

**Chesed- The Essence of Judaism**  
**Daniel Rothner, YIOT Shavuot, June 13,2024/ 7 Sivan 5784**

**Thesis**

We do not really fully understand chesed. We often treat chesed as “a nice thing to do” and fail to comprehend that it is commanded and obligated just like any other mitzvah. There is much written about articulating the importance of chesed and explaining how it should be done and we therefore should give that the attention it deserves like we would any other aspect of Torah or halacha.

**Chesed As a Central Topic in Tanach**

- What theme(s) emerge from these examples and in other places in Tanach that mention chesed?
- What can we learn from these pesukim about the importance and centrality of chesed?

**ויקרא פרק יט: פסוק יח**

לֹא־תִקֹּם וְלֹא־תִטּוֹר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כַּמִּוֹד אֲנִי ה'

**Vayikra 19:18:** Do not take revenge nor bear a grudge against the children of your people. You must love your neighbor as [you love] yourself. I am *Hashem*.

**מיכה פרק ו: פסוק ח**

הֲגִיד לְךָ אָדָם מֵה־טוֹב וּמֵה־ה' דוֹרָשׁ מִמֶּךָ כִּי אִם־עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ חֶסֶד וְהִצַּנַּע לְכַת עִם־אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

**Micah 6:8:** Mortal! He told you what is good and what *Hashem* demands of you- nothing more than to act justly, love kindness, and walk modestly with your God.

**ירמיהו פרק ט: פסוק כג**

כִּי אִם־בָּזְזֹאת יִתְהַלֵּל הַמְתַּהַלֵּל הַשֶּׁכֶל וַיִּדְעֵ אוֹתִי כִּי אֲנִי ה' עֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה בְּאָרֶץ כִּי־בִאֲלֵה חִפְצֵי נַאֲסֵה:

**Yirmiyahu 9:23:** Rather, let those who wish to glory in knowing and understanding Me, for I am *Hashem*, who acts kindly, justly, and righteously on earth. It is these things that please Me, says *Hashem*.

**ישעיהו פרק נו: פסוק א**

כֹּה אָמַר ה' שְׁמְרוּ מִשְׁפָּט וַעֲשׂוּ צִדְקָה כִּי־קִרְוָה יִשׁוּעָתִי לְבוֹא וְצִדְקָתִי לְהִגָּלוֹת:

**Yeshayahu 56:1:** *Hashem* says, “Do what is just observe what is right, for My salvation will arrive soon and My victory will be revealed.”

**משלי פרק ג: פסוק יז**

דַּרְכֵיהָ דִּרְכֵי־נֶעֱם וְכָל־נִתְיֹבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם:

**Mishlei 3:17:** Her ways [the Torah] are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace.

**זכריה פרק ז: פסוקים ט & י**

כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת לֵאמֹר מִשְׁפָּט אָמַת שְׁפִטוּ וְחֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים עֲשׂוּ אִישׁ אֶת־אָחִיו וְאִלְמָנָה וְיָתוֹם גֵּר וְעֵנִי אֶל־תַּעֲשִׂקוּ וְרַעַת אִישׁ אָחִיו אֶל־תַּחֲשִׁבוּ בְּלִבְבְּכֶם:

**Zechariah 7:9-10:** This is what *Hashem* said: Render true justice; be kind and merciful to one another. Do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the convert or the poor and do not plot evil in the hearts against one another.

## Chesed As a Central Topic in Gemara

- What theme(s) emerge from these examples and in other places in the Gemara that mention chesed?
- What can we learn from these excerpts about the importance and centrality of chesed?

**יבמות עט.** - אָמַר, שְׁלֹשָׁה סִימָנִים יֵשׁ בְּאוּמָה זוֹ: הֶרְחַמְנִים, וְהִבְיִישָׁנִין, וְגוּמְלֵי חֲסָדִים. רַחֲמָנִים דְּכִתְיִב: "וְנָתַן לְךָ רַחֲמִים וְרַחֲמֶיךָ וְהִרְבָּה". בִּישָׁנִין דְּכִתְיִב: "בְּעִבּוֹר תִּהְיֶה יְרֵאתוֹ עַל פְּנֵיכֶם". גּוּמְלֵי חֲסָדִים דְּכִתְיִב: "לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְיֶה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ וְגו'". כָּל שֵׁישׁ בּוֹ שְׁלֹשָׁה סִימָנִים הִלְלוּ רַאוּי לְהִדְבִּק בְּאוּמָה זוֹ.

**Yevamot 79a:** David said: There are three distinguishing marks of this nation, the Jewish people. **They are merciful, they are shameful and they perform acts of kindness.**

They are merciful, as it is written: "And He will give you mercy, and have mercy upon you and multiply you" (Deuteronomy 13:18); not only will God have mercy upon you, but He will bestow the attribute of mercy upon you. They are shameful, as it is written: "And that His fear shall be upon your faces" (Exodus 20:17), and the fear that is on one's face is his shame. They perform acts of kindness, as it is written: "For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to practice righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:19), i.e., to perform acts of kindness. Whoever has these three distinguishing marks is fit to cleave to this nation. Those who lack these qualities, however, are unfit to be part of the Jewish people.

**סוכה מט.** - וְהִינּוּ דְאָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר, מֵאֵי דְכִתְיִב: "הִגִּיד לְךָ אָדָם מָה טוֹב וּמָה ה' דִּרְשׁ מִמֶּךָ כִּי אִם עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֵסֶד וְהִצְנַע לְכֶת עִם אֱלֹהֶיךָ". "עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט" הֵ זֶה הַדִּין, וְאַהֲבַת חֵסֶד" זֶה גְּמִילוּת חֲסָדִים, וְהִצְנַע לְכֶת עִם אֱלֹהֶיךָ" זֶה הוֹצָאת הַמֵּת וְהַכְּנָסַת כְּלָה לַחֻפָּה. וְהִלָּא דְבָרִים קַל וְחוּמָר: וּמָה דְבָרִים שְׂדֵרְכֵן לְעֲשׂוֹתוֹ בְּפִרְהֶסְיָא, אָמְרָה תוֹרָה "הִצְנַע לְכֶת", דְּבָרִים שְׂדֵרְכֵן לְעֲשׂוֹתוֹ בְּצַנְעָא עַל אַחַת כְּמָה וְכְמָה.

**Succa 49b:** And this is what Rabbi Elazar said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "It has been told you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord does require of you; only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8)? "To do justly"; this is justice. "To love mercy"; **this is acts of kindness.** "To walk humbly with your God"; this is referring to taking the indigent dead out for burial and accompanying a poor bride to her wedding canopy, both of which must be performed without fanfare. The Gemara summarizes: And are these matters not inferred a fortiori? If, with regard to matters that tend to be conducted in public, as the multitudes participate in funerals and weddings, the Torah says: Walk humbly, then in matters that tend to be conducted in private, e.g., giving charity and studying Torah, all the more so should they be conducted privately.

**סוכה מט.** - תַּנּוּ רַבָּנֵי: בְּשִׁלְשָׁה דְבָרִים גְּדוּלָה גְּמִילוּת חֲסָדִים יוֹתֵר מִן הַצְדָּקָה. צְדָקָה בְּמָמוֹנוֹ; גְּמִילוּת חֲסָדִים בֵּין בְּגוּפּוֹ, בֵּין בְּמָמוֹנוֹ. צְדָקָה לְעֵנִיִּים; גְּמִילוּת חֲסָדִים בֵּין לְעֵנִיִּים בֵּין לְעֹשִׂירִים. צְדָקָה לַחַיִּים; גְּמִילוּת חֲסָדִים בֵּין לַחַיִּים בֵּין לַמֵּתִים.

**Succa 49b: The Sages taught that acts of kindness are superior to charity in three respects:** Charity can be performed only with one's money, while acts of kindness can be performed both with his person and with his money. Charity is given to the poor, while acts of kindness are performed both for the poor and for the rich. Charity is given to the

living, while acts of kindness are performed both for the living and for the dead.

**שבת לא** - שוב מעשה בגוי אחד שבא לפני שמאי. אמר לו: גיירני על מנת שתלמדני כל התורה כולה פשעני עומד על רגל אחת; דחפו באמת הבנן שבגדו. בא לפני הלל, גייריה. אמר לו: דעלקי סיני לחברך לא תעביד זו היא כל התורה כולה, ואידך פירושה הוא, זיל גמור.

**Shabbat 31a:** There was another incident involving one gentile who came before Shammai and said to Shammai: Convert me on condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I am standing on one foot. Shammai pushed him away with the builder's cubit in his hand. The same gentile came before Hillel. He converted him and said to him: **That which is hateful to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah, and the rest is its interpretation. Go study.**

אמר רבא: בשעה שמכניסין אדם לדיון, אומרים לו: נשאת ונתת באמונה? קבעת עתים לתורה? עסקת בפרה ורביה? צפית לישועה?

**Shabbat 31a:** Rava said: After departing from this world, when a person is brought to judgment for the life he lived in this world, they say to him: **Did you conduct business faithfully?** Did you designate times for Torah study? Did you engage in procreation? Did you await salvation?

**שבת קכז** - אמר רב יהודה בר שילא אמר רבי אסי אמר רבי יוחנן: ששה דברים אדם אוכל פירותיהן בעולם הנה והקרו קיימת לו לעולם הבא, ואלו הן: הכנסת אורחין, וביקור חולים, ועיון תפלה, והשכמת בית המדרש, והמגדל בניו לתלמוד תורה, והדן את חברו לכף זכות.

**Shabbat 127a:** Rav Yehuda bar Sheila said that Rabbi Asi said that Rabbi Yochanan said: There are six matters a person enjoys the profits of in this world, and nevertheless the principal exists for him for the World-to-Come, and they are: **Hospitality toward guests, and visiting the sick, and consideration during prayer, and rising early to the study hall, and one who raises his sons to engage in Torah study, and one who judges another favorably, giving him the benefit of the doubt.**

**סוטה יז** - אלא, להלך אחר מדותיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא: מה הוא מלבש ערומים, דכתיב: "ויצעש ה' אלהים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבשם" אף אתה הלבש ערומים. הקדוש ברוך הוא ביקר חולים, דכתיב: "וירא אלו ה' באלני ממרא" אף אתה בקר חולים. הקדוש ברוך הוא נחם אבלים, דכתיב: "ויהי אחרי מות אברהם ויברך אלהים את יצחק בנו" אף אתה נחם אבלים. הקדוש ברוך הוא קבר מתים, דכתיב: "ויקבר אותו בגי" אף אתה קבור מתים.

**Sota 14a:** He explains: **Rather, the meaning is that one should follow the attributes of the Holy One, Blessed be He.** He provides several examples. Just as He clothes the naked, as it is written: "And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21), so too, should you clothe the naked. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, visits the sick, as it is written with regard to God's appearing to Abraham following his circumcision: "And the Lord appeared unto him by the terebinths of Mamre" (Genesis 18:1), so too, should you visit the sick. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, consoles mourners, as it is written: "And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son" (Genesis 25:11), so too, should you console mourners. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, buried the dead, as it is written: "And he was buried in the valley in the land of Moab" (Deuteronomy 34:6), so too, should you bury the dead.