
THE WORLD WAS ESTABLISHED

FOR CHESED

Chesed (practicing kindness) is one of the hallmarks of Judaism. It is such an important Jewish value that most marriages, friendships, and business relationships are forged when individuals recognize this quality in one other. The Talmud teaches that chesed is so essential to life that it is one of the three pillars upon which the world exists.

The core issues that will be addressed in this class are:

- ~ What is chesed and why is it so critical for this value to permeate our daily lives?
- ~ Why does the world's existence depend upon chesed?
- ~ How can practicing chesed transform one's entire perspective on life?
- ~ Examples of chesed that make a difference in others' lives.
- ~ What attitude should one develop toward practicing chesed?
- ~ How does one grow in the area of chesed?

Class Outline:

- Section I. The Centrality of Chesed in Judaism
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SECTION I. THE CENTRALITY OF CHESED IN JUDAISM

PART A. CHESED MAKES A DIFFERENCE, ONE PERSON AT A TIME

1. Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D., *Do Unto Others*, Andrews McMeel Publishing, pp. 3-4

Goodness tends to propagate itself. It's apt to form a chain. A story occurs to me of a man named Avi. I first met him while I was in Tel Aviv speaking before a group of ex-convicts in recovery who were coming into our Israeli rehabilitation program. When I began to speak of self-esteem, this man interrupted me. "How can you talk to us of this? I've been in and out of jail for half of my 34 years. I've been a thief since I was eight. When I'm out of prison I can't find work and my family doesn't want to see me."

I stopped him and asked if he'd passed by a jewelry store lately. "Consider the diamonds in the window," I said. "Try and think what they look like when they come out of the mine – lumps of dirty ore. It takes a person who understands the diamond to take the shapeless mound and bring out its intrinsic beauty. That's what we do here, we look for the diamond in everyone; we help the soul's beauty come to the surface, we polish it until it gleams. We're all like that dirt-covered ore and our business is to find the diamond within and polish it until it grows."

Two years passed. Avi had graduated from the treatment center, and was integrated into the community, working in construction. One day, Annette, who manages our halfway house, received a call from a family whose elderly matriarch had died and wanted to donate her furniture. Annette called Avi and asked him to pick up the furniture. When he went to pick it up he saw that it wasn't worth saving, but not wanting to insult the family, he hauled it anyway.

While Avi was laboring to carry the shabby sofa up the stairs to the halfway house, an envelope fell from the cushions. After getting the couch inside, Avi retrieved the envelope, in which he found five thousand shekels (about \$1700). Avi called Annette and told her about the envelope. Annette said it must be reported to the family.

The family was so gratified by Annette and Avi's honesty that they told her to keep the money for the halfway house. As a result, the halfway house was able to buy one more bed and provide room for one more guest, creating another opportunity for recovery. And Avi wasn't a thief anymore. Another year went by and I returned to the halfway house. There was a sign hanging above the entry. It read: "Diamonds Polished Here."

PART B. THE WORLD EXISTS IN THE MERIT OF CHESED

1. *Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 1:2 – The world's existence is dependent upon chesed.*

The world rests upon three things: Upon Torah study, upon Divine service (i.e., prayer and sacrifices), and upon the practice of chesed (loving-kindness).

על שלשה דברים העולם עומד: על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים.

Rabbeinu Yonah teaches that these three pillars are the purpose for which the world was created. Therefore, the world will be built through the practice of chesed.

2. *Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura, ibid.*

"And upon the practice of chesed" – as it is written, "The world will be built through

דכתיב "עולם חסד יבנה".

kindness” (Tehillim/Psalms 89).

3. Maharal, Derech Chaim, ibid. – Chesed is the highest form of goodness.

Why does the world stand specifically upon these three things and not others? [The Maharal then explains how each of these three values maintains the world; we will look at his explanation of kindness. –Ed.] The reason is that everything that was created only deserves to exist in as much as it is inherently good. It is the goodness in each object that allows it to exist ... For this reason we find that after the creation of each object during the six days of Creation, it is written that God saw that it was good ...

Man’s capacity for goodness can be divided into three parts: His own intrinsic goodness; his goodness in his relationship with God; and his goodness in his relationships with his fellow human beings ...

Chesed corresponds to this third aspect of man’s life; for it is eminently clear that when man performs kind deeds for his fellow men without expecting any reimbursement, he is being good towards them. There is, in fact, no greater good than when one bestows kindnesses upon others from his own volition – in doing so he is truly and really “good.”

למה על אלו דברים ולא על דברים אחרים? ... כי הנבראים נבראו בשביל שיש בהם הטוב... רק מצד הטוב שיש שנמצא בכל אחד יש לו קיום... לכן תמצא בכל מעשה בראשית שאמר וירא ה' כי טוב...

ומה שהאדם הוא טוב... הבחינה האחת היא כשהוא טוב בעצמו... הבחינה השנית שיהיה טוב לשמים... השלישית שראוי שיהיה טוב אל זולתו מבני אדם אשר נמצאים אתו...

וכנגד השלישי שצריך שיהיה אדם שלם וטוב עם זולתו זהו גמילות חסדים; כאשר עושה לזולתו חסד חנם הנה אין ספק שבוזה הוא טוב לזולתו. ואין דבר טוב מזה כאשר עושה טוב לזולתו בחנם ואז הוא טוב לגמרי.

4. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Sotah 14a – Torah begins and ends with chesed.

Rabbi Simlai expounded: The Torah begins and ends with chesed. At its beginning, we learn of God’s chesed for Adam and his wife when He made clothing for them. And at its end we are told of God’s chesed when He buried Moshe (Moses).

דרש רבי שמלאי: התורה תחילתה גמילות חסדים וסופה גמילות חסדים. תחילתה גמילות חסדים שנאמר ויעש ה' אלקים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבישם. סופה גמ"ח שנאמר ויקבור אותו בגיא.

5. Midrash Rut Ch. 4 – How can one achieve a very high level of closeness to God?

Come and see the great power of people who perform charity and chesed! They are not given haven under the wings of the earth, nor those of the celestial beings, nor even of the most elevated angels; rather, they are sheltered under the Wings of He Whom through His utterance the universe was created.

בא וראה כחן של בעלי צדקה וגומלי חסדים שאין חוסין לא בצל שחר ולא בצל כנפי ארץ ולא בצל כנפי שמש ולא בצל כנפי חיות ולא בצל כנפי כרובים ולא בצל כנפי נשרים אלא בצל מי שאמר והיה העולם.

6. **Rabbeinu Yonah, Sha'arei Teshuvah (The Gates of Repentance) 3:13 – Making an all-out effort to assist others is one of man's main tasks in life.**

One is obligated to toil, exerting himself to the depths of his very soul, on behalf of his fellow man, be that person rich or poor. *This is one of the most crucial and important things that man is called upon to do.*

חייב אדם לטרוח בעמל נפשו על תקנת חבירו אם דל
ואם עשיר וזאת מן החמורות ומן העקרים הנדרשים
מן האדם.

7. **Vilna Gaon, Iggeret HaGra – Bringing joy to others is a central Torah value.**

Most of the Torah consists of gladdening other human beings.

ובזה רוב התורה לשמח לאדם.

SECTION II. THE DEFINITION OF CHESED

1. **Rabbi Avi Cassel, Morasha – Chesed is looking to provide what another person truly needs.**

When I was studying in Yeshivah in the suburbs of Baltimore, each Friday afternoon we would leave the campus to take care of errands. The only way to travel was relying on the kindness of people who had cars to give us a lift. We stood at the gate of the Yeshivah and drivers would stop and ask where we needed to go. There were two types of drivers: Those who offered rides to the destination where they themselves were going, and those who went out of their way to take us where we needed to travel. Both are good deeds, but the latter is the epitome of chesed.

2. **Chofetz Chaim, Ahavat Chesed, Introduction – Bestowing of goodness on another.**

The term *gemilut chasadim* (bestowing kindness) refers to any type of voluntary good that one does for another. Sometimes it may involve loaning money, while at other times it constitutes actually involving one's own self in helping others, such as through exerting oneself on behalf of guests or escorting visitors or the like.

תחילת הכל צריך האדם לידע שגדר גמילות חסדים
מונח על כל עניני הטוב שאדם עושה חסד ומטיב
להחבירו בחנם. יש שמתחסד עמו בממונו כגון שמשאיל
לו בהמה או כלי או הלואת ממונו כו' ויש שמתחסד עמו
בגופו... כגון שמכניס אורחים לתוך ביתו ומטריח עצמו
לפניהם וכן מצות לוייה שמלוה אותם...

3. **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. I, p. 93 – Even the small things count.**

Chesed is not limited to money. A nice word, a smile – these can give new life to someone who has given up on himself! A word of encouragement can bring joy. These are such small things [yet so significant!]. In general, there are so many acts of chesed that are easily within our reach – if only we would notice that they are needed!

חסד אינו מצטמטם בכסף. חיוך ומילה טובה בכחם
להחיות מיואשים, דבר עידוד בכחו להביא אושר.
אלה הם דברים קטנים מאד. ומלבד זה – מה רבים הם
החסדים שבכחנו לגמול – לו ראינו שהם חסרים!

SECTION III. TORAH IDEALS INSPIRE US TO ENGAGE IN CHESED

The Torah contains several commandments teaching the overarching importance of chesed as discussed below.

PART A. LOVING ONE'S FELLOW JEW

1. Adapted from Rabbi Reuel Karpov, Ph.D., and Yonatan Nadelman, *The Jewish Observer*, December 1994, www.traditionofkindness.org

It started out like any other 4:30 A.M flight from Tel Aviv to New York with a refueling stop in Brussels. After refueling at 9:00 A.M., the captain announced a series of mechanical delays. By 2:00 P.M. the plane's mechanical troubles were still not resolved and the nearly five hundred weary travelers were taken by bus to a local hotel. From the pre-dawn hours until mid-afternoon, the airline had served only beverages and boxed lunches. Although the airline distributed meal vouchers for the hotel, this did not help the majority of passengers requiring kosher food.

News of this interminable delay reached Antwerp, the largest Jewish community in Belgium, forty-five minutes from Brussels. The Antwerp Jewish community quickly organized an impressive array of kosher meals and food and delivered it to the Brussels' Hotel where over four hundred famished Jews anxiously wondered when they would see their next kosher meal. There was such an ample food supply, that the passengers had enough left over for breakfast the next morning and throughout their flight the next day when their journey finally continued, after a total delay of twenty-seven hours!

2. **Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot De'ot (The Laws of Conduct) 6:3 – Loving others as yourself.**

It is incumbent upon every person to love each and every Jew as himself, as it is written, "And you shall love your fellow as yourself."

מצוה על כל אדם לאהוב כל אחד ואחד מישראל כגופו שנאמר ואהבת לרעך כמוך.

3. **Rambam, Hilchot Aveil (Laws of a Mourner) 14:1 – "Loving others as yourself" motivates one to practice all forms of chesed.**

There is a specific rabbinic mitzvah to visit the sick, comfort mourners, bury the dead, marry off a bride, escort visitors ... and to gladden a bride and groom, as well as look after all of their needs. These activities are included in gemilut chasadim ... Although these are rabbinic commandments, they are also included in the Biblical commandment of: "And you shall love your fellow as yourself" – whatever you would want done for yourself, you should do for others.

מצוות עשה של דבריהם לבקר חולים, ולנחם אבלים, ולהוציא המת, ולהכניס הכלה, וללוות אורחים, וכן לשמח חתן וכלה ולסעדם בכל צרכיהם, ואלו הן גמילות חסדים שבגופו... אע"פ שכל מצוות אלו מדבריהם, הרי הן בכלל "ואהבת לרעך כמוך" – כל הדברים שאתה רוצה שיעשו אותם לך אחרים, עשה אתה אותן לאחריך.

PART B. EMULATING GOD'S KINDNESS

We are commanded to follow in the "ways" of God. One way we emulate God is through practicing kindness.

1. Devarim (Deuteronomy) 10:12 – Following the path of God.

Now, Israel, what does the Lord, your God, ask of you, other than to fear Him and to go in all of His ways ...

ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלקיך שואל מעמך כי אם ליראה את ה' אלקיך וללכת בכל דרכיו...

2. Sefer Hamitzvot, Mitzvat Asei #8 – Emulating God's actions.

We are commanded to emulate God, as it is written, "And you shall go in His ways..." This implies emulating the good actions and good attributes that are used to describe God.

שצונו להדמות אליו ית'... שנאמר והלכת בדרכיו... שענינו להדמות בפעולות הטובות והמדות החשובות שיתואר בהם הא-ל יתעלה...

3. Devarim 13:5 – Cleaving to God.

Follow after the Lord, your God ... and cleave to Him.

אחרי ה' אלקיכם תלכו... ובו תדבקון.

4. Rashi, ibid. – What is meant by cleaving to God?

"Cleave to Him" – [this means:] cleave to His attributes: Bestow chesed, visit the sick, and bury the dead, just as God does.

ובו תדבקון – הדבק בדרכיו: גמול חסדים, קבור מתים, בקר חולים כמו שעשה הקב"ה.

5. Talmud Bavli, Sotah 14a – Emulating God translates into taking compassionate action to help others.

Said Rabbi Chama Bar Chanina: What is the meaning of the injunction, "Follow after the Lord, your God"? This teaches us to follow God's attributes: Just as He clothed the naked, as it is written, "God made clothing for Adam and his wife and clothed them," so shall you clothe the naked.

God visited the sick, as it is written, "And God appeared to him (Avraham/Abraham)" so shall you visit the sick. God comforted the mourning, as it is written, "And it was after the death of Avraham, that God blessed Yitzchak (Isaac) his son;" so shall you comfort the mourning. God buried the dead, as it is written, "And [God] buried him (Moshe) in the valley" – so shall you bury the dead.

ואמר רבי חמא בר חנינא מאי דכתיב אחרי ה' אלקיכם תלכו... 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; הקב"ה ניחם אבלים דכתיב ויהי אחרי מות אברהם ויברך אלקים את יצחק בנו, אף אתה ניחם אבלים; הקב"ה קבר מתים דכתיב ויקבור אותו בגיא, אף אתה קבור מתים.

PART C. PRACTICING CHESED BRINGS AN AWARENESS OF GOD'S EXISTENCE

When a person practices chesed, he can become sensitive to God's existence and develop an awareness of the tremendous chesed that God constantly does for him.

1. **Malbim, Shemot (Exodus) 20:1 – The need to actualize and strengthen one’s awareness of God.**

The commandment [of belief in God] specifically means to actualize and strengthen one’s awareness of God’s existence.

מה ששאלו איך יצדק מצוה על האמונה שאין לבחירה
מבוא בה...המצוה היא שישתדל לדעת זה בידיעה
ברורה...

2. **Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, Ohr Yechezkel, Midot p. 177 – Chesed to others triggers an awareness that God showers us with chesed.**

A person who is preoccupied with taking anything he can for himself does not notice that others are bestowing kindnesses upon him. When he is able to step outside of himself and become an outwardly focused and giving individual, he becomes aware of the kindnesses that he receives from others, since he now appreciates that others exist. This will specifically affect his relationship with God, for he will become aware that He is constantly and consistently showering him with kindness. It is therefore clear that developing an attitude of chesed brings someone closer to an awareness of God’s existence.

אדם שעסוק כל הזמן בלקיחה לעצמו אינו יכול להשים
לב למה שמקבל מאחרים. בשעה שמתנתק מאהבת
עצמו ובגדר בעל חסד יקרא ומטיב לזולתו, אזי אותה
המדה מביאתו אף לידי הכרה שמקבל מחבירו כי הרי
מרגיש את האחרים...וממילא מרגיש את ההטבות
שמקבל...וממילא פשוט הוא איך שמתקרב בעל
חסד לאמונה שכיון שמטיב ובעל חסד מכיר ומרגיש
שהשי"ת מטיבו בכל עת ומכיר לו טובה.

SECTION IV. CLASSIC EXAMPLES OF CHESED

As the Chofetz Chaim and Rav Wolbe taught above, chesed can be practiced through a broad range of actions, from donating a hospital, providing a meal to one in need, to showing a smile to cheer up a friend. Below are classic examples of chesed:

PART A. PROVIDING LOANS

1. **Rabbi Yonason Rosenblum, www.traditionofkindness.org – Looking to provide loans.**

In 1971, Shmuel Avraham Myski decided to use five hundred dollars from wedding gifts to begin a *gemach* (free loan fund) in a small basement in Monsey, New York. Its “office” consisted of a brown desk, black book, and Parker pen. Over the next twenty-two years, Keren HaChessed – “The Kindness Fund” – grew to loan more than a hundred million dollars. By the late ’80s, it was lending over ten million dollars a year! How did a gemach, begun with no significant financial resources, grow to dwarf every other gemach in the world? The answer starts with Rabbi Myski’s desire to give. He did not wait to be asked for a loan, but would tell people, “I hear you’re making a wedding. Perhaps you need a loan?”

2. **Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Asei #197 – What is the greatest form of tzedakah (charity)?**

There is a positive commandment to lend money to a needy individual to ease his poverty and

מצות עשה להלות לעני להקל לו מעניו ולהרחיב לו
מזדקן וזו המצוה היותר חזקה מכל מצות הצדקה...

bring him relief from his straits. This is the greatest form of charity.

3. **Chofetz Chaim, Ahavat Chesed, Mitzvat Halva'ah 1:1 – Assisting even the wealthy.**

There is also a mitzvah to lend money to a wealthy person if he temporarily has no access to money.

ומצוה ג"כ להלוות לעשיר לפי שעה בשעה שאין המעות מצויות לו...

4. **Ibid. 2 – It is also a mitzvah to lend all kinds of objects such as cars, appliances, furniture, clothing, books, etc.**

This mitzvah is not restricted to lending money. It applies to lending objects as well.

לאו דוקא הלוות מעות, דה"ה דמצוה להשאיל לו כליו ושאר חפציו כיוצא בזה.

PART B. TZEDAKAH – CHARITY

1. **Rambam, Matnat Aniyim 7:1-2 – Giving money to one in need.**

There is a positive commandment to give tzedakah to needy fellow Jews, according to the recipient's needs, if the giver has the means; as it is written, "Rather, you shall open your hand for him ..." And one who sees a needy person requesting help and ignores him, and does not give, transgresses the following commandments: "Do not harden your heart and do not close your hand from your indigent brother."

מצות עשה ליתן צדקה לעניי ישראל כפי מה שראוי לעני אם יד הנותן משגת. שנאמר פתוח תפתח לו... וכל הרואה עני מבקש והעלים עיניו ממנו ולא נתן צדקה עובר בלא תעשה שנאמר לא תאמץ את לבבך ולא תקפוץ את ידיך מאחיק האביון.

2. **Rambam, ibid. 10:4 – Giving joyfully and compassionately.**

One who gives tzedakah to a needy person with a sour expression, staring crossly at the floor, has lost and forfeited his reward. Rather, one should give tzedakah with a cheerful countenance, joyfully, and empathize with the other's troubles.

כל הנותן צדקה לעני אם נתן בסבר פנים רעות ופניו כבושות בקרקע אפילו נתן לו אלף זהובים אבד זכותו והפסידה. אלא נותן לו בסבר פנים יפות ובשמחה ומתאוונן עמו על צרתו... ומדבר לו דברי תחנונים ונחמות

If a needy person asks you for money and you have nothing to give him, [at least] encourage him verbally. It is forbidden to berate the needy person or to raise one's voice to him, for his heart is broken inside. *Woe to one who humiliates a needy person – woe to him!!* Rather, one should act as a father to him...

שאל העני ממך ואין בידך כלום ליתן לו פייסהו בדברים. ואסור לגעור בעני או להגביה הקול עליו בזעקה מפני שלבו נשבר ונדכה... ואוי למי שהכלים את העני אוי לו. אלא יהיה לו כאב בין ברחמים בין בדברים...

3. **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. II. p. 198 – Determining what each person needs.**

There are no objective standards in the field of tzedakah. Just as people differ in their

באשר יחסר לו אין נורמות. כשם שדעותיהם שונות כך מחסוריהם שונים. הרוצה להיות איש חסד צריך

personalities, so do their needs differ. Someone who wishes to be a true practitioner of chesed must learn to see and listen to what the other is actually lacking, what he truly needs.

להתלמד לראות ולהאזין מה יחסר לו.

PART C. WELCOMING GUESTS

1. Bereishit (Genesis) 18:1-8 – Avraham is the paradigm of inviting guests.

Avraham lifted his eyes and there were three men standing before him. He saw them, and ran to greet them from the entrance to his tent, and bowed to them. He said, “If I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass over your servant. Let a bit of water be taken and wash your feet, and lean under the tree. I will take some bread and you will satiate yourselves – then you may leave” ... And they said, “Do as you have spoken.”

Avraham hastened to the tent, to his wife Sarah, and said, “Quickly! Three measures of fine flour – knead them and make cakes!” And Avraham ran to the cattle and he took a good, soft calf and gave it to the lad, and hastened to prepare it. And he took butter and milk, as well as the calf he had prepared, and he placed it before them. He stood before them, under the tree, and they ate.

וישא עיניו וירא והנה שלשה אנשים נצבים עליו וירא וירץ לקראתם מפתח האהל וישתחו ארצה: ויאמר אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל נא תעבור מעל עבדך: יוקח נא מעט מים ורחצו רגליכם והשענו תחת העץ: ואקחה פת לחם וסעדו לבכם אחר תעבורו כי על כן עברתם על עבדכם ויאמרו כן נעשה כאשר דיברת:

וימהר אברהם האהלה אל שרה ויאמר מהרי שלש סאים קמח סלת לוישי ועשי עוגות: ואל הבקר רץ אברהם ויקח בן בקר רך וטוב ויתן אל הנער וימהר לעשות אותו: ויקח חמאה וחלב ובן הבקר אשר עשה ויתן לפניהם והוא עמד עליהם תחת העץ ויאכלו:

2. Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 127a – Welcoming guests is greater than greeting the Divine Presence.

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

גדולה הכנסת אורחים יותר מהקבלת פני השכינה שנאמר אדני אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל נא תעבור מעל עבדך.

3. Chofetz Chaim, Ahavat Chesed, Hachnasat Orchim, Ch. 2 – Greeting and providing for guests cheerfully.

When guests arrive at one’s home, a person should greet them cheerfully and immediately set out food for them, for perhaps they are hungry but are too ashamed to ask for food. He should provide their needs with a pleasant countenance. Even if he is worried about something, he should attempt to keep his concerns hidden so that the guest does not feel that he is inconveniencing his host.

כתבו הספה”ק כשיבואו האורחים יקבלם בסבר פנים יפות וישים לפניהם מיד לאכול כי אולי העני רעב ומתבייש לשאול ויתן לפניהם בפנים צהובות ולא בפנים זועפות ואף אם יש לו בלבו דבר דאגה יכסנו בפניהם...

PART D. ESCORTING GUESTS

1. Rambam, Hilchot Aveil 14:2 – Escorting guests is even greater than providing hospitality.

The reward for escorting guests is greater than all [other types of chesed]. It is part of the institution established by Avraham Avinu – he would feed travelers and then escort them on their way. Welcoming and inviting guests is as great as greeting the Divine Presence – and escorting guests is even greater than extending hospitality! The Sages teach: When someone fails to escort another, it is as if he has spilt his blood!

שכר הלוייה גדול מן הכל. והוא החוק שחקקו אברהם אבינו ודרך החסד שנהג בה – מאכיל עוברי דרכים ומשקה אותן ומלווה אותן. וגדולה הכנסת אורחים מהקבלת פני שכניה... ולוויים יותר מהכנסתן. אמרו חכמים כל שאינו מלווה כאילו שופך דמים.

2. Maharal, Netivot Olam, Netiv Gemilut Chasadim, Ch. 5 – Escorting guests gives honor to the Divine image.

When someone sets out on the way and others see him off, they in effect give honor to the Divine image in which he was created. If people fail to do so, it is as if they have shed his blood, for when one is robbed of the honor due to his Divine image – this is true bloodshed.

ולפיכך כאשר יוצא לדרך ובני"א מלוין אותו... דנותנין אל צלמו כבוד שאין מניחין אותו שיצא בלבדו וזה שנותנין לו לוייה בדרך ולכך נשאר הכבוד... ואם אין מלוין אותו כאילו שופך דמים פירוש שנוטלים ממנו צלמו אשר האדם נברא בצלם אלקים ובבטול הצלם זה עצמו שפיכות דמים לגמרי.

3. Rabbi Hillel Goldberg, Illuminating the Generations, p. 32 – Showing compassion when escorting others, even to strangers.

Once, as a band of a gypsies passed before the Alter of Slabodka, he accompanied them on their way and said: "Gypsies are the most forlorn people in the world. They do not know of rest or home. They torture themselves and their families in their wretched travels. So they ought to be heartened by a cheerful mien, a friendly smile in their roaming and wandering."

When the Alter visited health spas in Germany he would accompany departing trains – travelers should not depart without another human being showing concern.

PART E. VISITING THE SICK

1. Talmud Bavli, Sotah 14a – Just as God visited Avraham Avinu after his circumcision, we too should visit the sick.

God visited the sick, as is written, "And God appeared to him [Avraham]"; so too shall you visit the sick.

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

2. Rabbi Yitzchak Silber, Mishpetei HaShalom p. 159 – How does one visit the sick?

Some of the various components and purposes of the mitzvah of visiting the sick are: (a) taking care of any of the patient's needs, (b) giving him the comfort and satisfaction of knowing that others are concerned about him, and (c) praying on his behalf.

בעיקר מצות ביקור חולים יש... חלקים: (א) עשיית כל צרכיו; (ב) שימצא נחת רוח עם חבריו המשתתפים בצער; (ג) שיתפללו עליו...

PART F. GLADDENING THE BRIDE AND GROOM

1. **Rambam, Hilchot Aveil 14:1 – A mitzvah to bring joy to the bride and groom.**

There is a specific rabbinic mitzvah ... to gladden a bride and groom. These activities are included in gemilut chasadim.

מצות עשה של דבריהם לשמוח חתן וכלה... ואלו הן גמילות חסדים שבגופו.

2. **Talmud Bavli, Ketubot 17a – Dancing and juggling at a wedding.**

Rav Shmuel bar Yitzchak would dance [before the bride] while juggling three myrtle branches. Said Rabbi Zeira: "The elderly sage is causing us embarrassment [by degrading the status of Torah sages]!" When Rav Shmuel passed away, a pillar of fire [a sign of elevation and uniqueness] came between his coffin and everyone else. Said Rabbi Zeira, "The elderly man's branch accomplished something on his behalf!"

רב שמואל בר יצחק הוה מרקד אתלת. אמר רבי זירא קא מכסיף לן סבא! כד שכיב איפסיק עמודא דנהורא בני דידיה לכולי עלמא... אמר רבי זירא אהני ליה שוטיה לסבא!

PART G. BURYING THE DEAD

Burying the dead is called *chesed shel emet*, the most truthful expression of kindness. When a person does chesed for a healthy person, he might have selfish motives and hope for reciprocation. However, one does not expect anything in return for assisting in a burial.

1. **Rambam, Hilchot Aveil 14:1 – How does one perform the mitzvah of burial?**

There is a rabbinic commandment ... to be involved with all of the needs of a burial: To carry the deceased on one's shoulders, to walk before him, to eulogize him, to dig the grave and to actually bury him ... These are examples of gemilut chasadim that are performed with one's body.

מצות עשה של דבריהם... ולעסוק בכל צרכי הקבורה לשאת על הכתף ולילך לפניו ולספוד ולחפור ולקבור... ואלו הן גמילות חסדים שבגופו...

SECTION V. OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHESED IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

PART A: PRAYER

1. **Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, Ohr Yechezkel, Midot p. 173 – Pray for the needs of others such as recovery from an illness, finding a spouse, having success in business, etc.**

Prayer, when utilized properly, can also serve as a source of growth in developing the attribute of chesed. When one prays and focuses his thoughts on the needs of the community at large, he trains

התפילה כראוי אף היא דרך עליה במעשי חסד, בעת שמתפלל וחושב בתפילתו עבור הרבים מרגיל עצמו בעשיית חסד.

himself in the attitude of loving-kindness and concern towards others.

PART B: ALL MITZVOT

Performing mitzvot benefits the entire Jewish people.

1. **Orchot Tzadikim, End of Sha'ar Ha'Achzariut – People can accomplish a tremendous amount for the community by the careful observance of mitzvot.**

Some people who do not have financial resources ask, "How can we do chesed? We have nothing to give as charity!" They are, however, mistaken. One can be charitable by doing good deeds and mitzvot and by being extremely meticulous in his service of God. Moreover, in the merit of the righteous and their deeds, God brings good upon others. Could there be any greater form of tzedakah?

גם זה תשובה לעניים האומרים: איך נעשה טובה? הלא אין בידינו מאומה ליתן צדקה! ואלו דברים של הבל הם, כי יכול ליתן צדקה במעשיו הטובים ובקיום המצוות, אשר יזהר בעבודת הבורא ית' בכל יכלתו, וביכות הטובים והצדיקים הקב"ה מטיב לעולם ומפרנסם, היש צדקה גדולה מזאת?

2. **Rabbi Yaakov Ades, Hitkarvut LaShem p. 17 – Even a small mitzvah goes far to merit the Jewish community.**

When someone studies Torah, performs a mitzvah or even simply refrains from sinning, his actions benefit the entire Jewish people. Sometimes a person studies Torah for a short time and feels that he has not done anything particularly significant, while in reality he has no way of knowing what kind of tragedies he prevented or what of kind of success he caused for other Jews.

בשעה שאדם עוסק בתורה הוא עוזר לכל עם ישראל כולו... ועי"ז מתרבה שפע ברכה והצלחה לכל ישראל ופעמים שאדם לומד שעה וכשסיים יש לו הרגשה שלא עשה מספיק בשעה זו ובאמת אינו יכול לדעת איזה ישועות הביא לעם ישראל בשעה זו של לימוד... ולא דוקא בלימוד תורה כן אלא בכל מצוה ומצוה שבן אדם עושה כן הוא... ולא רק בלימוד תורה ובעשיית מצוות אלא בהמנעות אדם מעבירה הרי הוא עוזר לכל עם ישראל.

PART C. CHESED TOWARD ONE'S OWN SELF

1. **Vayikra (Leviticus) Rabbah 34:3 – Sensitivity to your own soul is chesed.**

"A man of chesed is good to himself" – this refers to [the likes of] Hillel. Once when Hillel was departing from his disciples, they asked him where he was headed. Hillel answered, "I am on my way to perform chesed with the guest in my home." The students asked, "Do you always have a guest in your home?" To this Hillel replied, "Is the soul not a guest in the body? After all, it is here only temporarily!"

גומל נפשו איש חסד – זה הלל הזקן, שבשעה שהיה נפטר מתלמידיו היה מהלך והולך עמהם. אמרו לו תלמידיו לאן אתה הולך? אמר להם לגמול חסד עם הדין אכסניא בגו ביתא. אמרו לו כל יום אית לך אכסניא אמר להם והדין נפשא עלובא לאו אכסניא היא בגו גופא יומא דין היא הכא למחר לית היא הכא.

2. **Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, Ohr Yechezkel, Midot p. 179 – Torah study and performing mitzvot are acts of chesed, nourishing our souls.**

Although the classic form of chesed is performed on behalf of others, it is in fact possible to bestow chesed upon oneself and to thus be considered a *ba'al chesed*. Since we naturally identify more with our bodies, we tend to regard the soul as a complete stranger. In truth, the soul is in a situation of impoverishment and discomfort in this world, and it requires our kindness in the form of feeding it with Torah and mitzvot and by refining our character traits. This type of chesed is in fact one of the most significant acts of chesed we can do ... Thus, each and every mitzvah that we perform should be carried out as an act of chesed to the soul.

יתכן שיעשה חסד עם עצמו ואף זה יקרא בשם חסד...
כי הנפש נחשב לזר אצלו וכיון שעושה חסד עם זר
מיקרי עשיית חסד... חסד זה מן הנכבדים בין מעשי
חסד... כאן בעוה"ז נמצא במצב של דחקות ועניות
ונצרך למעשי הטבה של האדם... ומעתה כל מצוה
ומצוה שאדם עושה חייב לעשותה בגדרי חסד ורחמים
לנפש.

SECTION VI. THE ATTITUDE TO ACCOMPANY CHESED

What is the proper attitude to develop when performing chesed? This is two sided: (1) what is the attitude you should strive for when helping others, and (2) what response should you anticipate from others to the chesed that you do for them?

1. **Michah 6:8 – Developing a love for chesed.**

[God] has told you, man, what is good and what He demands of you: Only to do justice, love chesed, and to walk modestly with your God.

הגיד לך אדם מה טוב ומה ה' אלקיך דורש מעמך כי
אם עשות משפט ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת עם אלקיך.

2. **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. II, p. 205 – When one loves chesed, he will perform true chesed.**

The Sages teach that "love of chesed" refers to the entire gamut of chesed (Sukkah 49b). We learn from this that a love for chesed is an intrinsic aspect of chesed itself. Chesed done without this love is not full-fledged chesed.

וביארו חז"ל אהבת חסד זה גמילות חסדים (סוכה
מט:). נמצאנו למדים מכאן, כי גמילות חסדים צריכה
לצמוח מאהבת חסד דוקא... מעשה חסד בלי אהבת
חסד... לפי הגדרת חז"ל עדיין אין זה חסד גמור.

3. **Ibid. p. 206 – Mobilizing one's whole being.**

[It is a good strategy to] perform acts of kindness with the specific intention of acting wholeheartedly and arousing within oneself a true love of chesed.

נמשיך בפעולות של חסד יום יום אך הפעם ננסה
לעשותן ממש בלב שלם ולעורר בנו אהבת חסד.

4. **Rabbi Yisroel Miller, A Career of Chesed, www.innernet.org.il – Don't expect gratitude from those for whom you do chesed.**

The true joy of chesed comes only when you offer it without expecting anything in return, including gratitude. Too many idealists turn sour by unconsciously adopting an after-all-I-did-for-them approach, forgetting that true appreciation is as rare as it is precious. If you seek the image of God, then be like Him: Do kindness knowing that most people will not be very grateful for it, and consider the exceptions as an unexpected bonus.

SECTION VII. PERSONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE AREA OF CHESED

Although it is a virtue to practice chesed for even self-centered motives, the goal is to become a sincerely altruistic individual.

1. **Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D., Do Unto Others, Andrews McMeel Publishing, p. 19**

A recent theory regarding chaos suggests that the mere flapping of a butterfly's wings in the air over, let us say, Mexico, creates a current which ripples around the world to touch the tides of oceans in, say, Australia. It says to me that each of our deeds, even those as small as the flapping of a butterfly's wings, has great consequences for now and who knows how many eons to follow. Perhaps the man in the following story knew about this theory...

Some years ago a renowned scholar named Rabbi Akiva Eger had a number of guests for his Passover Seder. One guest accidentally tipped over his goblet of wine. To prevent his being embarrassed Rabbi Eger promptly nudged the leg of the table with his knee causing several other goblets to spill and giving the impression that it was the table's shakiness, not his guest's clumsiness, which caused the spill.

The Rabbi exhibited here the epitome of character refinement. His instinctive response shows to what level a person can rise by acting frequently out of kindness, by being as concerned about another's dignity as one's own. The habit of giving is etched so deeply inside Rabbi Eger that he goes directly to the good deed he might extend.

2. **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. I, p. 94 – Extending oneself beyond one's limits.**

Each individual has his limitations as to how far he is willing to extend himself on behalf of others. Growth in the area of chesed means broadening the confines of those boundaries.

יש לכל אדם מדה וגבול עד כמה הוא מוכן לעשות
חסד. עבודת החסד היא להרחיב גבול הנכונות הזאת
ולהרבות בחסד.

3. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu Vol. 1, p. 45 – Using creativity.**

One should utilize his imagination to picture his fellow man's suffering or lack, and how happy he would be to be relieved of his troubles or obtain what he lacks. When one understands that he has the ability to benefit another person by fulfilling

יצייר אדם בנפשו את צרת חברו ודאגותיו לכל
פרטיהם וחלקיהם ואז ישא בעול עמו וירחמיהו; כן
בציירו לנפשו את גודל שמחת רעהו ואושרו בהשיגו
את אשר יידרש לו. אז בידעו כי בידו הוא לסבב אושר

his needs, it will be much easier for him to give of himself to others.

רב כזה לרעהו בנתינתו, הלא תקל לו הנתינה.

4. **Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Mesillat Yesharim (The Path of the Just), Ch. 19 – Building compassion and goodness.**

The guiding principle is: Compassion and goodness must be embedded in the heart of the person who personifies chesed at all times. His only objective should be to bring pleasure to people and avoid causing them pain.

כללו של דבר, הרחמנות וההטבה צריך שיהיה תקועה בלב החסיד לעולם, ותהיה מגמתו תמיד לעשות קורת רוח לבריות ולא לגרום להם שום צער.

5. **Rabbi Moshe Cordevero, Tomer Devorah Ch. 3 – Ultimately, you should see yourself as a mother or father to all those around you, caring for them to the best of your ability.**

One should emulate God in the sense that just as He is Father to everything in Creation, so should one see himself as father to all creatures – especially fellow Jews – and should always desire compassion and blessing for the entire world.

החכמה אב לכל הנמצאות... כך יהיה הוא אב לכל יצוריו של הקב"ה ולישראל עיקר, ויבקש תמיד רחמים וברכה לעולם כדרך שהאב העליון רחמן על היותיו...

