

Netivot Shalom
Insights on the Holidays and *Avoda*
Based on the Writings of the Slonimer Rebbe





Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Netivot Shalom

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Asher Zelig Weiss
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Several years ago, the first volume of “*Understanding Netivot*” was published thanks to the efforts of “a man of spirit,” my wise and esteemed friend Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein. This book provides English interpretation and explanation of lessons from the honored and holy Rebbe, author of *Netivot Shalom*. This book has become known as a fundamental source for understanding Hasidic ideas and the service of God, and many have studied it in order to draw near to Him. Rabbi Adlerstein has succeeded in conveying the deep and wonderful content of this book for English speakers.

Now he has devoted the second volume to the topics of the holidays and the foundations of *avodat Hashem*. As was the first, so is the second – this is a wonderful book guaranteed to enlighten and strengthen many.

May the author *shlit”a* always merit to increase Torah, and may the great merit of *Netivot Shalom* uphold him and his family with joy, peace, and truth.

Fondly,
Asher Zelig Weiss

In loving memory of my dear Father

Lionel A. Walpin, M.D. *z"l*

אריה לייב אברהם בן אליעזר יהושע ז"ל

He was a gifted physician, musician, innovator and teacher.

His love for family, Judaism, and Israel is an inspiration
to his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Dr. Loren Greenberg

In honor of our father, Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein, an eminent scholar and original thinker, who has nurtured and developed creative thought and intellectual honesty in every one of his children. One of his favorite means of transmitting these lessons has been through his renowned and sometimes “out-of-the-box” *parsha* questions at the Shabbos table, often based on the *Nesivos Shalom*. While maintaining that every thought and idea must be deeply examined and not blindly accepted, he always managed to show us how the Torah is the true source of all wisdom. He continues to influence the next generation, his grandchildren, who have already grown to appreciate his genuine love of Torah...and difficult *parsha* questions.

Abba, we are forever grateful to you for opening our minds and enabling us to comprehend the depth and greatness of Torah, strengthening us as individuals in a complex world, to become independent thinkers with the Torah as our guiding light. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the gentle love, support, and insight we all received from your *eishes chayil*, our dear and beloved mother, who has always been there to embrace anyone looking to gain from your knowledge, bridging all cultural and social differences and creating an atmosphere conducive to open discussion and growth.

Thank you for making the teachings of the *Nesivos Shalom* a real part of our lives. In your endeavor to bring the beauty of the *Nesivos Shalom* to the general public, you empower multitudes with its refreshing and relevant ideas, enabling them to benefit in much the same way as we have. May you continue to use your strengths and influence to respond to those who challenge, to guide those who yet search, and to inspire all of us – no matter which lane we travel on the *Derech HaTorah*, the superhighway whose parallel lanes are all *Nesivos Shalom*, paths of peace.

With love and admiration,
Your children

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Introduction

What keeps the world going?” asks the Gemara at the end of Sota.¹ Having established that the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* threw the world into an ever-worsening decline, the Gemara indicates that something must provide sufficient resistance to the process to prevent the world from collapsing entirely.

The world endures, answers the Gemara, “upon the *Kedusha* of the Order (*Kedusha DeSidra*) and upon the response of ‘May His great name be blessed’ of the Aggada.” This *Kedusha* of the Order, Rashi explains, is the *kedusha* that was added to the very end of the morning prayer, which includes an elaboration of its meaning in Aramaic. In effect, it is a short exercise in Torah learning that is shared by all of Israel, the schooled and the unschooled together. In this brief moment every day² was a nexus of Torah study and *kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of God’s name. Similarly, the public gathered on Shabbat to listen to words of Aggada – the homiletical explication of the Torah. When the crowd

1. Sota 49a.

2. See *Beit Yosef, Orach Hayim* 132, according to which there was a longer order of verses and explanations on Shabbat, when people were not in as much of a hurry to exit the synagogue.

Introduction

listened to the recitation of *kaddish* at the conclusion of the *derasha*, their mass response of “May His great name be blessed” also married Torah to *kiddush Hashem*. This combination is particularly cherished by God, and it allows the world to soldier on.

The works of Rav Shalom Noach Berezovsky *zt”l*, the Slonimer Rebbe, continue to captivate the Jewish world. They come closest to a contemporary example of a series of texts hungrily consumed by everyone: *Hassidim* and *mitnagdim*; *haredim* and Modern Orthodox; the schooled and the unschooled. The sheer number of people who turn to his words for illumination, inspiration, and a tried-and-true method of upgrading their personal relationships with the Almighty is a massive *kiddush Hashem*. Like the *Kedusha* of the Order, *Netivot Shalom* (the title of his main works) is at an uncommon nexus of Torah study and sanctifying God’s name.

Netivot Shalom works because of the rare combination of gifts that the Rebbe brought to his position. He had studied in the Slonimer yeshiva Torat Hessed of Baranovitch, which blended a Hassidic approach with a Lithuanian one, as both its *rosh yeshiva* and *mashgiaḥ* were rooted in the latter. He wrote with the warmth and passion of the Hassidic world, but expressed himself with the clarity of an accomplished *rosh yeshiva*, having founded one in Tel Aviv, after which he continued to lecture for five decades. He possessed the hands-on experience of a major rebbe; he knew of real people and the real issues they grappled with. He excelled in confronting the realities of modern life – especially the spiritual challenges and failings of people – with extraordinary honesty.

If one were able to design a person with all the right tools to lead and inspire the largest number of people, one would have nothing to add to the Rebbe.

Kedusha DeSidra did not only offer a fuller explanation of the verses of the *kedusha* – it offered it in the vernacular. As Meiri writes,³ “That translation was comprehended by them, so that it was as if everyone was studying Torah.” The rabbis of the Talmud understood that for the exercise to be truly universal, language could not be a barrier.

A number of years ago, I published an English-language adaptation of selections by the Rebbe from his five-volume work on *Humash*.

3. *Beit HaBehira* on Sotah 49a, s.v. *af al pi*.

Introduction

My aim was to serve two audiences: those with insufficient language skills or background to study *Netivot Shalom* on their own, and those who have the skills but vastly prefer the quick access that an English-language work provides. I tried to stay faithful to the original, but tailored my adaptations to the needs of the Anglo world. I knew that certain kinds of arguments were likely to be less than persuasive, and that there were limitations of the length of what people would read.

That book was well received. In this new volume, I try to do much the same with material primarily from the other two volumes of *Netivot Shalom*. The material falls under two headings. One is the yearly calendar; the reader will find essays that make each special season or calendar day come alive in its unique spiritual meaning and potential. The second is a sampling of the Rebbe's treatment of different aspects of growth in *avodat Hashem* – the science of learning how to serve Hashem more meaningfully.

This book should serve in the merit of my mother-in-law, Devora Ita (Aviva) Metchik, *a"h*, who took leave of this existence for a better destination while the book was in preparation, and who provided me with my most important asset in writing and in life: my dear wife Reena, *amu"sh*.

Lehavdil bein hayim lehayim, it should also serve in the merit of the family members who are the most meaningful parts of my life. The list starts with my mother Trudy, *amu"sh*, and my father-in-law, Yitzchok HaKohen Metchik, *amu"sh* – may they enjoy long life, health and happiness. It continues with our children Dovi and Rachel; Shevi and Rabbi Moshe; Yehuda and Chana; Rabbi Pesach and Malki; Yoni and Yehudis; Ari and Rebecca; Tzvi and Chani; Rabbi Akiva and Meira; and all of their children. May we all see the unending *nahat* of בנים ובני בנים ולתורתו נאמנים להשם ולתורתו.

Grateful thanks go to sponsors known and unknown. Perhaps at publication, I will find out who some of them are.

While I had a rough manuscript in hand, this book would not have come about without the encouragement, assistance and expertise of the professionals at Koren Publishers. Here, as well, I do not know the identity of all, but wish to thank them anyway. Some I can thank by name: Matthew Miller, publisher of Maggid Books; Rabbi Reuven

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Ziegler, whose enthusiasm for publishing is singularly driven by his passion for Torah; and the editorial team of Debbie Ismailoff, Ita Olesker, and Shira Finson.

I could not have produced this work (and the several other incomplete manuscripts lying in wait) without the support of my superiors and colleagues at the Simon Wiesenthal Center of Los Angeles: Rabbi Moshe Hier, Rabbi Abraham Cooper, Rabbi Meyer May, and Evy and John Nelson. Through them, I have been able to tell myself that besides having the opportunity to contribute spiritually to the Jewish people, I am able professionally to be part of the small army of people who labor constantly on the political level to help our embattled people.

The greatest change in life in decades came with our move to Jerusalem, where we have finally come home. It was the dream of a lifetime – one that the people who knew us best thought we would never actualize. We weren't running from anything; to the contrary, we could not have made the move without the strength supplied by all our friends in Los Angeles, especially at Beis Midrash Kehilas Yaakov, and its *mara de'atra*, Rav Gershon Bess, *shlit"a*. We miss all of you. Of course, an extra measure of thanks goes to two of our children in Israel, Shevi and Peysi, who did all the heavy lifting for us to make the move a piece of cake. There is no way to thank you properly.

Mori verabbi HaGaon Rav Asher Weiss, *shlit"a*, made it easy to navigate the complex issues of *halakha* and general orientation that are part of making *aliyah*. Not only has he always been available, but he has been a constant source of warmth and encouragement. I sought only one approbation for this volume, and it was from him. Many thanks to him for providing it.

Neither is there a way to thank *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* for all the myriad *hassadim* that He has bestowed upon us in the years of our lives, and in the preparation of this book. In classic Jewish style, thanking Him always morphs into asking for more, and I will not break with tradition.

יהי רצון מלפני ה' שלא תמוש התורה מפי ומפי זרעו וזרעו עד עולם.

Avoda

Avoda: A Primer

The Gemara's depiction¹ of the *oved Hashem*, the servant of God, does not give us much cause for celebration. Most of us will have to concede that we are not even close.

Here is what the Gemara says: “You will return and see the difference between a righteous person and a wicked person, between one who serves God, and one who does not serve Him.”²... There is no comparison between one who studies his passage one hundred times and one who studies his passage one hundred and one times.” Most of us will have dropped out well before we approach the one hundredth time. Can that one last repetition be all that important?

This is the point. We cannot imagine ourselves getting too excited about the hundred and first round of studying anything at all. The novelty, the sense of discovery would have disappeared long before, leaving mostly tedium in its wake. That is precisely the idea. *Avodat Hashem*, the service of God, means first and foremost serving Him for the sole purpose of fulfilling His will, even when unaccompanied by any pleasure or

Based on *Netivot Shalom* 1:235–238.

1. Hagiga 9b.
2. Mal. 3:18.

positive feeling. The Gemara provides a hypothetical illustration regarding someone who might still squeeze some surprise and enjoyment from his one hundredth attempt at a piece of text but gets none at all from the one that follows. He makes that last attempt only because he believes God asks it of him. This makes him an *oved Hashem*. All his previous effort will be justly rewarded – but the toil alone does not entitle him to be called a servant of God.

We reach the level of *oved Hashem* only through the expenditure of extraordinary effort in fulfilling His will, even when unattended by any other satisfaction. We find this most pointedly in regard to Moshe Rabbenu. He is described as having qualities not shared by any other human being: speaking “mouth to mouth... beholding the image of God;”³ “Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom God had known face-to-face.”⁴ Yet it is neither of these extraordinary descriptions that capture his uniqueness and specialness but a much simpler one. When summing him up in an economy of words, the Torah calls him simply, “Moshe, the servant of God.”⁵ This title underscores his love for God, which allows him to do His bidding in the manner of a faithful servant.

The image is further amplified in a midrash.⁶ A king decides to test the devotion of his children and servants. He wishes to distinguish between those who both fear and love him and those who only fear him but do not love him. He readies a narrow alley of four cubits by four cubits. Inside it, he constructs a courtyard of only four handbreadths on a side; it in turn contains an extremely narrow doorway. The king’s children and servants stand within the alley and courtyard. He understands that only those who truly love him will push themselves through the doorway, will force themselves through with great exertion, and will thereby find the king on the other side.

Our Sages had this in mind when they declared, “[One who says] ‘I toiled and succeeded’ – believe him; ‘I did not toil and succeeded’ – do

3. Num. 12:8.

4. Deut. 34:10.

5. Josh. 1:1.

6. *Tanna DeVei Eliyahu* 16.

Avoda

not believe him.”⁷ A person who attempts to apprehend God using his natural gifts and talents will not succeed, even if those gifts of intelligence and insight usually afford him penetrating insight and understanding. In reaching out across the abyss of incomprehension to God Himself, only toil and effort will be met with success.

This, then, is the requisite first step in the service of God: becoming a willing soldier, faithfully manning his assigned, holy station, and working with great effort. The *oved Hashem* is consistent in his performance, acting with the same alacrity during the dark times of his life as during the bright ones. Even when times seem oppressive to him – whether because he bears the load of weighty temptations and desires, or because his spirit is so darkened and uninspired that he feels that his entire facility for spiritual responsiveness has rotted away from within – he does not relent in fulfilling his obligations. He tells himself that if it is God’s will that he live a spiritually darkened experience, then he will respond to that will with joy and happiness.

Acquiring this first step has prerequisites of its own. Chief among them is developing utter and complete confidence that victory is his if he wants it. He must know that if he struggles mightily and begins to push himself through the narrow doorway, God will help pull him the rest of the way. He must understand that God does not come after people cunningly.⁸ If He challenges a person with extraordinary tests, He also gives that person extraordinary tools and talents to be able to pass those tests. A person must keep in mind that all the effort he is required to expend pales in comparison to what he will achieve – that of all the pleasures in this world, nothing holds a candle to the feeling of being close to God. Nothing could be a more worthwhile and profitable endeavor. He must hold to a steady course, never wavering, remembering the image of the Menora, literally monolithic, one continuous piece of pure gold, hammered into shape. Such must be his *avoda* – continuous and uninterrupted, knowing that any small break will weaken the entire enterprise.

You will come across people who have spent decades in pursuit of spirituality and are bitter and disappointed. Despite many years of trying,

7. Megilla 6b.

8. Avoda Zara 3a.

their achievement still comes up short. These people are often victims of their own enthusiasm. They have given valiantly of themselves – but skimmed on the essential preparation. Working toward spirituality without first preparing oneself in the service of God simply does not work. It is the equivalent of spending lavishly on a tall building but doing an inadequate job on the underground foundation. A building will never last without a strong foundation. Understandably, there is some natural resistance to spending freely on the foundation – no one ever sees it. Such a policy, however, is foolish and counterproductive. Yet people do the same, jumping into the work of the seemingly more rewarding parts of the pursuit of spirituality without doing their due diligence in the very first and most important step – acquiring a strong commitment to *avodat Hashem*.

“Counterproductive” is not too strong a word. Our Sages tell us⁹ that whosever wisdom exceeds his positive activities, his wisdom will not last. Would it not have been more accurate to refer to someone whose actions do not keep up with his wisdom? The problem cannot be his excess of knowledge so much as his deficiency of mitzvot!

Yet this is precisely the point. The Rebbe of Ruzhin offered the analogy of a fruit. God prepared the skin to protect the delicate tissue. If the tissue bulged and extended outside of the skin, many hazards would compromise the fruit’s integrity. Wisdom requires the protection of significant mitzvot. Those mitzvot protect the integrity of the wisdom – of Torah learning and spiritual insight. Without protection, the wisdom itself is subject to attack by many waiting spiritual hazards which can bring great spiritual illness to a person.

It takes a bit of insight to realize how important the service of God is as the ground floor in spiritual progress. It takes more insight to sustain the task of building that sense of *avoda*, of accepting the responsibility of fulfilling God’s will regardless of how much or how little fulfillment it may initially provide us. As in many areas of life, however, there are no shortcuts.

9. Mishna Avot 3:12.

It All Begins with *Ḥesed*

H*esed* – loosely translated as “loving-kindness” but encompassing a much broader spectrum of compassionate behavior – is chief among good *middot*, good character traits. It is also the central principle around which all other principles of creation are predicated. All elements of *ḥesed* contribute to the upbuilding of the world; all forms of cruelty give rise to destructiveness.

Things could have been different, claimed the brother of the Maharal.¹ “*Olam ḥesed yibaneh*”² – the world will be built upon *ḥesed*. There is no *a priori* reason why this had to be. God could have chosen one of His other *middot* and spun a world revolving around it. He chose *ḥesed* because it is closest to His will. Similarly, when we are instructed to imitate God’s *middot* (as fulfillment of the imperative “You shall walk in His ways”³), our Sages limit this obligation to the

Based on *Netivot Shalom* 1:98–100.

1. *Sefer HaḤayim*.
2. Ps. 89:3. Although the verse literally means “Forever will your kindness be built,” it is often used the way it is above to illustrate the centrality of *ḥesed*.
3. Deut. 28:9.

It All Begins with Hessed

midda of *hessed*, but no other.⁴ It is through *hessed* alone that we can attach ourselves to Him.

We can perform acts of *hessed* with our property and ourselves. Greater still is when we rise to the level of becoming the very embodiment of *hessed* – when we become people of *hessed*. We then share in the Torah's description of Avraham, the quintessential person of *hessed*. About him the Torah writes, "And you will be a blessing."⁵ This means, say our Sages, that anyone who was touched by Avraham or who dealt with him or even saw him was blessed, because Avraham himself had become a blessing. Indeed, the true person of *hessed* feels for the other and gives him his entire heart. When his friend is racked by pain and his spirit collapses within him, the *hessed* personality joins with him in his struggle, as stated in the verse, "I am with him in his trouble."⁶ Conversely, at times of his friend's joy, he also stands with him as a partner.

The *hessed*-person influences all who enter his orbit. He gives everyone his attention, because he loves every Jew as himself. An aura of love and fraternity accompanies him; it seems as if his entire being is given over to assist the other. The *hessed*-person's being is shaped by the special nature of *hessed*, which is *hitpashtut*.⁷ Thus, *hessed* and love emanate and extend from him, reaching both near and far. By contrast, the person who lacks *hessed* is, by nature, contracted and limited. He contains his capacity to love narrowly within and applies it only to himself.

Besides all of this, an added benefit is attached to this character trait. When a Jew conducts himself in the spirit of *hessed*, Heaven deals with him with the aforementioned *midda*. The Baal Shem Tov and other scholars emphasized that God relates to people according to the *middot* with which they live their lives. If they practice cruelty, the attribute of God's judgment is aroused against them, regardless of the validity of their

4. See, similarly, Maharal, *Netiv Gemilut Hasadim*, ch. 1, and *Pahad Yitzhak*, Rosh HaShana 31:4–6, 15.

5. Gen. 12:2.

6. Ps. 91:15.

7. Spreading, or extension. Some *middot* are focused narrowly, usually inwardly. Others – especially *hessed* – force the person to extend his ego, his focus, to the world beyond himself.

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justification. The Maharal⁸ shows at length that when a person attaches himself to the goodness of God by directing some of it to others, God directs some of that very good to the person himself.

Rabbi Avraham Weinberg in *Yesod HaAvoda* writes that a person should view an opportunity to do *hesed* as if he found great treasure. The Rebbe of Kobrin points out that exercising such an opportunity is a key to successful living. A day in which a Jew does not perform some favor or kindness for another, he taught, is a day not really lived.

One who diligently studies Torah but does not occupy himself with acts of *hesed* “is as if he did not have a God.”⁹ What he lacks, explains Rashi, is God protecting him. Were he to practice *hesed* as well as participate in Torah study, his affairs would be conducted from heaven through protocols of *hesed*. Thus, his umbrella of protection would be more complete, working to assure his safety even when he does not otherwise deserve to be spared.

Tikkun – the long process of bringing a flawed world back to the rarified state of Gan Eden before Adam’s sin – began with Avraham. He started the process of reestablishing spiritual order to a world of chaos, of *tohu vavohu*¹⁰, followed by the Six Shepherds that exemplified other *middot*.¹¹

His contribution, of course, was the perfection of the *midda* of *hesed*. *Hesed* is associated with no figure in the Torah as strongly as with Avraham. Why, then, does *hesed* not appear on the mishna’s¹² short list of characteristics of Avraham’s disciples? Instead, the mishna speaks of a generous eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul.

We might answer that when the mishna speaks of disciples of Avraham, it refers to Avrahams-in-training – those who aspire to become like him. The mishna does not describe Avraham the individual so much as how a person should position himself to be able to imitate his great

8. *Netivot Olam, Netiv Gemilut Ḥasadim*, ch. 3.

9. *Avoda Zara* 17b.

10. Gen. 1:2.

11. Avraham and these six others are known in Kabbala as the Seven Shepherds, more familiar to us as the *Ushpizin*, the spiritual guests in the sukka. Each corresponds to one of the seven lower *sefirot*.

12. *Mishna Avot* 5:22.

It All Begins with Hesed

hesed. The three traits mentioned by the mishna are the important precursors to *hesed* activity. Nothing allows the natural *hesed* within us to flower and flourish as much as diminishing one's sense of self. Similarly, when the mishna describes the polar opposite traits and links them to Bilam, it assigns the blame for stunted *hesed* development to a heightened sense of self. The greatest barrier to acts of true *hesed* is *anokhiyut*, or selfishness.

This analysis is appealing but doesn't stand up to scrutiny. The facts indicate otherwise. We note much *hesed* performed by people who are not exemplars of the three traits of the mishna.

We need not discard our explanation, however. We can resolve the conflict with a simple but hugely important distinction. The mishna speaks of those who wish to become *hesed* personalities, whose *hesed* flows from their essential self. Acts of *hesed* can be done for reasons both more and less laudable. People who have not yet become full *hesed* personalities can be moved by circumstances to respond with *hesed*.

Only special people personify *hesed*, with *hesed* at their cores. We will discuss this further in future chapters.

Hesed as Vocation

Performing acts of *hesed* is wonderful, but it does not automatically turn one into a *hesed* personality.

While one who performs acts of *hesed* responds compassionately to anyone who needs it, he does not seek out new situations to which he can bring his *hesed*. But the person whose core is suffused with *hesed* will chase after charitable acts. He stands ready to sacrifice the material – and even the spiritual – in order to do *hesed* for others.

A midrash¹ has God chiding Iyyov. “You sit comfortably in your house, and guests come to you. You have not achieved half the measure of Avraham’s *hesed*! He goes about seeking out guests.”

The Torah depicts the *hesed* of Avraham in full blossom. Weak and in pain, three days after circumcision at an advanced age, he was free of any obligation to toil in the service of others. Concerned for his comfort, God created a heat wave that would protect him from bother. Instead, Avraham was pained because he could not serve guests, and sat expectantly, waiting for their arrival. The presence of the *Shekhina*, the Divine Presence, and the opportunity to converse with the Divine

Based on *Netivot Shalom* 1:100–101.

1. *Avot deRabbi Natan*, ch. 7 s.v. *veyihyu aniyim*.

Presence were not sufficient to keep Avraham from his guests. He left the *Shekhina* behind, as it were, and ran to greet his guests, forever teaching us that offering proper hospitality to guests is more important than receiving the Divine Presence.

Avraham paid no attention to the identities of the recipients of his largesse. It made no difference to him if they were righteous people or idolatrous Arabs. No external factor, no perceived need, stimulated his interest in giving. His propensity for *hesed* presented itself constantly, at all times. If no one nearby presented himself as a recipient of his kindness, he would search out some other recipient. Avraham directed it even toward those who opposed what he stood for; he fervently prayed for the evildoers of the city of Sodom.²

Acting kindly to someone who needs assistance very often unwittingly causes some pain or discomfort to the recipient. Within our nature is a sense of shame in taking what we have not earned or deserved. Avraham's acts of *hesed* avoided this pitfall. Notice how many times he spoke to his guests as if they were doing him a favor by joining him: "Please, if I have found favor in your eyes; please do not pass by your servant."³ He turned to the travelers, fatigued and thirsty in the brutal heat, and spoke to them as if they would be performing an act of kindness by joining him. He inverted the roles of benefactor and beneficiary, making himself the recipient and his guests the givers.

Eliezer's test of a potential match for Yitzhak that he conducted by the well made use of this distinction between performing acts of *hesed* and the *hesed* personality. He would not be satisfied if a young lady offered to provide him with water; a compassionate person might very well volunteer such assistance. He was looking for something more than that. The response of the *hesed* personality moves beyond this; it was this that Eliezer considered crucial. Eliezer's request to Rivka implied that he needed water and nothing else – that he would be quite comfortable with water alone. The *hesed* personality is unperturbed by the lack of

2. According to the Sages, not only were they evil, but part of their evil was an utter rejection of *hesed*, Avraham's defining characteristic. They thus legislated against the performance of acts of kindness to strangers.

3. Gen. 18:3.

Avoda

need and finds other places to direct the quest to give. Rivka impressed Eliezer precisely because she volunteered to water the camels as well, despite Eliezer having made no mention of it.

Opportunities to perform charitable acts envelop every aspect of a person's life – his property, his body, his house, and his soul. Performing acts of *hesed* with one's property includes giving *tzedaka* to the poor, extending support to one who has come upon hard times, and lending money to one in need. The act of refraining from lending money – even in the face of the cancellation of the debt through the approaching *Shemitta* year – is called a “base”⁴ deed. However, the Torah warns against performing these monetary mitzvot with imperfect intent. “Do not find it evil in your heart when you give.”⁵ We are encouraged to give with positive intentions.

Performing acts of *hesed* with our bodies concerns us in two discrete ways. On the one hand, we are commanded to physically perform a variety of mitzvot including visiting the sick, burying the dead, unloading and loading distressed animals, returning lost property. Within these commandments, however, we discern another level of *hesed*. We should ready our bodies in anticipation of the performance of acts of *hesed*, so that we will jump into service with the eagerness of one who is collecting rare treasure.

Performing acts of *hesed* with our homes affords us the opportunity to turn them entirely into mitzva objects, sanctifying them entirely to God. Offering hospitality allows us to perform charitable acts to rich and poor alike, as opposed to *tzedaka*, which by definition must restrict itself to the poor.

Being hospitable to guests, as our Sages tell us and as we see with Avraham, is greater than receiving the Divine Presence. A simple analogy explains this. Imagine a good friend appearing on your door step unannounced. If he is a dear friend, you will react with unrestrained joy in seeing him and lavish all kinds of attention upon him. Could anything demonstrate warmth and closeness more than such a reception?

Yes, indeed. Imagine the son of your friend – an individual you have never met or spoken with before – arriving in a similar manner. If you receive him with the same enthusiasm and alacrity as you would

4. Deut. 15:9.

5. Ibid. 15:10.

his father, you have made a powerful statement. He returns to his father and relates the happiness that greeted him and the royal treatment that he received when people discovered that he was the son of their dear friend. The father's satisfaction is even greater when this unknown and unrecognized son of his is so graciously received.

Every Jew is a prince, the son of the King. When a Jew welcomes some unknown and unrecognized son of the King, he brings great satisfaction to the Father. We multiply the value of the gracious reception when the guests are Torah scholars or people who have done great deeds who continue their holy work from within our homes. When we do so, we combine acts of *hesed* with serving God.

The greatest form of *hesed* we can perform takes place internally, within our deepest thoughts. When a friend is broken and in anguish, we can go beyond showing that we take part in his pain – we can identify with the pain so completely that we experience it as our own.

There is no greater support we can offer another than taking on his pain as an equal partner. Sharper than any physical pain or financial loss is the mental pain and loneliness that comes with feeling that no one understands his situation or stands with him. The true *hesed* personality will find a way to demonstrate his solidarity at such a time, showing himself to be a caring brother, encouraging the individual in pain and supporting him, breathing into him new life with the belief that God will care for him and that there will be an end to the darkness.

This kind of *hesed* is a fulfillment of two mitzvot. We are commanded to “walk in His ways,”⁶ to imitate God's *middot* of *hesed* and mercy. It follows that we are obligated to commiserate with a person in pain, even when he will not respond or even know the depth of our feeling. We must do it to attach ourselves to God's trait of compassion. Additionally, part of the basic level of loving another as ourselves⁷ is to resist and fight any pain suffered by another. We cannot do that without first understanding the pain and only then battling against it.

6. Deut. 28:9.

7. Lev. 19:18.