukkah that talks about this subject. It's in Sukkah 49b and the Gemara quotes a *possuk* in Tehillim: מַה יָּקָר חַסְדְּךָ אֱלֹקִים – *How precious is your kindness, Hashem* (36:8), and the Chachomim put a meaning into it that we ourselves might not say. *Yakar* means 'precious'

but it also means 'rare' — they're similar ideas because when something is rare, it's usually more precious. And so the *possuk* is saying, 'How rare is Your kindness, Hashem!'

Now, we know right away that's not true — Hashem's kindness to us is not rare at all. Just the opposite. It's so much, so ubiquitous and unremitting, that we become immune, *chas v'shalom*, to even noticing it. When your eyes and legs and lungs and heart and liver are functioning so perfectly day and night, day and night, you forget you even have those organs. But that doesn't mean that Hashem's *chessed* is rare; it's just our own willful blindness of habit.

Our Rare Kindness

And so what does it mean that "Your kindness, Hashem, is so rare"? It means 'the kindness that *we* do in Your service, that's what's rare.' Our *mitzvos* are called kindness to Him. Like we say, וְזוֹכֵר חַסְדֵי אָבוֹת – *Hashem remembers the kindnesses of the Fathers.* So we see that when people do deeds of devotion to Hashem, that's called *chessed.* And so "How rare is Your *chessed*, Hashem," means 'How rare is it that we are able to do a kindness that Hakadosh Baruch Hu really appreciates.' מַה יָּקָר חַסְדְּךָ אֱלֹקִים – How rare is it that we should be able to succeed in kindliness.

Now, even that is surprising to our ears because we are busy with kindness all the time. We are a nation of *chessed.* No nation in the world compares with us! And so in what way are we not succeeding?

And so Rashi says it means, לְמֻהֲגָנִים – *for worthy people*; that our money and our *chessed* should go for worthy recipients, to the right people. So you might say, "Well since my *kavanah* was the same, I wanted to do good, so it's all the same." No. It makes a difference who gets your money. That's a big *zechus* when your money or your effort is expended on better ones. That's the rare *chessed* that perfects the mitzvah.

The Best Investment

Now we have to pay good attention to that because the Gemara is telling us that sometimes when we do *tzedakah*, when we give charity or kindness, you might be investing your money and your actions and emotions in somebody who is not the very best investment. Not everyone is as fortunate as Yisro.

Now that doesn't mean you shouldn't give to those who ask. If you give to any kind of a Jew, you give him *tzedakah*, you're going to get merit for that, certainly. And you have to give! It's an investment that you'll never regret! It'll pay you big dividends forever and ever!

But suppose you're able to help somebody who really needs it, somebody who is really deserving. Let's say if you give *tzedakah* to a man who has thirteen children and all of them are *tzaddikim* and his wife is a *tzidkonis* and they're living in one room — such a thing exists in Yerushalayim; they're living in one room — and they're very much pressed for the most elementary necessaries of life and you give them whatever you give them, you're actually saving lives. They

need bread to eat and so you're feeding *tzaddikim*. מַה יָקָר חַסְדְּךָ! How rare is Your *chessed* Hashem! How rare is it that a person merits to hit the bullseye; that all of his efforts are directed in the best direction. That's an important aspect of making a perfect mitzvah.

Fifty Percent Off

You know, sometimes the man has a driver outside who drives him around to various places and this man comes in and stretches out his hand, and you give him something, so part of that money goes to the driver.

That's the driver's source of income. Some people don't know about that. Maybe I shouldn't have told you but that's deducted from the perfection of that mitzvah.

So you'll say, "Why should it be deducted? I gave ten dollars. My intentions were good. The fact that part of that, 50%, five dollars, went to the driver who does it for business, so do I have to lose out?"

The answer is that there's a certain perfection that's beyond the actual doing of the deed. It's a perfection of doing the deed to the most necessary and worthy person in the most necessary and worthy way. There's something in that that's very important. מַה יָקָר חַסְדְּךָ אֱלֹקִים – How rare is Your *chessed* Hashem, that people should do a mitzvah in the right way, with the most deserving people.

A Second Jackpot

Now, in order to better develop this subject we'll go to another person in this week's *sedrah* who hit the jackpot with Moshe Rabbeinu. וַתֵּרֶד בַּת פַּרְעֹה לִרְחֹץ עַל הַיְאֹר – *The daughter of Pharaoh went down to bathe in the river* (*ibid.* 5). As she was bathing in the river, she saw something bobbing on the waves. "Oh," she said. "Look. It's a little basket. Most likely, there's something inside of it," and so וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת אֲמָתָהּ.

There are two *peirushim* on that and both are true. First she sent her maidservant, but the maidservant hesitated; she didn't want to go so deep in the water, or maybe she was afraid because it could be that it was a Jewish child and Pharaoh had made a decree that the Jewish boys should be thrown into the river.

Whatever it is, her maidservant didn't go in, and the basket was being carried off by the current. So then she said: I couldn't fulfill the first *pshat* in the *possuk*, so I'll fulfill the second. וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת אֲמָתָהּ – She ran forth and stretched out her hand with all her strength and her hand became a little longer. How exactly, I can't tell you—maybe the joints became more limber — but she got the basket.

And it was her good fortune that she seized the right basket! It could have been any baby but it was Moshe Rabbeinu! That same act, it could have been a little boy who would have been one of the least of the Bnei Yisroel. Of course, that's also a mitzvah, but for the same effort that she invested, she hit the

jackpot! Her *chessed* was directed at Moshe Rabbeinu, and now the daughter of Pharaoh is established in the Torah and in the mouths of the Am Yisroel forever.

The Foreign Holy Name

Do you know how she's established? Because whenever you hear the name Moshe, it's an echo of the daughter of Pharaoh. She's the one who gave him that name. She called him Moshe, "*because I drew him forth from the water*" (*ibid.*). Now, Moshe is an Egyptian word. In Hebrew it's *meshisihu* – I drew him out of the water. But in Egyptian *mo* means water. And so the Torah found a word that fits in for Moshe Rabbeinu too. *Meshisihu* – I drew him out of the water. But actually she gave an Egyptian name. And the Torah kept it!

Now that's a very queer thing. Others had names given by *tzaddikim*, sometimes even they're given by Hashem, beautiful names. And here's a name given by an Egyptian woman. That's the name that Moshe Rabbeinu should wear forever? We know he was called Avigdor too; it means 'the man who fenced in the Jewish nation.' He's called other great names. Why call him Moshe?

Avrom was given a new name. Yehoshua was given a new name. Hosheia bin Nun became Yehoshua. Why couldn't Moshe get a new name? Moshe, our great leader, should forever and ever have the name given by an Egyptian woman?

Hitting the Jackpot

Yes. The name of Moshe is forever. We never changed it! In honor of the daughter of Pharaoh, to memorialize how she hit the jackpot with this little baby, the name she gave remains forever. She's established forever in the hearts of the Jewish people. Not only with us; she's established forever with Hakadosh Baruch Hu in the world of eternity because of what she did. Because she did it for the right person! She didn't know who he was. But the reward for a kindness to somebody who turned out to be very great is tremendous.

And that's a very valuable lesson that the Torah is teaching with these two incidents of Yisro and bas Pharaoh. We're beginning to appreciate the usually underappreciated ingredient of a *chessed* and *tzedakah* that makes it especially valuable — *a very important part of the mitzvah is who it's being done to!*

Part II. The Tzedakah Jackpot

A Dollar and a Dream

You know, when someone takes out a penny and he gives it to charity, he is doing a very big deed for himself. How big? Well, imagine a man was able to corner the market and he bought all the apartment houses on Ocean Parkway from one end to the other. So now he's quite a fortunate fellow because the money, the rent payments, would start coming in every day by mail; checks from everywhere. And so, to acquire such property is an achievement — the rewards keep coming.

But you have to know that all that is not as great of an achievement as giving one penny to tzedakah! And I don't even *hesitate* to make that statement! One penny that you put into the charity box is more valuable than all the other accomplishments in material success.

That's why a person who is focused on the Next World, he looks forward to seeing a *pushke*—a charity box is a big opportunity!

Not All Pushkes are Created Equal

But you have to know something; according to what we're saying now, it depends *which* charity box. Sometimes it's a real tragedy what a person does with his dollar. Instead of acquiring a great property, he buys a dud. Don't we hear stories like that? A man takes his life savings and invests it in what turns out to be a white elephant. And that's nothing compared to investing your *tzedakah* in the wrong place — that's the worst punishment for a person.

You know where we know that from? From Yirmiyah Hanavi. You know, Yirmiyahu suffered because he spoke the Word of Hashem. Not everyone likes to hear criticism, even if it's a *nevuah*, and there were people who ridiculed Yirmiyahu. They persecuted him; they spat on him, some of them. Some even endangered his life. He was almost killed; they threw stones at him.

Now, at that time, Yirmiyahu prayed to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and he said like this. וִיהִיו מֻכְשָׁלִים לְפָנֶיךָ – "*I pray that these people should fall into error; they should stumble before You.* בְּעֵת אַפְּךָ עֲשֵׂה בָהֶם – *In the time of Your wrath, do something against them*" (Yirmiyahu 18:23).

The Angry Curse

Now we understand that whatever stumbling it was that Yirmiyahu wanted to curse his enemies with, it must have been a terrible curse because he understood Hakadosh Baruch Hu would not listen to his entreaty unless it was *b'eis apcha*, a time of wrath.

What was the prayer? What was the terrible thing that should happen to his enemies? Yirmiyah said אֶפְלוּ בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁעוֹשִׂין צְרָקָה – "*When they're giving charity,* הַכְשִׁילֵם בִּבְנֵי אָדָם שֶׁאֵינָם מְהֻגָּנִים – *cause them to stumble with unworthy people,* כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יְקַבְּלוּ עֲלֵיהֶן שָׂכָר – *so that they won't get reward*" (Bava Kama 16b).

It happens sometimes. A man is giving charity with the intent of helping somebody who needs it, somebody worthy, but he's deceived. The poor fellow actually has a big bank account. He has a lot of cash put away in the vault. He has property too. Only he dresses like a beggar and sometimes he limps — when he enters your block he begins limping. There are people like that.

And when you give him *tzedakah*, what happens? It's a major misfortune. You see it's a major misfortune because even this great man who suffered for Hashem, he couldn't accomplish this request from Hakadosh Baruch Hu unless in a time when Hakadosh Baruch Hu was angry. That's how terrible it is — it can only happen to a man who has been cursed by Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

The Nickel...

So here is a man who all his life was a tightwad. He refused to give. He never sent in contributions for anything. But once, as he was sitting in the synagogue, so when the sexton was going around with the charity box – ordinarily he was able to turn around and act like he didn't see, but this time the sexton caught him unaware and stuck the box in between his eyes. So he was embarrassed and he dropped in a nickel. What could he do already? It was a holdup.

You have to know that this man has been induced to do one of the biggest things in his life! It's one of the biggest achievements in his career. It's so big that he'll have to come to the Next World to discover what that meant — there's no reward big enough in this little world to pay him off.

And so we can imagine now when his days are at an end, and he has to go for some vacation in the warm climates in order to cleanse him of all his iniquities. And as he's being treated with all the treatments, he's thinking "This is horrible! This is terrible! When will it come to an end?!"

But finally, he's let out. He's worse for the wear; he's limping and he's emaciated now. He doesn't look the same as before, but at least it's finished now and he looks forward to the happiness of eternity, the eternal joy that he deserves because of that nickel. He's in the Next World now, so he knows what the nickel means. The truth is he'd like to go back and give a lot more nickels now, but it's too late. He can't go back. But at least he's looking forward. And so as he comes to Gan Eden, now he's ready to live in happiness.

...That Went Lost

So they say, "What claim do you have on us here?"

And he says, "I gave a nickel to charity. You remember, in the box?"

So they say, "Well, you have to know something about that box. The *gabbai* who is in charge of that box was a careless man and he didn't investigate to whom he gave money. And the man who came in subsequently to ask the *gabbai* for help wasn't deserving; he was a fellow who carried a *yarmulke* in his back pocket for collecting's sake."

I knew a bum like that. He had a beard by the way; a bum with a beard. He wore a hat too. And he used to collect money, *tzedakah* money. So one day I was walking on Church Avenue on Shabbos morning and who did I see emerging from a *treifeh* restaurant? This bum. This bum with his gray beard. And this same fellow, the next day after he wiped the bacon off his lips, he pulled out a *yarmulke* and stuck it on his head and he walked into the synagogue.

"And so," the *Beis Din shel Maaleh* says to that man who's expecting his reward for that nickel, "when the *gabbai* gave this fellow some money containing your nickel, you have to know that's where it went. So we're sorry. Your nickel is lost."

How to Win the Jackpot

Now, we have to understand this puzzle. Why is it that some people's *tzedakah* is frustrated while others hit the jackpot? So you must say that such accidents are not random; it's a reward that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is giving a person for his virtue.

It means that there was something about Yisro and something about the daughter of Pharaoh that made them worthy of that. Yisro, you have to remember, was an idealist. He had been an *avodah zarah* priest in Midyan, but as time went on, his mind developed, and he became disgusted with idol worship and threw it away. And he was ostracized by his town because of that, but he kept at it, and so, Hakadosh Baruch Hu rewarded him that a refugee came from Egypt – it happened to be Moshe Rabbeinu, and he took him in.

Same thing with the daughter of Pharaoh. When she went down to bathe, she was making a demonstration against her father. She was greatly troubled by her father's behavior and had been harboring these thoughts in her mind for a long time already. Her father was persecuting the Bnei Yisroel for no reason, and she recognized how noble these people really were, and she was outraged by how they were being degraded by the *Mitzrim*. And as a result of her cogitations, she came to the conclusion that she wanted to side with the Am Yisroel. She wanted to break herself away from the travesty of justice she witnessed in her country – that's what her bath was all about. And so there was something there, some idealism and sacrifice, that was rewarded by Hashem.

And so it means that according to your idealism, according your desire to succeed in this service of Hashem, that's how much you'll succeed.

More Bang for Your Buck

That's what our Gemara which introduced us to this subject of how rare it is to do a perfect *chessed* says about this question: יָכוֹל – *I might think for everybody it's a rarity*, אַף יִרְאֵי שָׁמַיִם כֵּן – *even for a yirei Shamayim*; that even someone who fears Hashem and wants to give, he also may sometimes invest his money in things that are not so important. So the Gemara says, "No, for *yirei Shamayim* it's different." שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר חֶסֶד ה' מֵעוֹלָם וְעַד עוֹלָם – *Like the possuk teaches, 'The kindness done for Hashem, that's eternal forever and ever*, עַל יְרֵאָיו – *on those who fear Him.'"*

If you are a *yarei Shamayim*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu causes more solid achievements to come your way. He helps you gain more perfection in the *mitzvos* – you'll do the same amount of effort and time and money that others put in, but you'll achieve much, much more.

A Wise Investor

Now why is this so? Is Hakadosh Baruch Hu partial to *yirei Shamayim*? And the answer is that of course He is. But besides that, there's a logical reason that a *yirei Shomayim*'s *tzedakah* will succeed more – it's because he puts more into it!

If you're a *yirei Shamayim*, you'll take it seriously. Someone who fears Hashem, he's aware of Hashem, so a mitzvah opportunity is very precious. Not only will he give more, but he'll make sure to give it to the right people. Now you'll say you don't know who the right people are. So you'll investigate! A *yirei Shamayim* doesn't treat a mitzvah so flippantly. He asks somebody who is competent!

Why should it be different from buying an apartment building? If you had the money to buy an apartment building, would you just rush out, you amateur, you *am ha'aretz* in real estate, would you go out and plunk down a million dollars? No! You'd ask somebody who knows. You'd pay a man a thousand dollars to advise you. You'll pay someone else to do a checkup, to check everything in the building. The financials, the tenants, the building itself! There might be termites; maybe the walls are caving in. Otherwise, you could pay a lot of money into a building and then discover that you're saddled with a white elephant; that you've lost your money.

Investment of a Lifetime

And that's the trouble — if you don't care enough to make a mitzvah more perfect, so what do you want? In Yiddish you say *az men fregt, blundget men nit*. That means if you ask directions, you'll get there. But if you're trying to go someplace, and you don't ask anybody, so if you arrive at the wrong destination you only have yourself to blame.

But the one who understands that there's nothing more valuable than the investment of a mitzvah, so he already is heading in the right direction. A mitzvah, that's all we live for! To do *chessed*, to give *tzedaka*, that's one of the great achievements in life.

What do we live for after all, the property in this world? As the big hospitals say on the billboards when they ask for donations – 'You can't take it with you.' Hospitals tell you that you can't take it with you – as if you could take with you what they do for you with your charity. But whatever it is, the only thing you take with you is that nickel. And therefore, the best thing is to get it right! As much as possible to fulfill that great admonition of our Sages, to do a *chessed* that Hashem appreciates most.

Part III. The Home Jackpot

Kindness Begins at Home

Now this whole subject, as important as it is when it comes to *tzedakah*, we have to realize that it applies in the home as well. Because whatever good deeds you're going to be doing in the home – all day long and sometimes even all night long, you're doing acts of kindness in the home – those deeds become greater and greater, more and more valuable according to the value of the recipients.

And therefore, let's say you marry a person who is an idealist, a *ben Torah*. So when he comes home from work and you're putting a supper before him — now it's the same work cooking for a very idealistic person or cooking for a plain, hard-working laborer, a *frum* Orthodox laborer — but this woman, when she puts down a meal on the table for an Orthodox plain laborer, a man without any great ideals, is getting nowhere the perfection as putting down the supper in front of an idealist, a man with devotion to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

The Chofetz Chaim's Wife

And that's why it's so important when you're looking for a *shidduch* to look for the best. After all, a woman serves her husband in many ways. You're going to invest all your life in doing services to your husband, and the same effort, if it's invested in somebody worthwhile, it transforms your life forever and ever in the World to Come!

The Chofetz Chaim married a simple girl; she couldn't even write. He used to come home from the yeshiva in the evening, she had a little store, and she used to tell him from memory what the customers bought and how much they still owe, so that he could write it down in a little record book. She was a simple girl. But he writes in his works that his wife was the one who enabled him to become what he was. He was able to write his *seforim* because she was in the store all day gaining that little pittance that enabled him to sit and study Torah and make his *seforim* and be *mezakeh es rabbim*.

Now, imagine if she had married an ordinary *frum* Jew in Radin, and she would have served him all her life. She would have passed on to the Next World – of course there's a Gan Eden for her; *chessed* to any Orthodox husband is excellent, no question. But now she's sitting on the side of the Chofetz Chaim in the Next World! The radiance of the Chofetz Chaim envelops her too. She's in the same radiance! A woman and her husband share 100% in all his achievements! So how great it is, how important it is for a girl to sacrifice to marry somebody good!

The Best Wife

The same is for her husband. You're going to work to support a wife. Every week, every Friday you come home and bring the pay and give it to your wife – I hope you do – or you put it in the bank and give part to your wife. Whatever it is, you're supporting a family.

So suppose you're supporting a family of an ordinary wife and ordinary children, children who go *b'derech hayashar* more or less, children who go to the synagogue; good decent Jews, but they're nothing important. You get reward, no question. A father, especially if he has in mind as he's sitting in his office or in his factory and he's working and he's thinking, "I want to support my Orthodox family. I have to pay *schar limud* to support them," certainly he's going to get reward.

But suppose you want more than that. Suppose you desire to hit the jackpot. You're an idealist and you're not satisfied with a plain *frum* family. And so you talk always about Hakadosh Baruch Hu in the home. You praise *tzaddikim* and *mitzvos* always. You encourage your children to be better and better, to learn better, to work on their character more.

The Best Family

You want to raise up a family of *bnei Torah*, children who will be devoted to Hashem, *ovdei Hashem* with heart and soul, fiery children; and your wife, she's a loyal *frum* Jewish daughter and she's doing everything *l'shem Shamayim*. Think how much greater are your efforts in that factory or in your office where you slave away all week. You're doing it for a much more important purpose. And the *shleimus*, the perfection you gain, is without a limit greater than it would be otherwise!

And therefore, when people are doing their daily deeds, if they're able to do it to better people – let's say a woman is standing over the breakfast table and feeding a roomful of children, children clustered around the table. Now, a mother who feeds her children, she cleans for them, she dresses them, does their laundry, so even if the children are going to public school *chalilah*, it's also something. After all, public school children it's a mitzvah to feed them also. But suppose they're yeshiva children and she's feeding them, how great is her perfection? She's sending children to yeshiva with the breakfast inside of them! What a great mitzvah it is!

The Best Children

Suppose, however, she's training her children to be very good Jews. She teaches them how to make a *bracha*, how to be grateful to Hashem, how to think about their loyalty to the Torah all the time, she's raising her children in the right way and she's feeding those children! *Al achas kama v'kama*!

Suppose her children turn out to be *gedolei Yisroel*. The Chofetz Chaim's mother when she was feeding him, can you compare to another mother who was feeding her child in the *shtetl*? A little town in the *shtetl*, a lot of mothers are feeding their children but this mother in the *shtetl*, she's nursing a little baby too but she's nursing the Chofetz Chaim! Oh! Such a *zechus*! Women, to nurse the Chofetz Chaim would give everything they have!

And therefore, if people make up their minds that their children are going to be the best that they can make out of them, their spouses are going to be as good as they encourage them, then all your efforts are devoted in the very best manner and Hakadosh Baruch Hu considers it a perfection of the *chessed* you're doing all day long. You can hit the jackpot even in your own home.

Selfish Chessed

Now we'll go one more step in the subject. We're going to say now what sounds like a *chiddush*, but I want you to pay attention because actually, it's a

very true and practical idea if you'll understand it. And the *chiddush* is that a person can also hit the jackpot with himself.

In Mishlei it says גֹּמֵל נַפְשׁוֹ אִישׁ חָסֶד – *a man of kindliness is doing favors to himself.* Now, the plain meaning is that somebody who does favors to somebody else, he should know he's doing a *chessed* for himself. And this we understand because we know that among the rewards for *gemillas chassodim* is שֶׁאָדָם אוֹכֵל פֵּרוֹתֵיהֶם בָּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה. It means you're rewarded in this world too for *gemilus chassadim.* When you're kindly to others, Hashem will make people kindly to you. And so 'an *ish chessed*, a person who does kindness, *gomel nafsho*, is helping himself.'

That's the plain meaning, but the Gemara gives another meaning. Listen to this. גֹּמֵל נַפְשׁוֹ אִישׁ חָסֶד – *If you're a kindly man, you will do favors to yourself.* You'll make sure to take care of yourself.

Now some people will bridle at that. They'll say, "What's he teaching you in that place? A Torah of selfishness? A Torah of loving yourself?"

The Hillel House

And the answer is yes! But it's not *my* Torah. Because that's what Hillel said when he went to eat breakfast.

"Where are you going, leaving the *beis hamedrash* in the morning?" his *chaveirim* asked him. "We're in the middle of a *sugya*."

He said, "I have to do a favor for somebody."

"A favor to whom?"

He said, "לִגְמֹל חֶסֶד עִם אַכְסַנְיָא עֲלוּבָה זוֹ – I'm staying at a certain inn, a poor little inn, and I want to be kind to that inn."

You know which poor inn he was staying in? The inn was named Hillel. The inn is called "I". It's an inn. Your *neshama* is staying in this hostel called a body and you have to do a kindness to the inn – you have to feed him breakfast.

By the way, that's a good idea you're learning now from Hillel. You shouldn't go out without breakfast. Eat something in the morning, *pas shachris*. Eat something substantial. You need energy for the day. You burn a lot of energy in the morning up until 10:00 and therefore you have to have something to burn.

Self Help

So Hillel said he's going home to do a kindness to this inn. And he quoted this *possuk:* גֹּמֵל נַפְשׁוֹ אִישׁ חָסֶד – A kindhearted man must be kindhearted with himself too. And it's not just a play on words, a *gleich vort*. It's a *yesod* of Torah. It's a *ratzon Hashem* that you must be good to yourself.

And not just when you sit down to eat breakfast, you're doing *gemilus chassadim.* When you take a warm shower, when you go for a walk, you're doing a kindness. When you go to sleep on time, absolutely you're doing a *chessed.* If you don't take that sugary drink, that's a *chessed* too. That's how you have to understand it. And the truth is, the most kindness you'll do in your life is with

yourself. That's the plain truth. All day long, and all night too, you're taking care of yourself. And that's how it should be.

Who are You?

Now the question for our subject is who you're doing the kindness to, who are you? Because the better of a person you are, the more of an idealist you are, the greater your kindness is. Who are you feeding, that's the question.

The Chachamim say that לְעוֹלָם יִרְאֶה אָדָם אֶת עַצְמוֹ – *a man should always view himself*, כְּאִלּוּ קָדוֹשׁ שָׁרוּי בְּתוֹכוֹ מֵעָיו – *as if there's a holy man, a saint, a kadosh inside of him.* As you lower the food to him, you're dropping it down, you're giving the *kadosh* something to eat. You hear that?

It's a remarkable statement! How could you say such a thing – I'm a *kadosh*? Yes. There's a *kadosh* inside, there's a *neshama* inside of you, a *neshama kedosha.* נְשָׁמָה שֶׁנָּתַתִּי בְךָ הַחֲיֵיה אוֹתָהּ – The *neshama* that I gave you, keep it alive. You're a *kadosh!* And so as you're lowering food to a *kadosh* that's imprisoned inside of you, it pays to imagine that you're helping him continue to exist.

Holy Eating

Now suppose you're not only *imagining* that you're a *kadosh* but you try also to make yourself more and more *kadosh.* Let's say, besides being *frum*, you're an idealist too—you're not merely an ordinary observant Jew, but you're a man of ideals. Maybe you listen to these tapes and you try to live with the high idealism of a Torah Jew. You open a *sefer* always. You try to be more devoted to Hashem and you train yourself to think constantly about Him. When you're at work, when you're walking in the street, when you look at the sky. Whenever you see a *mezuzah* or *tzitzis*, you utilize it and you're constantly being reminded of Hashem.

Therefore, suppose you happen to be an idealist and you're sitting and eating breakfast and you're thinking, "I want to do a kindness with this poor inn where I'm staying." But it happens to be a very good inn. Not only you have a stomach, but you have an idealism inside of you and you're lowering that food to this idealist, a *kadosh*. Think: how great is your accomplishment, your achievement, the perfection of that deed! How much greater are your deeds now if they're invested for the benefit of somebody who is much more deserving! Not only when you help a stranger who happens to be deserving, but even when *you're* more deserving.

Hitting Jackpots All Day Long

And therefore we see now that even though the perfection of a mitzvah of *chessed* involves very many things, we shouldn't neglect the highest level of accomplishment which is hitting the bullseye — striving as much as possible to do the mitzvah with the better ones, the more deserving ones.

Of course, every mitzvah is very valuable; no question about it. You'll never regret even the smallest mitzvah that you did. But we're talking now about the

higher accomplishment of מַה יָּקָר חַסְדְּךָ אֱלֹקִים, of doing the rare mitzvah that Hashem actually is looking for most. And that's an achievement that you will regret missing out on because in the Next World there's no measure to the tremendous reward for that.

And according to what we learned tonight it's not far from our reach. You have to desire it and *daven* for it and get busy doing it. More and more you have to be a *yarei Shamayim* who wants to perfect his mitzvos. And it's very available to you because it can be fulfilled on all levels; when you're doing *tzedakah v'chessed* to strangers, when you're doing it in your home with your family, and even with yourself.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

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Let's Get Practical

Hitting the Chessed Jackpot

In this week's *parsha* we learn that the greatness of *chessed* is not only in the act itself, but in whom it benefits. Yisro and Bas Pharaoh performed simple kindnesses, yet because their *chessed* reached Moshe Rabbeinu, it became eternally significant. The same principle applies to every act of kindness we do — even those directed toward ourselves — when they support something truly holy.

Each morning this week when I eat breakfast, I will *bli neder* pause for a moment and reflect on the idea that I am doing *chessed* for the *kadosh* who resides within me — the *neshama* that Hakadosh Baruch Hu placed inside my body. I will try to eat with the awareness that I am giving strength to serve Hashem better throughout the day. In this way, even a simple breakfast can become a deliberate act of *chessed* that aims for the highest possible recipient.

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Shabbos Inspired

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Shabbos Has No Night

It is written, "And God completed on the seventh day..."(Bereishis 2:2) When was the completion of Creation? It didn't actually take place on Shabbos day. Everything was completed at the onset of night, at the last moment of erev Shabbos. If so, it should be written, "And God completed on the seventh night." This would be more accurate, but the Torah didn't write it, because it's not such an appropriate expression. For Shabbos has no night. It is all day! Nowhere in the Torah do we find the phrase "the night of Shabbos," only "Shabbos day."

Regarding Yom Tov, there is night and day. We take a *lulav* on Sukkos day but not on Sukkos night. We blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah day but not at night. Yet when it comes to Shabbos, there is no distinction between daytime and nighttime. This is because "night," the blanket of darkness that hides Hashem from us, is not present on Shabbos. This is a twenty-four hour period when it is all day —all light —and Hashem may be found everywhere.

What does this mean, practically speaking? Let's say a person is looking to attain Torah — Shavuos is the special time for this. If he's looking to attain joy, Sukkos is the special time. And to attain freedom, we have Pesach. What if we're looking for Hashem? The time to find Him is on Shabbos, when Hakadosh Baruch Hu is not shrouded in darkness.

But what does it mean to look for Hashem? Sometimes people seek Hashem desperately. They're in trouble, and they really need Hashem's help. What do they do? They try to pray with kavanah, begging Hashem to save them. Let's say a family member is sick R"L. His relatives pray fervently and tearfully for his recovery. Or someone urgently needs ten thousand dollars. He prays, "Please help me, *Ribbono shel Olam*. I need the money so badly!"

But can we really call this davening with true *kavanah*? Having *kavanah* doesn't mean telling Hashem how badly we want something. Rather, increasing *kavanah* in our prayers means that we are increasing our awareness of Who Hashem is. We recognize His great powers and appreciate what He and only He can do. We say, for instance, "Hashem, I know that only You can help me!"

Let's say someone approaches a wealthy man for a very large loan and says, "You don't know how important this is to me! I really need the money." In such a case, the wealthy man will likely respond, "I understand you need the money, but I can't right now; try someone else." To which the prospective borrower might reply, "I looked around and there really is no one else who can help me —only you. I know you have a heart of gold, and besides, you are my dear friend, and I know you care for me a lot." What is the prospective borrower doing? He is showing that he appreciates whom he's talking to and acknowledging that this wealthy man can do what no one else can.

The key is to recognize with Whom we are speaking. Shabbos is the time when the cover of darkness is removed, and this becomes clear. This doesn't mean that Shabbos is the time to request our needs. But it does mean that Shabbos is the time to increase our awareness of Hashem —this is the time to build up our relationship with Him!

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שאל אביו וגדו זקניו ויאמרו לו

QUESTION

What do you think of buying lottery tickets?

ANSWER

Nothing wrong. Nothing wrong! Only you should be *mispallel* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. That's called *hishtadlus* – trying to make money. What difference is it if you make money on the stock market or lottery tickets?

Only you have to know there's a limit to everything. So if you spend, let's say, five dollars a week on it, that's enough. And put in a lot of *tefillah* and maybe something will happen. But you can't waste too much money because it's common sense.

And common sense – I'll tell you a little story. The Alter of Slabodka was once talking to his *talmidim*. He said to them, "What's the first mitzvah of the Torah? What is the first mitzvah of the Torah?"

So each one was trying to tell him – they were all *lamdanim*.

"No," he said. "The first mitzvah—he said it in Lithuanian—is *nebūk durnius*." It means 'don't be a fool.'

The first mitzvah of the Torah is don't be a fool. That's the very first mitzvah. You have to have *seichel* before everything else. So therefore, it's common sense you can't spend too much money on gambling, but a little bit, no harm. But on condition that you'll be *mishtadel* in *tefilla* to have *hatzlacha*.

October 1991

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