

## Darkei HaChizuk

ארבעה צריכים חיזוק (ברכות לב:) - שיתחזק אדם בהם תמיד בכל כהו (רש"י)

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### Good Middos: Signs of the Jewish Nation

Chazal tell us (*Yevamos* 79a) that there are three signs of the Jewish nation: *rachmanim*, *bayshanim*, and *gomlei chassadim* — they are merciful, bashful, and perform acts of kindness. “*Rachmanim*” is in the heart; we are merciful and our *rachmanus* drives us to perform certain actions. *Bayshanim* is something else, and *gomlei chassadim* also is not connected to *rachmanus*. It’s because people enjoy doing favors for others, even if it makes the other person feel good, there’s no reason to pity him. People do *chesed* because they want the other person to have pleasure and enjoy.

This is Klal Yisrael’s nature: to have mercy — which in turn drives us to perform acts of mercy, good deeds; *bayshanim* — to refrain from carrying out improper deeds; and *gomlei chassadim* — which is also *maasim tovim*, when a person does something because he loves doing *chesed*. These are the three signs that characterize the Jewish nation; this is a Jewish person’s nature.

This nature comes from our holy Avos, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. They are called *Avoseinu*, “our fathers,” because they influenced us and passed down this genetic makeup of *middos tovos* and good behavior.

### Avraham Avinu’s Chessed

Avraham Avinu was an *ish chesed*; he had *ahavas chesed*, he loved bestowing kindnesses for others. The Midrash states (*Avos D’Rebbi Nosson* chap. 7) that Iyov complained about his *yissurim*. After all, he was an *ish chessed* and had performed many *maasim tovim*. Hashem told him, “You still haven’t reached even half of the *chessed* Avraham Avinu performed.” When a guest came to Iyov, he would ask the guest what kind of food etc. he was used to and what his preferences were — what kind of wine, meat, or the like — and Iyov would provide his guest with it.

But Avraham Avinu didn’t do that. When three guests arrived, and he thought they were Arabs — after all, he told them (*Bereishis* 18:4), “Wash your feet,” and Rashi explains that Avraham thought they were Arabs who serve the dust on their feet — he asked no questions. He simply slaughtered three calves for them, as the *pasuk* states (*Bereishis* 18:7): “And he took a young calf, soft, and good.” The Gemara learns that this means he slaughtered three calves: 1) young calf 2) soft 3) good (*Bava Metzia* 86b), so that he’d be able to serve each of them a whole tongue with mustard, as the tongue is the choicest piece of meat. He did not ask them first if they were used to eating such delicacies at home.

Then he said (*Ibid.* verse 6), “Hurry, knead three *seah* of fine wheat and make cakes.” And “he took butter and milk” (verse 8) and served them all these dishes without asking any questions. Iyov would ask each guest what they were used to

eating and drinking, and he would serve them meals according to the standard they were used to. Avraham never asked, he just gave each guest the best possible dishes. This was the level of Avraham Avinu’s love of kindness.

### Middos and Abilities Are an Inheritance

As we’ve said, these good *middos* are an inheritance from our holy forefathers. That’s why the *Avos* are called “our fathers” — they genetically passed down to us the nature of good *middos*.

The *mishnah* tells us (*Avos* 5:2,3) that there are ten generations from Noach to Avraham, and then it says that Avraham “Avinu” was tested with ten tests. Now, why didn’t it say “Avraham Avinu” the first time too? Why is the term “Avinu” only mentioned when discussing the tests? The Ruach Chaim explains that Avraham is called “Avinu” regarding his tests, *nisyonos*, because through his *nisyonos*, he gave us, his future descendants, the *koach* to withstand *nisyonos*. When Avraham withstood his tests, he gave us as an inheritance the ability to withstand our tests as well.

The same *mishnah* states: “There were ten generations from Adam to Noach, to teach you how slow to anger Hashem is. All the generations would anger Him, until He brought the waters of the *mabul* upon them. There were ten generations from Noach to Avraham to teach how slow to anger Hashem is. All the generations angered Him, until Avraham Avinu came and received the reward for them all.” Here too, we see that first it says “Avraham,” without mentioning “Avinu,” but later on it says “Avinu.” This is because at first, the *mishnah* was just discussing generations, but later, when speaking of Avraham and his actions — that he came and received the reward for them all — “Avinu” is mentioned, because through his actions, he bequeathed to us the ability to be like him.

### Avraham Avinu Received the Reward for Them All

Let’s explain the concept of “Avraham Avinu received the reward of them all.” Ten generations from Noach to Avraham angered Hashem, but then Avraham came along and influenced his generation and caused them to repent. Now, the first ten generations, from Adam till Noach, also angered Hashem, and after ten generations, Hashem punished them with the *Mabul*. Indeed, the Tanna says this shows us how Hashem utilized His *middah* of *erech apayim*, slow to anger, which is for a period of ten generations. Since they didn’t repent after ten generations, they were subject to punishment — in the form of the *Mabul*. The next ten generations — from Noach to Avraham — angered Hashem as well, but they were not punished, because Avraham Avinu rectified the situation and influenced his generation to repent. That’s why he received the reward of them all.

I heard from HaGaon HaTzaddik Rav E.E. Dessler *zt”l* that the “reward of them all” means whatever reward they would have

received had them been tzaddikim. If every individual in all ten generations would have been tzaddikim, they would have received a tremendous amount of *sechar* — Avraham Avinu received all that collective *sechar*. They continuously angered Hashem, and Avraham had to fight against their *hashpa'ah*, which has a tangible influence. **Ten generations of *avodah zarah* and *bad middos* bring impurity on the world. Not only didn't Avraham Avinu become influenced by this tremendous level of impurity, he went to the opposite extreme and rectified the sins and caused his generation to do *teshuvah*! Since he had to prevail over ten generations' worth of a *hashpa'ah* of impurity, he deserved the reward of them all** — since he exerted himself to prevail over the natural challenge of the *tumah* of ten generations' worth of angering Hashem.

We must realize that we are on a special *madreigah*, because are *rachmanim*, *bayshanim*, and *gomlei chassadim* — and this nature was bequeathed to us by the *Avos*.

### Yishmael and Esav — Not Avraham's Descendants

Now, Avraham also bore Yishmael, but Yishmael did not act like Avraham. He acted like a wild man, his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand will be against him (*Bereishis* 16:12). This is probably because he was Hagar's son. Even though Hagar was a *tzaddeikes*, after all, she spoke with angels (see *Bereishis* chap. 16), this is not connected to personality. Indeed, HaKadosh Baruch Hu told Avraham (*Bereishis* 21:12), "Through Yitzchak you will have children." This took place after Sarah told Avraham (*Bereishis* 21:10), "Drive away this maidservant and her son, for the son of this maidservant will not inherit you together with my son, with Yitzchak." Hashem told Avraham, Listen to her, for through Yitzchak you will have children." Only Yitzchak is considered his child; Yishmael does not trace his *yichus* to Avraham; he is not connected to Avraham. He is not called "the son of Avraham," for "through Yitzchak you will have children."

Yitzchak bore two sons: Yaakov and Esav. Chazal said (*Nedarim* 31a), "The verse says 'through Yitzchak,' not Yitzchak in his entirety, because Esav is not Avraham's child. Esav had bad *middos* from the beginning of his creation, as the *pasuk* states (*Bereishis* 21: 22, 25, and see Rashi), "And the sons grappled inside of her."

Even so, I heard from Rav Dessler *zt"l* that Esav's "head" was kosher — indeed, it was buried in Mearas HaMachpeilah. The Gemara relates (*Sotah* 13a) that when the brothers went to bury Yaakov Avinu, Esav claimed that Mearas HaMachpeilah belonged to him as well, because he's Yitzchak's son. Chushim ben Dan got up and beheaded him, and Esav's head was buried in Mearas HaMachpeilah. Rav Dessler said that he merited this since his "head" was kosher. Intellectually speaking, Esav's had *emunah* — but his heart was evil. His behavior did not follow his intellect, but since his mind and his intellect were kosher, his head was buried together with Yaakov in Mearas HaMachpeilah. But in any case, Esav is not considered "the seed of Avraham."

Yaakov's "bed was complete" and he bore the *shevatim*, the *Shivtei Kah*, who merited that Hashem's name is attached to them, as the *pesukim* demonstrate (*Bamidbar* 26:5): משפחת ההנוכי ומשפחת הפלואי. Rashi explains: "The other nations degraded them and said: How can they trace their lineage to their fathers.... Therefore, HaKadosh Baruch Hu attached His name to them, a *hei* on one side, and a *yud* on the other side, to say: I testify that

they are their fathers' descendants. This is expressed clearly by David, '*Shivtei Kah, eidus l'Yisrael*, The tribes [that bear the name] of Hashem, are a testimony to Yisrael.'"

### Rivkah's Chesed Makes Her Worthy of Yitzchak

Good *middos* are genetic, as we see that Avraham Avinu told Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak "from my house and from my father's house" (*Bereishis* 24:40). Avraham's family are Terach's sons, so Eliezer went to Besuel and Lavan HaArami and took Rivkah, who was Besuel's daughter and Lavan's sister. Even though they were idol-worshippers, they had good *middos*. That's why Avraham asked Eliezer to go specifically to his own family, who had good *middos*, to find a *shidduch* for Yitzchak. (See the *Drashos HaRan*, fifth *derashah* for further exposition.)

And that's why Eliezer tested Rivkah to see if she had good *middos*. His plan was to ask her for a little drinking water, and then see if she'd also offer to provide water for his camels as well. If so, that would be a sign that she was a *baalas chessed* and had good *middos*, and that she was a worthy of marrying Yitzchak.

Although he knew she was a *tzaddeikes* before he even tested her — he saw the water rising from the well in her honor — it was not enough. The fact that a miracle occurred is sign enough that she's a *tzaddeikes*, but checking her *middos* was most important. How well perfected was her *middah* of *chesed*? Once he had clarified that she possessed the quality of *chesed*, he said, "She has proved worthy of Yitzchak." Rashi explains, "She is worthy of him for she is a *baalas chessed* and she is fitting to join the household of Avraham."

### Ahavas Chesed Is Built in to a Jew's Nature

*Ahavas chesed* is built in to a Jew's nature; we are *rachmanim*, *bayshanim*, and *gomlei chassadim*. Therefore, we were commanded to love your fellow as yourself — *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho*" (*Vayikra* 19:18). Seemingly, this commandment is not fair: Love is a natural feeling, so how can a person love someone he really doesn't love? The answer is that *ahavas Yisrael* is part of every Jewish person's basic nature and everyone is born with a *teva* of "*v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho*." However, the *yetzer hara* makes all sorts of *cheshbonos* as to why you should not love your fellow, and that's where the *mitzvah* of "*v'ahavta*" comes in: Don't pay attention to the *yetzer hara*'s calculations, just be your natural self and act with *ahavas habriyos*.

### Changing and Rectifying a Person's Natural Middos

Even if someone naturally has bad *middos*, he can do *teshuvah* and rectify his *middos*. He can change them. The Rambam in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (7:3) writes that one is obligated to do *teshuvah* for negative ideas, which means bad *middos* — he delineates there a few examples of bad *middos*. He wrote that doing *teshuvah* for bad *middos* is harder than doing *teshuvah* for bad actions, because one needs to change his personality in order to rectify his *middos*. And this is quite difficult.

In the past, we've mentioned what Rav Yisrael Salanter wrote (*Ohr Yisrael* Letter 14): Prayer alone is not enough to cause a person to change his *middos* — it's just like someone would daven to see without eyes, or hear without ears. This change

of nature is impossible according to *derech hateva*. One must come up with solutions to change nature.

The Rambam in his commentary to Mishnayos (*Avos* 3:15) writes by performing various actions, one can strengthen the *teva* of his good *middos*. The *mishnah* states: “Everything is measured by many actions.” The Rambam explains that if a person is giving a large sum of money to *tzedakah*, such as 1000 *zuz*, because of his *middah* of *ahavas chesed*, this action will solidify his nature of *ahavas chesed*. However, if he gives the same sum of money in 1000 installments, it will have a much greater influence on him. His *ahavas chesed* will increase exponentially. This is the meaning of “measured by many actions.” When a person performs multiple good deeds due to his love of *chesed* it has an influence on him and strengthens his good nature.

### The Madreibah We Merited at Matan Torah

In addition to the good *middos* that Am Yisrael received as an inheritance from the *Avos*, there is another level that we received with Kabbalas HaTorah, at Maamad Har Sinai. Chazal say (*Shabbos* 146a): “When Yisrael stood at Har Sinai, their impurity ended.” Seemingly this is not referring to their *middos*, but rather to *kedushah*, since that was when Klal Yisrael received the sanctity of Yisrael and the 613 mitzvos. Indeed, we say in our prayers: “You chose us from all the nations, You loved us... and sanctified us with Your mitzvos” — we were *zocheh* to receive the Torah. Good *middos* existed even before Matan Torah; we already received them from the *Avos*. General *avodas Hashem*, however, the servitude of 613 mitzvos, was added at Matan Torah.

The concept of “You have chosen us” is not like a standard choice, like when a person has two items to choose from and he picks the best one. “You have chosen us” means that **You have made us the best, the chosen ones!** At Kabbalas haTorah, HaKadosh Baruch Hu changed us and made us *baalei madreigah*. We received a higher *madreibah*, not just in *middos*, but in everything: in our *yetzer tov* and good deeds. And we merited receiving the 613 mitzvos, which sanctify us even more — as we say “You have sanctified us with Your mitzvos.” This is a special *kedushah* that can be attained through performing all the mitzvos, not just *middos tovos*.

*Middos tovos* are an inheritance from our *Avos*, but at Matan Torah we reached the level of “You have chosen us” — You have made us the best, the chosen ones. The *berachah* “Who has chosen us from all the nations and given us His Torah” reminds us that Hashem changed our nature and made us “the best” in all matters of *avodas Hashem*: Torah, *avodah*, and *gemillus chasadim*. The world stands upon these three: *esek haTorah* and *avodas Hashem*, which should be performed out of love, and *gemillus chasadim*, which is good *middos*.

### The Level of Our Avos

The merit the *Avos* bequeathed us is not just in *middos tovos*. Their entire lives were solely for *avodas Hashem*, as Chazal said (*Sanhedrin* 96a) that the *Avos* were like “horses running in muddy water.” Running in mud is very difficult, so a horse uses all its strength when it runs through mud. So too, the *Avos* would serve Hashem with all their might. Every single action they did was for the purpose of *avodas Hashem*. So too, they did not acquire all their possessions or other acquisitions because they loved materialism; their possessions

were a means toward their *avodas Hashem*. This was the purpose of whatever they did. They served Hashem with all their might throughout their entire life.

The Baal HaTurim in *Parashas Ki Sisa* (*Shemos* 32:13) writes the following on the *pasuk* “Remember to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yisrael Your servants”: Here, he first mentioned the names of the *Avos* before calling them “Your servants, whereas in *Parashas Ekev* (*Devarim* 9:27) it states: “Remember to Your servants to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov,” first mentioning “Your servants” and only then the names of the *Avos*. This teaches us that they were Hashem’s servants from the beginning to the end.

The *Avos*’s entire lives, from the day of their creation, till the end of their lives, was solely for *avodas Hashem*. Every single action, their material possessions, their sheep and cattle, everything — was solely used to serve Hashem. This was the purpose — they did not acquire wealth because they were greedy, nor because they wanted honor; it was solely for *avodas Hashem*.

### A Jew Feels His Fellow’s Pain

Regarding Klal Yisrael’s good *middos*, we’ve already mentioned the Gemara (*Shabbos* 31a) that discusses the non-Jew who wanted to convert, and asked to be taught the entire Torah “on one foot.” This means he wanted to learn the entire Torah in a short time. At first, he approached Shammai, who did not want to answer him, and then he came to Hillel, who understood that he really wanted to know and that he was a good person. Hillel told him, “Do not do unto others what you don’t want done to you. This is the entire Torah, now go learn the commentary, but remember that the goal is ‘do not do unto others what you don’t want done to you.’” This is what the mitzvah of “*v’ahavta l’reiacha kamocha*” is about, it’s just written as an active mitzvah, whereas Hillel presented it as a *shev v’al taaseh*, a passive mitzvah — just as you don’t want trouble, don’t cause pain and trouble to others.

We already explained that the *ger* wanted to know what he’d gain if he’d become a Jew. After all, as a non-Jew, if he’d just observe the Seven Noachide Laws, he would be fulfilling his duty, so what would he gain if he’d convert and accept the yoke of 613 mitzvos? Hillel answered him that he’d gain a new nature: he will not be able to cause pain to another person, and he will now care if someone else is suffering or in pain, because this is a Jew’s nature!

If non-Jews hear about someone else in pain or suffering, as long as it’s not someone from their immediate family, they do not care and are not pained by it at all. But when a Jew hears about another Jew in pain — even if he’s miles away — it pains him and hurts him. This is a Jew’s nature: *rachmanim*. Hillel was telling this potential convert: Now you are a non-Jew, and it does not bother you if someone else is suffering, but when you convert, you will care; therefore, “Do not do unto others what you don’t want done to you.” If something is difficult for you and you wouldn’t want others to do it to you, you should not do to them, because it’s hard for you to bear seeing someone else in pain. This is what you’ll gain once you convert — your entire personality and nature will change.

We must be aware of this: our nature is to be “*rachmanim*, *bayshanim*, and *gomlei chasadim*.” We have good *middos* ingrained in our nature. When a person acts according to his

nature, he is happy. Behaving with *middos tovos* — our true nature — brings a person happiness and good fortune!

### Money and Honor Are Worthless

There are two major matters that entice people in this world: the desire for wealth and the desire for honor. People want money and try to earn a lot and increase their wealth. The *pasuk* states (*Koheles* 5:9): “One who loves money will never be satisfied with money.” Chazal say (*Koheles Rabbah* 1:13), “One who has one hundred wants two hundred; and if he has two hundred, he wants four hundred.” He will never be satisfied and will always be searching for more and more money.” The same is true regarding honor. People are always looking for more honor; looking for a more important position. This is human nature.

But this is not the way of Torah. We must act only with our innate nature of *rachmanim*, *bayshanim*, and *gomlei chasadim*. We must stay away from the desire for wealth and honor. If a person has what he needs, “Bread in salt and measured water, but he toils in Torah, then he will be happy and fortunate in this world (*Avos* 6:4). He will be happy with his lot, with whatever he has to sustain him.

Honor is not worthwhile either. Receiving honor in this world will make a person lose honor in the World to Come. Even though a person naturally wants honor, he loses from it! It’s important to keep this in mind: honor is not worthwhile. Shame, *bizyonos*, is not worthwhile either; indeed, we ask “do not bring us to shame.” Shame disturbs a person and causes him much suffering, but honor makes a person lose his Olam HaBa. One must remember that money and honor are nothing.

### The Fortune and Joy of Esek HaTorah

This is the reality. You will be fortunate in this World with bread and salt while you toil in Torah, with *esek haTorah*. When one is *osek* in Torah, life is wonderful.

*Esek haTorah* is interesting and enthralling and satisfying. Just as we say in davening: “A nation who sanctifies the seventh day, everyone will be satisfied and derive pleasure from Your goodness.” First enjoyment is mentioned, and then satisfaction. Ostensibly, when a person is satisfied, he does not have pleasure anymore. If he eats when he’s hungry, he enjoys it, but when he’s hungry, he’s tired and wants to sleep. He doesn’t enjoy the food he eats then. How then, is it possible to “be satisfied and enjoy”?

The Haflaah explains this in his introduction to *Kesubos*. “From Your goodness” refers to Torah, as Chazal said (*Avos* 3:6), “Goodness is solely Torah.” The Torah is also satisfying, as Chazal say (*Berachos* 14a), “One who satisfies himself with words of Torah.” Man’s soul hungers and wants something to satisfy it, and *esek haTorah* is satisfying and calms the soul.

This is the idea of “will be satisfied and derive pleasure from Your goodness” — when a person learns Torah it satisfies him, but when he continues learning, it’s even more pleasurable! The more one learns, the more enjoyment he gains! At the beginning, it’s a little difficult, but once one gains a flavor for learning and continues learning, the pleasure increases. **The more one learns, the more his pleasure increases!** This is the meaning of “will be satisfied and derive pleasure from Your goodness” — in *limud haTorah*, which is “you are fortunate in this world.”

If so, *Ashreinu* that we know the truth that *middos tovos* are the *ikkar*, and *esek haTorah* is the most fortunate, joyous thing. *Ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu* — How fortunate we are, how good is our lot! *Baruch Hashem*.

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