

# Fascinating INSIGHTS

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### Essential Duo

Each of us needs to have Torah and Chessed.<sup>1</sup> Possessing just one isn't sufficient.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the Gemara<sup>3</sup> tells us that תורה תחלתה גמילות חסדים וסופה גמילות חסדים, the beginning and end of Torah is performance of kindness, as the Torah begins with Hashem clothing Adam and his wife and concludes with the burial of Moshe.



Here are some allusions to possessing Torah and Chessed:<sup>4</sup>

1) The Gematria of גמילות חסדים is 611, the same as תורה.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is also shown by Shiduchim. Concerning the Shiduchim in the Torah, we see acts of Chessed — with Moshe and Tziporah, Yitzchak and Rivka as well as Yaakov and Rachel. In fact, the Rokeach tells us that the word גמילות (camel) which is said by Yitzchak and Rivka is a contraction of גמילות חסדים (Breishis 24). These Shiduchim were done at a well (Breishis 24:11, 29:2, Shemos 2:15. See Shemos Rabba 1:32). What does water symbolize? Torah (Taanis 7a). This is what we should look for and pursue in a spouse. Parenthetically, it has been pointed out that this can explain why many propose near water. That is, although they are doing it unintentionally but as the Gemara says אע"ג דאינהו לא חזו מזלייהו חזו מולייהו חזו, even though they didn't see it, their Mazel did (Megila 3a).

<sup>2</sup> The Pasuk (Breishis 14:18) states ומלכי צדק מלך שלם הוציא לחם ויין והוא כהן. Malki-Tzedek, who is Shem (Rashi), brought out bread and wine for Avraham, he was a priest of Hashem, the Most High. Shem was constantly engaged in Torah and Avoda in the Beis Midrash of Avoda. On the other hand, Avraham's main trait was אורחים (Chessed). Shem

הוא. הכנסת אורחים — he learned from Avraham the trait of אורחים — Avraham learned from Shem עליין לך — כהן לא-ל עליון — to increase and be more assiduous on Torah and Avoda like a Kohen in the Beis Hamikdash (Mayana Shel Torah, Lech Lecha).

<sup>3</sup> Sota 14a. To know how to do proper Chessed we need to learn Torah since the Torah dictates what is proper Chessed (Ruach Chaim 1:2, s.v. ועל גמילות חסדים). Without Torah, one may think it is proper to have mercy on a person he shouldn't be merciful to. An example of this is Shaul having mercy on Agag (Shmuel 1, 15:9). With this we can understand why when the Mishna (Avos 1:2) states the world stands on three things — Torah, Avoda and Gemilus Chasadim — Torah is mentioned first because only through Torah do we know what true Gemilus Chasadim is (the same can be said of Avoda).

<sup>4</sup> It comes as no surprise that the first letters of חכם are ח and ת — תורה, חסד.

<sup>5</sup> See Be'er Moshe, Devarim 1, p. 222.

2) The term<sup>6</sup> חסד hints that we should possess Torah along with Chessed.

3) In the Parsha of Matan Torah, Parshas Yisro,<sup>7</sup> we have 72 Pesukim. This is the numerical value of the word חסד, again indicating that we need Chessed and Torah.<sup>8</sup>

The following are some teachings that discuss Torah and Chessed.

a) R' Elazar told his students that to be spared from the pangs of Moshiach,<sup>9</sup> one should occupy himself in the study of Torah and acts of kindness (Chessed).<sup>10</sup>

b) The Gemara<sup>11</sup> relates that Rabba who engaged in Torah lived for 40 years whereas Abaye who engaged in Torah and acts of kindness lived until 60.

c) Whoever engages in Torah study and bestowing kindness merits glory and wealth.<sup>12</sup>

d) When we engage in studying Torah and perform acts of Chessed, the Yetzer Hara is given over to us.<sup>13</sup>

What are ways to improve with Chessed? Chessed<sup>14</sup> may include helping another with learning Torah, giving encouragement, opening a Gemach<sup>15</sup> or even just smiling to someone.<sup>16</sup> We must attempt to fulfill עינים לא ידעתי אהקרהו, I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame; I was a father to the destitute; if I was ignorant of their grievance I would investigate.<sup>17</sup>



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### [A Vibe to Imbibe](#)

The Gemara tells us that Ovadia merited prophesy on the falling of Edom (Esav's nation) since he lived with wicked people (Izevel and Achav), yet didn't learn from their bad deeds. What is the connection between the two?

The Rambam<sup>18</sup> cautions us in who we surround ourselves with, since they affect us. If so, Esav should have

been a Tzadik since he was around Yitzchak and Rivka. Ovadia on the other hand, should have been wicked because of Izevel and Achav.

There are two types of those who don't learn from another's bad ways. It can be passive as in keeping a distance from them. However, a higher level is from actively fighting the wave.<sup>19</sup> The saying goes, "Are you going to ride the wave or let the wave ride you?"

Predicated on this we can understand why the pasuk highlights that Rivka was the daughter of Besuel and sister of Lavan although we already know this. It is to relate her praise that she was the daughter and sister of nefarious people yet she didn't follow in their path.<sup>20</sup> This gives us a deeper appreciation in ... עם לבן הרשע גרתי. I lived with Lavan and observed the 613 mitzvos and did not learn from his evil deeds.<sup>21</sup> Yaakov was proactive in not learning from Lavan's nefarious ways.

In a similar way, Yosef who was surrounded by the lowest of people in Mitzrayim, was steadfast in his righteousness. In this way we can understand ויוסף הוא השליט על הארץ he ruled over the physicality that was present in Mitzrayim.

Esav on the other hand fought the tide of those who were good around him. Ovadia fought the tide of wickedness and was therefore a Tzadik. Consequently, we now see the connection of the prophesy Ovadia merited since he didn't learn from the wicked.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of six books including the recently released Dazzling Money Insights. His writings, some of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

<sup>6</sup> Mishlei 31:26. The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni 601 s.v. וימותו. Also Rus Rabba 2:14.) says that Megilas Rus was written, ללמדך שכר של גומלי חסדים, to teach us the reward of those who perform Chessed. It therefore is appropriate that Megilas Rus is read on Shavuos (the day of Torah) as it hints to us that we should pursue Torah and Chessed.

<sup>7</sup> We should realize that no matter how far one is from Judaism, the Torah is still accessible to him. This is shown to us by the fact that the Parsha of Matan Torah is in Parshas Yisro (and Yisro worshiped every Avoda Zara — Shemos 18:11, Rashi) as well as reading Rus on Shavuos- those who converted.

<sup>8</sup> The Chazon Ish (Igaros Chazon Ish, 1:63) writes that nowadays one who strengthens himself in לימוד התורה is doing Chessed for all Jews to increase merit and protection.

<sup>9</sup> Parenthetically, through פחד, fear, we can receive our share of חבלי משיח, the pangs of Moshiach. Another interesting interpretation of חבלי משיח is that it refers to the spiritual realm. When we look at the spiritual deterioration of the world today, we can understand what tzadikim meant when they said that.

<sup>10</sup> Sanhedrin 98b.

<sup>11</sup> Rosh Hashana 18a.

<sup>12</sup> Baba Kamma 17a. Others say his reward is that his enemies will fall before him as well as meriting בינה, understanding.

<sup>13</sup> Avoda Zara 5b.

<sup>14</sup> A Baal Teshuva once reflected and commented on the contrast between what he was exposed to as a child and his children. He remarked that he was raised in a secular environment and got the message in his house and school, "How much money can I earn?" His children however who were being raised as observant Jews were naturally taught about giving away money (via *maaser*) and volunteering to do acts of chessed.

<sup>15</sup> There is a Gemach in Yerushalayim called the crying baby gemach. If the baby keeps the mother up at night, you can call this Gemach and they take your baby for the night so that the mother can sleep at night.

<sup>16</sup> There is a saying, "Never look down on anybody unless you are helping him up."

<sup>17</sup> Iyov 29:15-16.

<sup>18</sup> Hilchos Daos 6:1. See Mishlei 3:34, Rashi.

<sup>19</sup> The same applies in the reverse. One can learn good from another by just being around them — passive. It has been advised for one to surround himself with the types of people he wants to become. If one wants to be a positive thinker, he should hang around those who see things in a positive light.

<sup>20</sup> Breishis 25:20, Rashi.

<sup>21</sup> Breishis 32:5, Rashi.

<sup>22</sup> Breishis 42:6. The simple meaning is that Yosef was the viceroy over the land.