

Incredible Investment

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
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In this season of awe, we often invoke the mantra, *"Uteshuvah utefillah utzedakah ma'avirin et roa hagezaeirah/Repentance, prayer and charity can turn back a negative decree."* These three paths to a positive outcome are alluded to in three verses that contain an acronym of Elul, notes Rav Schlesinger.

The first verse is in *Shir Hashirim*: *"Ani ledodi (u)vedodi l'il am to my beloved and my beloved is to me."* It implies prayer. The second verse, from Deuteronomy, signifies return: *"Umah et levovcha (u)vet levav zarecha/ And He will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring."* The final verse is in Megillat Esther: *"Mishloach manot (e)jish lere'eyhu umatanot la'evyonim/Sending mishloach manot to a friend and gifts to the poor,"* which alludes to *tzedakah*.

While there seems to be a clear connection between repentance and prayer, why did our Sages choose *tzedakah* as the third path? The Ben Melech notes, so many of the *mitzvot* are rooted in the concept of *tzekadah*, in the command to create a world that is just, where all people have what they need while retaining their dignity. As the Ohel Moshe explains, when you give a needy person money, you give him a new lease on life. In return, Hashem will do the same for you. Rav Hofstadter notes that all three of these tools are alluded to in the verse: *"Ve'ahavta et Hashem Elokhecha bechol levavcha uvechol nafshecha uvechol me'odecha/And you shall love Hashem with all your hearts, and with all your soul and with all your resources."* "With all your heart," refers to prayer; "With all your soul," refers to *teshuvah*; "And with all your resources," refers to *tzedakah*.

But charity can be done on multiple levels. On the first level, it's given more to alleviate the donor's discomfort than as an altruistic act. Although still *tzedakah*, it's selfish giving. A higher level is seeking out people in need. The donor's only need is to give to others. This was the character of Avraham Avinu who

beseeked Hashem to send him wayfarers. The giver acknowledges that he is actually giving from the wealth that Hashem has merely entrusted to his care. This level of *tzedakah* has the ability to annul an evil decree, for by acknowledging that everything comes from Hashem, he proves himself worthy of continuing to receive Hashem's blessings.

But the highest form of *tzedakah* is performed with the intention of imitating the behavior of Hashem. Here, the sole intention of giving is to help others. Hashem's purpose in creating Man was so that He would have a recipient for all He had to give. When our sole purpose is to give to others, we are validating Hashem's purpose in creating Man and are meriting further life and blessings.

An integral part of *tzedakah* is building a relationship, having a generous spirit and a "good eye" for your fellow, says Rabbi Mintzberg z"l. It's responding to the emotional needs of another. *Chesed* and *tzedakah* are intimately related. When you interact with others this way, Hashem will view you as well with a generous eye.

Rabbi Scheinerman reminds us that Hashem reacts measure for measure. If someone shows mercy toward others, Hashem will show mercy towards him even if he is unworthy. So too, adds Rav Wolbe z"l. If you show no mercy to others, Hashem will withhold His mercy from you. If someone has other positive attributes but is too strict with others, why would Hashem nevertheless not be merciful with him in light of his other good attributes?

Rav Wolbe z"l explains that the character of being charitable creates vessels that can accept blessings and plenty. Lacking these vessels, there is nothing that Hashem can fill. We determine how Hashem will interact with us by how we interact with others. If we are miserly or demeaning, that is how Hashem will act with us. If we are uplifting and generous with others, we create huge vessels that

Hashem can fill.

The Sifsei Chaim cites the verse from Psalms 85, "Kindness and truth have met, righteousness and peace have kissed." If you relate to the world only through strict judgment without kindness, you cannot make peace even in your own actions. Even when we do *mitzvot*, there is usually a tinge of improper thought. If we want Hashem to view our *mitzvah* performance as complete, we have to give the benefit of the doubt to others. We must look for ways to do kindness, in deed and in judgment, to others.

Just as *tzedakah* has gradations, so too *chesed*. Sometimes we may do a *chesed* by rote, or because we feel obligated. True *chesed* is love of *chesed* that prompts us to look for opportunities. It requires stepping outside oneself and seeing the need of others. Are you taking up two parking spaces and too tired to straighten out your car? Are you making room on the supermarket's conveyor belt for the next person? Are you praying for others in need? Even holding the door or offering a smile can raise someone's spirit. When you go beyond the "I", there is less "I" even in a sin to condemn you.

Chesed is about changing yourself from being a taker to being a giver, of taking one's personal physicality and transforming it to spirituality, writes Rabbi Moshe Schwab z"l. Tomer Devorah tells us that there are angels tasked with collecting acts of *chesed*, *Bnei Yisroel* perform. When Hashem is contemplating judgment against *Bnei Yisroel*, these angels display the acts of kindness and Hashem displays compassion.

Rabbi Gedaliah Eisenman z"l notes that proper *chesed* is about connecting to others. When we perform act of *chesed*, we become part of the collective of Am Yisroel. Together as a community our judgement is less harsh.

May we merit a year full of goodness.



Deceit Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dayan Shlomo Cohen

The Shulchan Aruch writes that we must be especially careful not to insult or deceive converts either verbally or financially. They've made a tremendous turnaround in life and we are warned many times in the *Torah* to treat them respectfully. We may not insult them or remind them of their past. They must be accepted fully by all Jewish communities. Some say that the reason we have to be so careful is because they are easily insulted and there are so many warnings and prohibitions we may transgress. Another reason is because generally they are so careful in their performance of *mitzvot* that they put born Jews to shame and that can cause a *kitrug* (indictment) in heaven.

If you see someone suffering don't say that he is suffering like *Iyov* because he's too pious and therefore Hashem is being very strict with him. Don't ask someone a question if you know beforehand that he knows nothing about the subject. Be careful not to call a person by a nickname that might be insulting. Even if everyone calls him by that name, it's still wrong. When buying or selling, one may not cheat people with words or actions. If you're selling something with a defect you have to point it out. If you do a favor and the person thinks it's for him when in fact it's not, or you make a person think you're doing it because you like him, when you would do it for anyone, that's *geneivat daat*.

you and you know this person never eats out at all and you keep inviting him when you know he won't come anyway, you are deceiving him into thinking that you like him and what a shame he doesn't eat out. The Sma says you are allowed to invite him once or twice because if you don't invite him at all other people around him will have a low opinion of him. But don't start nudging and making a false impression that you're a great friend.

The Shulchan Aruch gives another example. Some people don't accept gifts. If you keep offering them gifts even though you know they will say no, it is deceit. You're fooling them into thinking you're a good friend when in fact you're not.

For example, you invite someone to eat with

Elul Through Yom Kippur: 40 Days of Recreating Our Reality Part IV

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Elul is a time to awaken ourselves and to stop and examine where we are. It's about returning to our true potential and recognizing that life is about our relationship with Hashem. While throughout the year we may easily forget this, immersed as we are in the mundane aspects of life, we must seize this time to look deep within ourselves and discover our true potential. Elul is about changing our attitude and direction and focusing on how we can improve our actions. How do we view reality? Do we see our house as the main aspect or as a tool to fulfill the *mitzva* of *mezuza*? Is food our central objective or the *bracha* before and after? Obviously, there are endless levels and we might be at a higher level in some aspects and behind in others. That is why we have Elul every year so we can start to correct at whichever point we're at.

"*V'atem tzon marito*- You are the flock of which I am the shepherd." The nature of sheep is to follow after the shepherd, to nullify themselves, and to do their master's will. When Hashem rebukes us He says, "*Yada shor kaneihu Yisrael lo yada*- An ox knows his

master but Yisrael did not know." An ox doesn't have his own agenda. He's entirely at his master's beck and call. As human beings we have an innate desire for independence and an evil inclination that pushes us to indulge in physicality. At the same time, we must know that our purpose is to be like the sheep who follows his shepherd, to be *lo anachanu*, to nullify ourselves, to know that the best thing we can want for ourselves is to want Hashem.

When Klal Yisrael sinned, Hashem told Moshe he would destroy the Jewish people and create a new nation from him. Immediately after that, Hashem taught Moshe the 13 Attributes as a means to attain forgiveness even when we are undeserving. We continuously invoke this prayer beginning with *Selichot* and throughout the *yamim naroim*. Sin may make us fall into despair, but Hashem never gives up on us and gives us a way to return. He adjusts reality so that we can achieve what we need to achieve. The Sefas Emes and Ohr Gedalayhu explain that when *Klal Yisrael* received the first *luchot* they were on the level of *shira* (song), the medium that angels use to connect to Hashem. A person who is perfect and has total

clarity can bond with Hashem through song. A song has ups and downs and creates harmony. When a person is capable of seeing that everything is really harmony, he can relate to Hashem in this way.

Before *cheit haegel* the Jews were on the level of *shira*. After the sin of *cheit haegel*, we transitioned to the level of *tefilah*. In the prayer of the 13 Attributes we express our need for Hashem's help and mercy although we are undeserving. Hashem gave us the unique ability to awaken His compassion through prayer.

Midah means a measurement. We ask Hashem to bestow upon us a higher measure of assistance that will enable us to fulfill what we need to do. If we will overcome our *middot*, if we will go beyond our nature, Hashem too will give us beyond nature. This is why when Hashem taught the 13 Attributes to Moshe, he used a language of *asiya* (doing). There's power in reciting the words of this prayer, but even more so, when we work on ourselves to emulate His *middot*.