
BEING LIKE GOD

Judaism requires that man “walk in God’s ways” and be like God Himself. What does this mean, and how is this possible?

This class will explain that being like God is primarily expressed by doing acts of kindness and improving one’s character traits. We will see that “walking in His ways” results in a unity with God, and an understanding of Him that goes beyond the limits of that which the mind can accomplish. In contrast, this class also shows the consequences that result when humanity does not strive for this noble ideal.

In this class we will examine the following questions:

- ~ How can finite man be like God, Who is infinite?
- ~ Why is it important to be like God?
- ~ What does humanity look like when it fails to be like God?
- ~ What can we hope to achieve by being like God?
- ~ What does the Torah mean when it calls upon man eight times to “walk in God’s ways”?

Class Outline

- Section I. A World that Emulates God Versus A World That Does Not
- Section II. The Infinite God Calls on Finite Man to Walk in His Ways
- Section III. To Do Acts of Loving-kindness is to Be Like God
- Section IV. Other Ways to Fulfill the Mitzvah to Be Like God
 - Part A. Improve Your Character Traits
 - Part B. Use Your Free Will
 - Part C. Avoid Evil
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- Section V. The Central Importance of Being Like God
- Section VI. The Effects of Being Like God
 - Part A. We Become God’s Nation When We Walk in His Ways
 - Part B. Achieving a Unity With Him
 - Part C. An Intimate Understanding of God That Transcends the Intellect
 - Part D. One Who Acts Like God, Sanctifies His Name
- Section VII. Teaching One’s Children to Be Like God

SECTION I. A WORLD THAT EMULATES GOD VERSUS A WORLD THAT DOES NOT

In the sections below we will see that being like God means doing acts of loving-kindness and improving one's character traits in order to become more compassionate and patient. To understand the impact of the human aspiration to "be like God" let us consider for a moment what the world would be like without such an ideal.

The cruelty and barbarism of Nazi Germany was made possible by a belief that God does not exist, and that man is the ultimate authority. This allowed people simply to revert to behaving like sophisticated animals, with no accountability to a higher, more compassionate moral vision.

In contrast, the Jewish people have always aspired to emulate God, and thus have been a major civilizing influence on mankind:

1. **John Adams, Second President of the United States, from a letter to F. A. Van der Kemp (1808), Pennsylvania Historical Society – The Jewish people have civilized humanity more than any other nation in history.**

I will insist the Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation. If I was an atheist and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing the nations ...

They are the most glorious nation that ever inhabited this Earth. The Romans and their empire were but a bauble in comparison to the Jews. They have given religion to three-quarters of the globe and have influenced the affairs of mankind more, and more happily than any other nation, ancient or modern.

2. **Ken Spiro, WorldPerfect: The Jewish impact on civilization.**

Without the influence of the Jewish people and the Torah's ideals of equality before the law, institutions of social justice and accountability to a Divine morality, mankind might never have emerged from its pagan origins. In fact, the following practices were commonplace in a world without Torah: infanticide, human sacrifice, killing for entertainment, war-mongering and conquest for profit, feudalism, dehumanizing slavery, mass illiteracy, and lack of social institutions to care for the poor and needy.

When a whole community is unified with the common goal to be like God, then the positive effects are evident. For example, a *gemach* (acronym for gemilut chasadim, lit. acts of kindness) is a Jewish free loan fund for goods, services or money. Torah-observant communities have a high per-capita number of gemachim, as evidenced by the next source.

3. **The Newcomer's Guide: The Directory for the English Speaking Religious Community of Greater Jerusalem (newcomersguideisrael.com) – A partial listing of the approximately 270 free loan funds available. When a community wants to emulate God and do good, then resources are shared for the benefit of all.**

AVEILIM – MOURNERS

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Ramat Beit Shemesh, Lerner, Nachal Tamar 5

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Highchairs, swings, car seats, infant seats, carriages, booster seats, backpacks.

Mattersdorf, Applebaum, Panim Meiro 1

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Beis Yisroel, Gemach Libi, Reichman 25

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Zichron, Chana.

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MEDICINE

Arzei Habira, Farbstein, Arzei Habira 45/7, 582-5843

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Ezras Torah, Miller, Ezras Torah 41

WEDDING CARS

Rolls Royce car to take Bride and Groom to their wedding.

Unsdorf, Moore Family

4. **Rabbi Avrohom Ehrman, Journey to Virtue 60:1 – When individuals consider how God would act in a situation, they act with more sensitivity and thought toward others.**

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter was going personally to deliver some money to a person in nearby town. When asked why he was going personally to the owner and not sending the money with a messenger, he answered:

The Gemara (Yevamot 78a) teaches that [the following] is an attribute of God: when He mentions a person's shortcomings He simultaneously mentions that person's greatness.

"I, too," said Rav Yisrael, "must criticize Rav Ploni for behavior that, in my opinion, was amiss. As I am obligated to emulate the ways of God, I have to honor the target of my criticism for the greatness he does have. By troubling myself to travel to this rabbi and return the money to him personally, I am honoring his Torah learning and good deeds at the same time that I criticize him."

5. **Rabbi Binyomin Pruzansky, Stories for the Jewish Heart, p. 144-5 – When individuals are driven by the desire to emulate God, they go beyond the letter of the law regarding acts of kindness.**

Rabbi Gissinger is a student of Rabbi Pam, the great Rosh Yeshivah of Torah V'Da'at. One day, while sick in hospital, Rabbi Gissinger's father asked that Rabbi Pam take time out of his schedule to come visit him in hospital as he felt this would lift his spirits and lead to his healing.

"I would love to visit your father in hospital," Rav Pam replied. "But I'm sorry to say that I cannot, because I'm a Kohen." [A Kohen, due to his higher levels of sanctity, is bound by special rules of ritual

impurity that prevent him from being inside the same building as a dead body.]

But Rav Pam's expression signified that this was not the end of the matter. He gazed down at his desk, as if searching there for an idea. At last he looked up at Rabbi Gissinger. "Is there a window in your father's hospital room?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Does your father have the ability to get to the window?"

"I think so."

"Wonderful!" said Rav Pam with the excitement of someone who has just made a remarkable discovery.

"I have a plan. At 2 P.M. on Tuesday, bring your father to the window and I will be right outside on the street across from the room. I'll look up at his window and wave to him and give a *berachah* [blessing for a healthy recovery]. That way, I can fulfill your father's request."

That Tuesday, at precisely 2 P.M., Rabbi Gissinger helped his father out of bed and made his way to the window of his hospital room. Standing out on the street, many stories down, was the great Rosh Yeshivah, who was looking directly at the window, waving and smiling and uttering a *berachah* for the patient's recovery. Despite the windowpane and the distance between them, Rabbi Gissinger's father basked in the warmth of Rav Pam's presence.

Rabbi Gissinger testifies that shortly after Rav Pam's visit, his father's condition began to improve. He had finally obtained a healing dose of the only medicine that could really help him.

One of the ways to be like God is to visit the sick (Sotah 14a, below). When a person's entire personality is shaped by a desire to be like God – and not just to do acts of kindness when it's convenient – then one is more likely to find as yet unimagined and creative ways of doing kindness and showing compassion.

SECTION II. THE INFINITE GOD CALLS ON FINITE MAN TO WALK IN HIS WAYS

In the next section we will discuss the source of the mitzvah to be like God.

Man is called upon to "walk in God's ways" no less than eight times in the Torah:

1. **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 28:9 – The infinite God calls on finite man to walk in His ways and draw close to Him.**

God will confirm you for Himself as a holy people, as He swore to you [at Mount Sinai] – if you observe the mitzvot of the Lord your God, and you go in His ways.

יְקִימְךָ ה' לְעַם קְדוֹשׁ כְּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְךָ כִּי תִשְׁמֹר אֶת
מִצְוֹת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָּיו:

The above verse is one of the blessings listed in the Torah that the Jewish people can expect to receive if they fulfill God's instructions (Devarim 28:1-14).

2. **Ibid. 11:22 – Man's mission in this world: love God and walk in His ways.**

For if you will observe this entire commandment that I command you, to perform it, to the Lord your God, to walk in all of His ways and to cleave

כִּי אִם שָׁמֹר תִּשְׁמְרוּן אֶת כָּל הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי
מִצְוֶה אִתְּכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹתָהּ לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לְלַקֵּת

to Him, [then] God will drive out all these nations from before you ...

בְּכָל דְרָכָיו וּלְדַבְרָהּ בּוֹ: וְהוֹרִישׁ ה' אֶת כָּל הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה מִלְפָּנֶיךָ ...

The above verse appears as part of Moshe's (Moses) reminder to the Jewish people of their sacred purpose and their obligation to live up to the holiness of the Land of Israel (Chizkuni). God calls on man to walk in His ways in six other places in the Torah as well: Devarim 8:6, 10:12, 13:5, 19:9, 26:17, and 30:16.

How is it possible for finite man to “walk in the ways” of the Infinite God? In the next section we will see how this question is addressed by the Oral Torah.

SECTION III. TO DO ACTS OF LOVING-KINDNESS IS TO BE LIKE GOD

In the Torah, God describes to man the qualities of compassion and graciousness that He manifests in this world. These verses serve as the source and blueprint for how man should emulate God:

1. Exodus (Shemot) 34:6-7 – The Thirteen Attributes of God's Mercy.

Hashem, Hashem, God, Compassionate and Gracious, Slow to Anger, and Abundant in Kindness and Truth; Preserver of Kindness for thousands of generations. Forgiver of Iniquity, Willful Sin, and Error, and Who Cleanses ...

ה' ה' קל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורב חסד ונאמנות. נצור חסד לאלפים נשא עון ופשע וחסדאה ונקיה ...

2. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Sotah 14a – When a person emulates the ways in which God cares for His creatures (as described in the Torah narratives), then that person is “walking in His ways” and cleaves to Him.

Rebbe Chama bar Chanina said: “What is the meaning of the verse, ‘The Lord your God, shall you follow’ (Devarim 13:5)? Is it possible for a person to walk and follow the *Shechinah* [the Divine Presence]?”

Rather this teaches us to follow God's attributes: just as He clothes the naked, as it is written: “And God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them” (Bereishit/Genesis 3:21), so too must you clothe the naked.

God visits the sick, as it is written: “God appeared to him [Avraham/Abraham who was recovering from his circumcision] in the plains of Mamre” (Bereishit 18:1), so too must you visit the sick. God comforts the mourning, as it is written:

ואמר רבי חמא בר חנינא מאי דכתיב אחרי ה' אלקיכם תלכו וכי אפשר לו לאדם להלך אחר שכינה? ...

אלא הלך אחר מידותיו: מה הוא מלביש ערומים דכתיב ויעש ה' אלקים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבישם, אף אתה הלבש ערומים;

הקב"ה ביקר חולים דכתיב וירא אליו ה' באלוני ממרא, אף אתה בקר חולים;

“And it was after the death of Avraham that God blessed Yitzchak (Isaac) his son [as comfort for the loss of his father]” (Bereishit 25:11), so too must you comfort the mourning.

God buries the dead, as it is written: “He buried him [Moshe] in the valley” (Devarim 34:6), so too shall you bury the dead.

הקב"ה נחם אבלים דכתיב ויהי אחרי מות אברהם ויברך אלקים את יצחק בנו, אף אתה נחם אבלים;

הקב"ה קבר מתים דכתיב ויקבור אותו בגיא, אף אתה קבור מתים.

3. **Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D., Do Unto Others, Andrews McMeel Publishing, pp. 116-118 – To help the vulnerable and destitute with kindness and compassion is to emulate God.**

In Berdichev there lived a man who struggled to eke out a meager living to support his family. This man had grandiose aspirations and repeatedly told his wife he wanted to go to Leipzig, a nearby city, to seek his fortune, but his wife resisted. “What will become of me and the children then? It’s bad enough we are starving, but if you leave, we will also be abandoned. How would you expect me to support these two children if you were gone?”

One day the man came home with good news. “I have been hired by Boruchovich to represent him in Leipzig. He will pay me well. Every Friday you are to report to his office to receive my salary. I must leave immediately since he is negotiating several major deals now.” On that Friday she reported to Boruchovich’s office as instructed and gave the cashier her husband’s name. The cashier was perplexed. “We don’t have an employee by that name,” he said. The woman suddenly realized that her husband had deceived her. She began to weep bitterly.

Boruchovich, who was working in his office, heard the crying and came out to investigate. The cashier explained how the woman had been duped by her husband. “Oh for heaven’s sake it totally slipped my mind to inform you,” he said to the cashier. Then he turned to the woman and said, “Your husband told you the truth. My agent in Leipzig died and I hired your husband, but so many things happened this week I forgot to tell the cashier. Yes, you are to come every Friday for his pay.”

More than a year passed during which the husband in Leipzig was successful in business and returned, finally to Berdichev with adequate funds to establish himself in business. He expected to find his family destitute and be greeted with a shower of curses from his wife, but he hoped she would forgive him now that he could amply provide for the family. How astonished he was when his wife and children, well-dressed and in good health embraced him. After a bit he cautiously got the story from his wife and learned that Boruchovich had covered for him. A few days later he calculated all he owed to Boruchovich and went to pay his debt, but the man refused him. “I was happy to support your family. I will not sell the happiness this brought me for money.”

Boruchovich was a notorious cheapskate, believe it or not, but this story (as well as others) shows how he changed his character over the course of his life through acts of kindness!

4. **Rashi, Devarim 11:22, s.v. *lalechet* – Walking in God’s ways means being like God through being compassionate and doing acts of kindness.**

“To walk in all His ways” – [Just as] he is compassionate, so too you should be compassionate. Just as He bestows acts of loving-kindness, so too you should bestow acts of loving-kindness (Sifri 49).

ללכת בכל דרכיו - הוא רחום ואתה תהא רחום, הוא גומל חסדים ואתה גמול חסדים:

To emulate God, not only should one act with kindness, but one should also be compassionate.

SECTION IV. OTHER WAYS TO FULFILL THE MITZVAH TO BE LIKE GOD

In Section II we saw how doing acts of kindness is a way to be like God. In this section we examine other ways of being like God, including improving one's character traits.

PART A. IMPROVE YOUR CHARACTER TRAITS

1. **Rambam (Maimonides), Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Mitzvah # 8 – Being like God means incorporating His character traits – being compassionate, gracious and righteous – into one's personality.**

The eighth mitzvah is the obligation to resemble the Exalted One to the best of our ability. This is reflected in two verses: "You shall walk in His ways" (Devarim 28:9) and "...to walk in all of His ways" (Devarim 11:22).

The explanation of this verse is: just as God is compassionate, you should be compassionate. Just as God is gracious, you should be gracious. Just as God is called "righteous," you should be called "righteous." Just as God is called "devout," you should be called "devout" (Sifri, end of Parshat Eikev).

This mitzvah is repeated elsewhere as "The Lord your God shall you follow" (Devarim 13:5). This verse is explained [in the Gemara, Sotah 14b] as a mitzvah to emulate the positive actions and noble character traits by which God is described via analogy.

והמצוה השמינית היא שצונו להדמות בו יתעלה לפי יכולתנו והוא אמרו (תבוא כח) והלכת בדרכיו. וכבר כפל צווי זה ואמר (עקב י ויא) ללכת בכל דרכיו.

ובא בפירוש זה מה הקדוש ברוך הוא נקרא רחום אף אתה היה רחום מה הקב"ה נקרא חנון אף אתה היה חנון מה הקב"ה נקרא צדיק אף אתה היה צדיק מה הקב"ה נקרא חסיד אף אתה היה חסיד וזה לשון ספרי (ס"פ עקב)

וכבר נכפל הצווי הזה בלשון אחר ואמר (ראה יג) אחרי י"י אלהיכם תלכו ובא בפירוש גם כן (סוטה יד א) שענינו להדמות בפעולות הטובות והמדות החשובות שיתואר בהם האל יתעלה על צד המשל יתעלה על הכל עילוי רב:

2. **Rabbi Yitzchak Silber, Mishpetei HaShalom 14:8 – Being like God requires intent to improve oneself.**

One misses the opportunity to fulfill this mitzvah if:

- One does not exert himself to improve his general conduct,
- One does not overcome his negative and self-destructive inclinations,
- One does not improve his thoughts, attitudes and actions to love God, and
- One does not intend to fulfill this mitzvah.

ומי שאינו משתדל להישר דרכיו, ולכבוש יצרו, ולתקן מחשבותיו ומעשיו לאהבת ה', ולקיים המצוה הזאת, ביטל עשה זה.

In the next few sources we will examine specific character traits of God that we can emulate.

3. **Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, Tomer Devorah, Ch. 1 and Michah 7:18-20 – We should emulate The Thirteen Attributes of God's Compassion.**

It is proper for a person to emulate his Creator, and thereby resemble the Supernal form, image and likeness ... Therefore, it is proper to emulate the actions of the Supernal Crown, which are thirteen Supernal attributes of mercy, which are alluded to in the verses.

[In the last three verses of Sefer Michah – which are read on Shabbos Shuvah and Yom Kippur Minchah – the prophet alludes to thirteen principal traits of God's goodness and mercy:]

“Who is a God like You, Who pardons iniquity and overlooks transgression for the remnant of His inheritance? He does not maintain his anger forever, for He desires kindness. He will again be compassionate with us. He will suppress our iniquities. You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Grant truth to Yaakov (Jacob), kindness to Avraham, as you swore to our forefathers in days of old” (Michah, 7:18-20).

האדם ראוי שיתדמה לקונו ואז יהיה בצורה העליונה,
 צלם ודמות ... לפיכך ראוי שיתדמה אל פעולות הכתר,
 שהן שלוש עשרה מידות של רחמים עליונות ורמוזות
 בסוד הפסוקים.

מי אל כמוך נשא עון ועבר על פשע לשארית נחלתו לא
 החזיק לעד אפו כי חפץ חסד הוא: ישוב ירחמנו וכבש
 עונותינו ותשליך במצלות ים כל חטאותם: תתן אמת
 ליצקב חסד לאברהם אשר נשבעת לאבותינו מימי
 קדם:

4. **Rabbi Avrohom Ehrman, Journey to Virtue, 60:3 – Emulate the patience of God, Who is infinitely patient.**

[The following is based on how] the Sage and Kabbalist, Rabbi Moshe Cordevero elaborates in his *Tomer Devorah* on these thirteen traits of God and explains how they can be emulated by every person in practical daily life.

The first attribute described in Michah is derived from the phrase *Who is a God like You*. God has infinite patience and tolerates those who insult Him, as seen from the fact that he maintains the existence of the entirety of Creation at all times, so that even at the very moment that a person sins ... He continues to bestow His goodness and sustenance on the sinner, and on the offending limb itself. [See Melachim I 13:4-6 for a remarkable example of this.]

We should learn from this to tolerate people who offend and annoy us, and to keep doing kindness for them even as they continue to upset us.

5. **Ibid. 60:6 – Emulate the love that God has for His children, who are our brothers.**

The fourth quality is described in Michah as being for *the remnant of His inheritance*. This tells us that God considers Israel to be His children and says, “What can I do to them; they are My children after all, and if any harm befalls them, I will also suffer!”

We, too, should act as if all Jews were close relatives, wishing them only good and the same degree of honor and respect we would like for ourselves. After all, we are all parts of one collective soul originating from the same source in Heaven.

6. **Ibid. 60:9 – Emulate the complete forgiveness and extra closeness that God reserves for those who want to return to Him.**

The seventh attribute is *He will again be compassionate with us*. It is human nature that someone who sustains an injury and later forgives his assailant might still bear residual resentment over the hurt suffered; the forgiveness may not be complete. God, however, is different – when He sees that a sinner genuinely wants to repent and to reject his sin, He draws the penitent even closer than before, as the Sages taught, “In the place where *ba’alei teshuvah* [penitents] stand, not even the completely righteous can stand” (Berachot 34b).

We should try to emulate this behavior as well. If a person who has upset us genuinely wants to make amends, we should not bear a grudge or harbor any resentment of our previous anger ... [and] we should treat him with even more kindness than we did prior to the upset.

7. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M’Eliyahu, Vol. V, p. 21 – Humility: just as God contracts his infinite Presence to make a place in which the finite world can exist, so too, man contracts his self-centeredness so that Godliness can be revealed.**

The Arizal said that the *sefirah* [the ten *sefirot* are aspects of God’s manifestation in this world according to Kabbalah] of *malchut* [kingship, corresponding to this world] is the furthest from the other nine *sefirot*, and is closest to the purpose of Creation [which is the revelation of God’s Presence in this world].

The *sefirah* of *malchut* is the tenth and last of the *sefirot*. At this level, the concealment of God’s Presence is the most intense, and yet it is here that the primary revelation of God’s Presence must take place ...

It is at this level that a person’s spiritual work is to contract his ego in order to allow the light of the higher *sefirot* to enter his world. By doing this, he will reveal aspects of God in the concealment.

When a person contracts his ego, he walks in the ways of God. [How so?] It is known [according to Kabbalah] that God contracted Himself, as it were, for the sake of creating the world, for the ultimate purpose of revealing Himself here. So too, a person contracts his ego for the sake of revealing God’s honor and greatness. This is the [deeper] meaning of the verse: “And cleave to him” (Devarim 13:5) which Rashi explains as: “Cleave to His ways, perform acts of kindness [bury the dead, visit the sick, just as God did].”

אמר האר"ז"ל שהרחוק מן המרכז בהשתלשלות הספירות – היינו ספירת מלכות – הוא היותר קרוב אל התכלית.

ספירת מלכות היא העשירית ממעלה למטה ושם ההסתר הוא עמוק ביותר, אבל דוקא שם הוא הגילוי העיקרי...

ושם עבודת האדם היא לבטל ולצמצם את ישותו כדי להכניס אל תוך עולמו מן האורות ההם, ובזה לגלות כבודו ית' בתוך ההסתר.

בצמצום זה הוא הולך בדרכיו ית', כי כידוע השי"ת צמצם את עצמו כביכול כדי לברוא את העולמות לשם הגילוי, כך האדם מצמצם את ישותו למען גילוי כבודו ית', והיינו "ובו תדבקון – הדבק בדרכיו, גמול חסידים וכו'" (רש"י דברים יג, ה).

PART B. USE YOUR FREE WILL

1. **Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Handbook of Jewish Thought, Vol. 1, 3:18-19 – Just as God performs acts that are intrinsically good through His own free choice, so can man. By utilizing our free will to do good, we resemble God.**

Since the ultimate good is God Himself, the greatest possible good that He can bestow is Himself. There is no greater good than achieving a degree of unity with God, the Creator of all good. Since God desires to give man the greatest good possible, He gave him the ability to resemble Himself (Derech Hashem 1:2:1).

This is another reason that God gave man free will. Just as God acts as a free Being, so does man. Just as God acts without prior restraint, so does man. Just as God can do good as a matter of His own free choice, so can man (Derech Hashem 1:2:2). Man is therefore spoken of as being created in the image of God (Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 5:1, Bereishit Rabbah 21:5).

PART C. AVOID EVIL

1. **Rabbi Yosef Albo, Sefer Halkarim 3:27 – Walking in God's ways means avoiding that which is bad and doing that which is good.**

All of the Torah's commandments, whether positive or negative, are ways to acquire human perfection or some aspect of it – when they are performed with the proper intention. It is not only the performance of good deeds that brings a person the reward of eternal life in the World to Come; it is also refraining from doing evil deeds out of fear of God that gives perfection to one's soul.

This is according to the explicit injunction of the Torah: "And you shall walk in His ways." It is evident that walking in the ways of God is the main element of the service of God. Thus, King David explains (in the Psalms) that one who refrains from doing evil because of his fear of God is considered to be one who walks in the way of God, "Fortunate are the perfect ones of the path, who walk with the Torah of the Lord" (Tehillim/Psalms 119:1). This means, fortunate are the many believers – who are called "perfect ones of the path," because they do not try to outsmart God, as it were, but rather proceed with simplicity along the path of the Torah of God, may He be blessed.

ואחר שהענין הולך אחר הכונה, יתבאר מזה גם כן שכל המצות שבתורה הן שיהיו מצות עשה או מצות לא תעשה הם דרך להקנות השלמות האנושי או מדרגה מה ממנו בהיותן נעשות על הכונה הראויה, כי לא עשית המעשים הטובים בלבד תביא את האדם לחיי העולם הבא, אבל גם ההמנע מעשות המעשים הרעים מפני יראת ה' יתן שלמות בנפש.

וזה כי לפי מה שבא מפורש בתורה והלכת בדרכיו (דברים כ"ח ט'), נראה שההליכה בדרכי השם היא עקר העבודה שיעבוד בה האדם את השם, ונמצא המפורר מפרש שמי שהוא נמנע מעשות רע מפני יראת השם נקרא הולך בדרכי ה', אמר אשרי תמימי דרך ההולכים בתורת ה' (תהלים קי"ט א), כלומר אשריהם המון המאמינים הנקראים תמימי דרך שאינם מתחכמים על השם אבל הולכים בתמימות בתורת השם יתברך.

PART D. BE TRUTHFUL

Apart from being a mitzvah unto itself, being truthful is one of the ways to emulate God, since He is described as “Abundant in Truth” (Shemot 34:6).

1. Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (The Chofetz Chaim), Sefat Tamim, Ch. 7, p. 26 – Being truthful is one of the ways to fulfill the mitzvah to be like God.

[Acting truthfully and avoiding falsehood] is a fulfillment of the mitzvah to “walk in God’s ways” (Devarim 28:9).

As the Sifri explains the verse “To walk in all of His ways,” (Devarim 10:12): “These are the ways of the Holy One, Blessed be He: ‘Hashem, Hashem, God, Compassionate and Gracious, Slow to anger, Abundant in Kindness and Truth ...’ (Shemot 34:6).”

והוא מקיים בזה המצוות עשה דוהלכת בדרכיו, וכדאיתא בספרי על הפסוק ללכת בכל דרכיו: אלו דרכי הקב"ה, ה' ה' קל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורב חסד ואמת וגו'.

2. Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah # 74 – Blessing is found upon those who emulate Him by being truthful and compassionate.

The root of this mitzvah is well known: falsehood is abominable and corrupt in the eyes of all. There is nothing more abhorrent than it. Desolation and curse [is found] in the home of those who love falsehood ...

And blessing is only found and will only take effect upon those who emulate Him in their actions: to be truthful, just as He is a God of truth; to have compassion, as it is known that He is compassionate; to do acts of loving-kindness, just as He abounds in loving-kindness.

שורש המצוה ידוע, כי השקר נתעב ונאלח בעיני הכל, אין דבר מאוס ממנו, והמארה והקללות בבית כל אוהביו...

ואין הברכה מצויה וחלה אלא במתדמים אליו במעשיהם, להיותם אמיתיים כמו שהוא אל אמת, ולהיותם מרחמים כמו שידוע שהוא רחום, ולהיותם גומלי חסדים כמו שהוא רב החסד...

SECTION V. THE CENTRAL IMPORTANCE OF BEING LIKE GOD

1. Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 127a – Hospitality to guests is even greater than being in the presence of God. In other words: being *like* God, is more important than being *with* God.

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: Welcoming guests is greater than greeting the Divine Presence.” [When Avraham was standing before God he noticed some guests approaching.] He said to God, “If I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not leave me!” [i.e. “Please wait while I go and greet the guests!”]

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: גדולה הכנסת אורחים יותר מהקבלת פני השכינה, שנאמר אדני אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל נא תעבור.

2. **Rabbeinu Bachya, Bamidbar (Numbers) 15:38, s.v. ve'asu – Walking in God's ways contains all the other mitzvot.**

This mitzvah is equivalent to all the mitzvot in the Torah, for it is the cornerstone that contains all of the 613 precious "stones" of the Torah.

מצוה זו שקולה ככל המצות שבתורה לפי שהיא האבן הראשה הכוללת תרי"ג אבנים יקרות

3. **Sefer Yeraim 408 – God gave us the mitzvah to walk in His ways so that we can be rewarded for doing all the other mitzvot stated in the Torah, which are all included in this mitzvah.**

The Holy One, Blessed is He, commanded Israel to walk in the path of the mitzvot, as is stated, "And you shall guard the commandments and walk in His ways" (Devarim 8:6). Despite the fact that there is an imperative stated for each mitzvah, this verse functions as an additional positive commandment in order to increase a person's reward.

ללכת בדרכי המקום. צוה הקב"ה את ישראל ללכת בדרכי המצות דכתיב [דברים ח' ו'] [ושמרת את מצוות ה' אלהיך והלכת בדרכיו ואע"פ שעל כל מצוה ומצוה נאמר עשה במקומה הוסיף לך הכתוב עשה אחר לקבל שכר.

SECTION VI. THE EFFECTS OF BEING LIKE GOD

PART A. WE BECOME GOD'S NATION WHEN WE WALK IN HIS WAYS

1. **Devarim 28:9 – When the Jewish people walk in God's ways, then we are truly called "His nation."**

God will confirm you for Himself as a holy people, as He swore to you [at Mount Sinai] – if you observe the mitzvot of the Lord your God, and you go in His ways.

יקימך ה' לו לעם קדוש באשר נשבע לך כי תשמר את מצוות ה' אלהיך והלכת בדרכיו:

PART B. ACHIEVING A UNITY WITH HIM

1. **Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, Derech Hashem, 1:2:1-3 – As one uses one's free will correctly to perfects one's character and actions, one becomes more like God, Who is the ultimate perfection.**

The purpose of all that was created was therefore to bring into existence a creature who could derive pleasure from God's own good, in a way that would be possible for it.

God's wisdom however, decreed that for such good to be perfect, the one enjoying it must

ונמצא היות כונתו ית"ש בבריאה שברא, לברוא מי שיהיה נהנה בטובו ית' באותו הדרך שאפשר שיהנה בו:

ואולם גזרה חכמתו, שלהיות הטוב שלם, ראוי

be its master. He must be the one who has earned it for himself, and not one given it accidentally [or by chance].

One sees that this arrangement is partially reminiscent of the perfection of God Himself, at least to the degree that this is possible, for God's [intrinsic] perfection is also not a matter of chance or accident either ...

By means of acquitting perfection [i.e. by choosing the true good that God has placed in the Creation], this unique creature [man] becomes fit to "cleave" to its Creator, simply because through acquiring perfection, it has, in a certain respect, begun to "resemble" its Creator. Moreover, by incorporating elements of perfection into itself, it "cleaves" to the Creator's Perfection, and is drawn to Him continually – until, ultimately, its earning of perfection and its bonding in closeness to Him are one matter.

שיהיה הנהגה בו בעל הטוב ההוא. פירוש - מי שיקנה הטוב בעצמו, ולא מי שיתלוה לו הטוב בדרך מקרה.

ותראה שזה נקרא קצת התדמות, בשיעור שאפשר, אל שלימותו ית'. כי הגה הוא ית' ש שלם בעצמו, ולא במקרה ...

ואמנם מלבד היות הבריה הזאת שקנתה השלימות ראויה לידבק בכוראה ית' מצד התדמותה לו, הגה על ידי קנותה השלימות לה, נמצאת מתדבקת והולכת בו, עד שסוף קנותה השלימות והמצאה מתדבקת בו, יהיה הכל ענין אחד.

2. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu Vol. I, p. 221 – By emulating God's acts of loving-kindness we experience a unity of purpose with God, Who is the source of all loving-kindness.**

The Sages comment regarding the verse: "[To walk in all of His ways] and to cleave to Him" (Devarim 11:22) – this means that one should "cleave" to His character traits: just as He is compassionate, so you must be compassionate, and so on.

There is a deeper aspect to doing acts of loving-kindness: it is not only that a person wants to benefit another through kindness, but rather, in doing kindness he feels a unity with his Creator [Who does kindness]. He feels at one with the kindness that the Creator does, which is the epitome of true *chesed* (kindness).

And therefore, when a person does kindness in order to cleave to God, it becomes genuine and true kindness [with no taint of selfishness or expectation of repayment or honor].

ואמרו ז"ל "ולדבקה בו – הדבק במדותיו, מה הוא רחום כו'..."

למדנו שיש בחינה עמוקה יותר בחסד – לא רק שרצונו של אדם להיטיב לזולתו לבד, אלא שירגיש בזה התאחדות עם בוראו, בהתאחדו עם חסדו ית' שהוא אמתת החסד.

שרק כשהדברים נעשים מתוך דבקות להשי"ת הם אמיתיים לגמרי.

3. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. I, p. 204 – Just as a chariot fulfills the will of its driver, so too a person who walks in God's ways merits being a chariot for the Divine Presence in this world.**

The level of walking *completely* in God's ways is referred to by the Sages as: "The righteous, who are the chariot of God" (Rashi, Bereishit 17:22, referring to Avraham).

The explanation is as follows: just as a chariot performs the will of the driver, and carries him to any place that he wants, so too the *Shechinah* [Divine Presence] rides upon the righteous. Every step they take, they walk in the ways of God; and in everything they do, they fulfill the will of God. Through this they sanctify God's Name, and reveal His honor in Creation.

דרגה זו של הליכה בדרכי ה' בשלימות היא הנקראת בפי חז"ל "הצדיקים מרכבתו של מקום" (רש"י בראשית יז, כב).

ביאור הדבר: כמו שהמרכבה עושה את רצון הרוכב ונושאת אותו לכל מקום אשר יחפוץ, כך הצדיקים, השכינה רוכבת עליהם. בכל צעד שהם הולכים, הולכים בדרכי ה', ובכל מעשה שעושים, עושים רצונו של מקום, ועי"ז מקדשים את שמו, ומגלים כבודו ית' בבריאה...

4. **Ibid. p. 205 – Walking in His ways is a practical, daily activity and can be accomplished in small, consistent steps.**

Every single person, on his level, must exert himself to adopt the ways of God, and thereby become a chariot for the *Shechinah* himself ...

Therefore the holy work that is placed before us is to study and recognize the ways of God, and thereby adopt His ways and walk in them. [Although] these are high spiritual levels, they can certainly be accomplished in small steps.

Each small act of kindness, such as:

- Every time one supports another emotionally,
 - Considers the other's needs,
 - Greets people with a pleasant expression – which in itself is a significant matter, and
 - Gives thought as to how best to benefit others,
- all these steps constitute walking in the ways of God, which result in a closeness and cleaving to Him.

כל אחד ואחד במדרגה שלו צריך להשתדל לאמץ לעצמו את דרכי השי"ת ועי"כ להיות מרכבה לשכינה...

העבודה הקדושה המוטלת עלינו היא ללמוד ולהכיר את דרכי ה', ועי"כ לאמץ את דרכיו וללכת בהן. מדרגות רמות אלו בוודאי ניתנות לשיעורין,

כל מעשה קטן של חסד, נושא בעול עם חברו, התחשבות בזולת, ולפחות סבר פנים יפות לכל אדם – אשר זהו דבר גדול – והקדשת מחשבה איך להיטיב עם הבריות,

הן הן צעדים ופסיעות בהליכה בדרכי השי"ת המביאים לקרבה ולדביקות בו ית'.

PART C. AN INTIMATE UNDERSTANDING OF GOD THAT TRANSCENDS THE INTELLECT

1. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu Vol. IV, p. 49-50 – Although there is a limit to our intellectual understanding of God, there is no limit as to how refined our character traits can become. In this way, we can achieve more of an understanding of God's perfection than through our intellect.**

Regarding the limits of that which the mind is

על השגת השכל אמרו "במופלא ממך בל תדרוש וכו' "

able to grasp, the Sages said, “Do not investigate that which is beyond [the ability of the mind]” (Chagigah 13a). Rabbeinu Chananel explains: “There is no need to contemplate these matters, for one who contemplates them becomes confused.” Not only should one not do it, but it is impossible to investigate that which is beyond the mind – and one who thinks he can do so, becomes confused.

However, a person’s character traits have no upper limit. There is no limit to the spiritual ascent [possible in the perfection of one’s character traits] especially in the trait of loving-kindness, through which we resemble God. As the Sages tell us: “Cleave to his character traits: bestow kindness, bury the dead, visit the sick, as God did” (Rashi, Devarim 13:5, based on Sotah 14a) ...

There is no limit or boundary to this form of cleaving [to God], for there is no limit to the opportunities for purifying one’s character – in the realm of being truthful, doing kindness, and dedicating oneself [to Him] through love.

(חגיגה יג.), ועיין שם בפירושו רבנו חננאל שכתב
 “ואין צריך להסתכל בהן, שהמסתכל בהן בא בטירוף
 הדעת”, היינו שלא רק שאסור, אלא שאי אפשר
 לחקור במופלא לשכל, כי המדמה להסתכל מעבר
 לגבול השכל דעתו מיטרפת.

אבל למידות האדם אין גבול; היינו שאין גבול
 לאפשרות העלייה במעלות רוחניות, ובפרט במדה
 החסד, שבה מתדמים אליו ית', כאמרם ז"ל “הידבק
 במדותיו – גמול חסדים, קבור מתים, בקר חולים, כמו
 שעשה הקב"ה” (רש"י דברים יג, ה) ...

ולדבקות זו אין גבול ושיעור, כי אין גבול לאפשרות
 העלייה בטוהרת המדות, באמת ובחסד ובמסירת נפש
 באהבה.

PART D. ONE WHO ACTS LIKE GOD, SANCTIFIES HIS NAME

1. Ramban (Nachmanides), Iggeret HaKodesh, Ch. 1

Since all of our actions are supposed to be a reflection of God’s actions, as long as we are doing that which is good and straight, we sanctify His great Name, as the verse states, “And who is this great nation who possesses righteous laws and statutes” (Devarim 4:8) – because we are emulating our Creator, may He be blessed. However, when we do not behave properly, and our actions are twisted, we thereby desecrate the Name of Heaven, since we are compared to Him, but our actions are abhorrent.

ומאחר שכל מעשינו כדמיון מעשה השם יתברך נמצא
 שכל זמן שאנו עושין הטוב והישר, שאנו מקדשין שמו
 הגדול כאמרו (דברים ד) ומי גוי גדול אשר לו חקים
 ומשפטים צדיקים, לפי שאנו מתדמים לבוראנו יתברך.
 וכל זמן שלא נתנהג כשורה (וכל מעשינו) [ונעשה
 מעשים] מקולקלים, אנו מחללין בהם שם שמים, אחר
 שאנו מתדמים לו והנה מעשינו מכוערים.

See Morasha class Kiddush HaShem and Chillul Hashem for a full discussion of the concept of sanctifying God’s name.

SECTION VII. TEACHING ONE'S CHILDREN TO BE LIKE GOD

1. **Bereishit 18:18-19 – Avraham is praised specifically because he educated his children – including future generations – to follow in God's ways.**

“Avraham is surely to become a great and mighty nation, and all of the nations of the earth will bless themselves by him. For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of God, doing charity and justice, in order that God might then bring upon Avraham that which He had spoken of him [i.e. the blessings of children, prosperity and the Land of Israel].”

וְאַבְרָהָם הָיָה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְעַצוֹם וְנִבְרְכוּ בוֹ כָּל גּוֹיֵי
הָאָרֶץ: כִּי יִדְעֻתָיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יַצְנֶה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ
אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דְרָגְהָ לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמוֹשָׁפֵט לְמַעַן
הִבִּיא ה' עַל אַבְרָהָם אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עָלָיו.

Not only was Avraham's hospitality to guests unsurpassed, but he also educated his children to distinguish themselves in the mitzvah of hospitality, which is one of the ways of being like God (Bereishit 18:7; Ahavat Chessed, 3:2).

2. **Rabbi Yitzchok Silber, The Code of Jewish Conduct – The Laws of Interpersonal Relationships, p. 242-3 – By training children to help around the house and take care of siblings and others, they are learning to follow in God's ways.**

Children should be trained in this mitzvah [of walking in God's ways] as well, and should be reminded from time to time that when we are kind to others, we are imitating the ways of God, Who is so kind to us.

In the same context, it seems fitting to point out here how important it is to involve children – both boys and girls – in helping at home. Besides the obvious fulfillment of the mitzvah of honoring one's parents [see Morasha class *Honoring Parents*], the child who learns to pull his weight in the realm of household responsibilities, especially in helping out his younger siblings, is getting “on-the-job-training” in *vehalachta bidrachav* [walking in God's ways]. In addition, participating in the family effort teaches him how to be *nosei be'ol* – to share the burden, instead of expecting to have others serve him, and it also fosters several other valuable *middot* [character traits], such as *zerizut* (alacrity) and *chesed*.

These goals are so important that we would be well advised to give children jobs in the house even if it might be easier to get the work done without their “assistance.” Also, we should keep in mind that our main goal is to educate the child to cultivate willing effort on his part, not necessarily to benefit from his work; therefore, we should not be sticklers for perfect results. [Based on Mishpetei HaShalom, Rabbi Yitzchok Silber, Ch. 13, footnote 16.]