



## The Middot Hayom Series

### Lecture 2: גבורה שבחסד – Adding Dimension to Existence

#### Transitions

We understand חסד, in general, as being the expression of existence and חסד שבחסד to be Existence expressing itself in existence, which is the primal discovery of אברהם, the concept of self-organization, and the way that we come to recognize that there is a unity or a kinship which is both monotheistic and kind. So that one always is dealing with something similar to one's self and from that comes the ideas of the צלם אלוקים and the issues that are so central to אברהם's vision.

Now, there are very clear dangers in kinship, both on the level of עבודת כוכבים and on the level of kindness. The danger of kinship on the level of עבודת כוכבים is pantheism. Curiously, if one considers Eastern religions, where there is a greater search for underlying unity and oneness of existence, one would expect to find less עבודת כוכבים because these are people who are more and more involved in seeing the unity of Being. And yet, strangely enough, as one gets closer to a greater awareness of the singular nature of existence, to the point that he is willing to say that all the differences and the detail in life are essentially illusory and what is real is only the oneness of Being itself, somehow the opposite takes place: as one gets closer to the idea of oneness, there is the worship of more עבודת כוכבים. The reason for this is because since life itself involves me, specifically, in dealing with what I am claiming to be illusory, and since in saying that it is illusory what I am saying is that it is mere perception, rather than innate in the way Being expresses itself, I have no choice but to relate to life as a series of different elements that are expressive of my "illusions" that have their roots, somehow, in ultimate Being. The danger in this, of course, is that one ends up worshiping the illusions themselves.

What is dangerous in חסד as it relates to kindness can be seen in אברהם's own children. We see it in ישמעאל in ידו בכל ויד כל בו<sup>1</sup>, in a complete breakdown of the sense of the value of life, because in having kinship, basically any thing can take the place of anything else, there is no value for differences or variety. And the religion that has

developed around this notion is one that lacks variety: everyone is a member of the Islamic "*umma*" as long as he keeps certain basic behaviours, and therefore there is very little concern for theft or killing, because people are units that are essentially replaceable. Now we know that אברהם throughout his own life fought this very issue because the one individual who stood against אברהם, and throughout all generations<sup>2</sup> is viewed as the antithesis of אברהם, was נמרוד. The problem created by נמרוד was that of homogeneity.<sup>3</sup> אברהם fought so diligently against this movement, yet, it would seem to be part of the dangers of the very kinship, of all things, that he himself discovered. Moreover, there is a much more profound issue which is in the nature of any type of חסד: there is a built-in contradiction in the meaning of חסד. This contradiction is expressed in the פרשה of עריות, which is where one might expect it to be expressed, because the question of identity or the mixing of identity ultimately revolves around differentiation. And when it talks about sleeping with one's sister, it defines such an act as חסד:

ואיש אשר-יקח את-אחתו בת-אביו או בת-אמו וראה את-ערותה והיא-תראה את-ערותו, חסד הוא--ונכרתו, לעיני בני עמם; ערות אחתו גלה, עונו ישא. (ויקרא כ:ז)

חסד הוא - לשון ארמי חרפה (בראשית לד יד) חסודא. ומדרשו אם תאמר קין נשא אחותו, חסד עשה המקום לבנות עולמו ממנו, שנאמר (תהלים פט ג) עולם חסד יבנה: (רש"י שם)

*And if a man shall take his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter, and see her nakedness, and she see his nakedness: it is a disgraceful act; and they shall be cut off in the sight of the children of their people: he has uncovered his sister's nakedness; he shall bear his iniquity.*

*It is a disgraceful act* – The Aramaic term for "disgrace" is *חסודא*. - [see Onkelos on Gen. 34:14] Its Midrashic interpretation, however, is: If you [object and] say, "But Cain married his sister!" [the answer is:] the Omnipresent [in permitting this marriage,] performed an act of kindness (*חסד*), to build His world through him, as it is said: "the world is built on kindness (*חסד*)."

This means that there is a double meaning to חסד. So that understanding חרפה to be part of חסד means that it is built into the nature of חסד. And there is a reason for this, which is presented so saliently in the story of לוט, who needs to escape from אברהם. לוט needs to escape from אברהם because if חסד is driven by kinship, it tends to destroy the boundaries of separation and identity (the main issue in עריות) and absorbs the recipient into the giver of חסד. Acts of חסד destroy the individuality and separateness of the person for the recipient of the act of חסד.<sup>4</sup> This idea is actually expressed in the *Promethean Bed*, or the מיטת סדום, in which we say, ok, you want to receive the "kind"ness of חסד: be exactly the same as everyone –we will chop you or stretch you to

size. In other words, essentially what the **מיטת סדום** does is state that anyone who wants to engage in this viciousness of taking over other human beings by being kind to them, so a person who is ready to accept that kind of thing is pure Nimrodian, really, and should be chopped down to size exactly the same way the Nimrodian bricks were industrial, homogeneous replacements for individualized natural stone (Bereishit 11:13): you want to be a brick, we will make you a generic brick!

This means that **חסד** is only possible when it provides for separation, which is the idea of, **לך לך** – get away and develop on your own. Indeed, with God we even have a similar idea of **הלוואי אותי** **שמרו עזבו ותורת שמרו**,<sup>5</sup> there needs to be an **עזיבה**. Interestingly, the destructiveness of **חסד** without this safeguard is the “Christian Love” in which selflessness is viewed as an advantage, where the **תורה** understands it as the ultimate evil, because the fundamental command of **לך לך** impels you never to be selfless but rather to recognize that **גומל נפשו חסד**,<sup>6</sup> only a person who does **חסד** for himself can possibly have any relevance to **חסד**.

### גבורה שבחסד

The solution to this primal problem in **חסד** is **גבורה שבחסד**. On the surface, **גבורה** seems to represent the antithesis to **חסד**: it is basically **דין** and in its ultimate form, it is the **מלאך המוות**, apparently the exact opposite of **חסד** as the giver. How could **דין**, which seeks to take, be a component of **חסד** itself, this seems to be a contradiction. Accordingly, we need to understand the difference between **גבורה** and **דין**.<sup>7</sup>

Basically, the **גיבור** can be envisioned as something of a samurai. The Japanese idea of a samurai is not somebody who takes, but somebody who enforces limits, so that all that is good can be destroyed if it is not in its proper place and if it isn't a failure, and by asserting those limits. We find this in the concept of **איזה הוא גיבור--הכובש את יצרו**.<sup>8</sup> Knowing what boundaries are, where things are meant to be – that's what **גבורה** means. This is part of **מעשה בראשית** in its essence:

The universe initially was expanding without any limits and the act of creation set the boundaries. So the act of creation itself, which is an act of **חסד**,<sup>9</sup> is viewed in terms of the assigning of limits.<sup>10</sup> In purely existential terms, the most fundamental form of coming into being is dimension. In other words, the thing that Creation must have in order to exist is dimension. Existence qua existence doesn't have dimensions. So the idea of assigning dimensions in **מעשה בראשית** is in fact that which provides for self-space in the actual, physical, and temporal sense and in the psychological sense – it's the fact that we can have a separate identity. This is what **לוט** himself said – I need some space, some room. This idea of space is expressed biologically in the *territorial imperative*<sup>11</sup> in which an organism's identity is tied to a specific place so that if it is removed from that space, it cannot protect itself. So now, if we recall our understanding of the **דרך השם** as being a chain, where each step demands the next, then it is the demand of **חסד** that it be provided with dimension. **חסד** itself makes no sense – it's an innate paradox because of its **חרפה** component. The thing that **חסד** requires in order to be **חסד** is space.<sup>12</sup>

This is why we find in Creation the incredible expressiveness and detail. One of the most exciting elements of life is the way that it is so insanely detailed. This concept of diversity creates separate existence amongst all of its components and provides them with a uniqueness, which is essentially, a breaking away from God. This is why אדם is the ultimate purpose of creation because only אדם can be fully separate through possessing a vision of separation, which becomes the עץ הדעת itself.

This means that in terms of our behaviour, we need to act in our acts of חסדים in such a way that provides space for others and that is clearly delimited, that is, we know what to give:

מאי דכתיב טוב איש חונן ומלוה יכלכל דבריו במשפט לעולם יאכל  
אדם וישתה פחות ממה שיש לו וילבש ויתכסה במה שיש לו ויכבד  
אשתו ובניו יותר ממה שיש לו שהן תלויין בו והוא תלוי במי שאמר  
והיה העולם (חולין פד:)

*What is the meaning of the passage, 'Well is it with the man who deals graciously and lends, who orders his affairs rightfully?' [It comes to teach that] a person should always eat and drink an amount that is less than he has and dress with clothes that are less than he has while dignifying his wife and children with more than he has, as they rely upon him [to provide] while he relies on him who said 'let there be a world.'*

This is also why אברהם eventually prayed for סדום, because its existence was as a place that provided separation: שלי שלי, ושליך שלי.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the giving over ארץ ישראל is the territorial imperative: you must have a place that is unique and specific to you:

כל המקום אשר תדרוך כף רגלכם בו לכם יהיה מן המדבר והלבנון  
מן הנגהר נהר פרת ועד הים האחרון יהיה גבולכם:  
(דברים פרק יא: כד)

*Every place whereon the sole of your foot shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness, and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the hinder sea shall be your border.*

This is also why, when אברהם comes to bury שרה, it is so shocking to the בני חת. They tell him he is a מבחר אתה בתוכנו – anyone would be willing to give you קברינו, because in terms of חסד שבחסד that is what you taught us, the oneness of our kinship, so if you need a place then you could take any place. But אברהם said no, I want a place that is special to me, I want an אחזת-קבר and I want to buy it. This shocked them because it didn't make any sense in terms of what they had learned from

up until this point. Indeed, אברהם was upset with מילה because he felt he would be different, and as noticeably different, how would he be able to teach what he was teaching. But God told him that on the contrary, it's that separation and distinctiveness that is going to end up making you more than what it is that you are.

ההוא דאתא לקמיה דרבא אמר לו במה אתה סועד אמר לו בתרנגולת פטומה ויין ישן אמר ליה ולא היישת לדוחקא דציבורא אמר ליה אטו מדידהו קאכילנא מדרחמנא קאכילנא דתנינא עיני כל אליך ישברו ואתה נותן להם את אכלם בעתו בעתם לא נאמר אלא בעתו מלמד שכל אחד ואחד נותן הקדוש ברוך הוא פרנסתו בעתו אדהכי אתאי אחתיה דרבא דלא חזיא ליה תליסרי שני ואתיא ליה תרנגולת פטומה ויין ישן אמר מאי דקמא אמר ליה נענתי לך קום אכול. (כתובות סז:)

*A man once applied to Rava [for charity]. 'What do your meals consist of?' he asked him. 'Of fattened chicken and old wine', the other replied. 'Did you not consider', [the Rabbi] asked him, 'the burden of the community?' 'Do I,' the other replied, 'eat of theirs? I eat [the food] of the All-Merciful; for we learned: The eyes of all wait for Thee, and Thou givest them their food in due season, this, since it is not said, 'in their season' but 'in his season', teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, provides for every individual his food in accordance with his own habits'. Meanwhile there arrived Rava's sister, who had not seen him for thirteen years, and brought him a fattened chicken and old wine. 'What a remarkable incident!' [Rava] exclaimed; [and then] he said to him, 'I apologize to you—come and eat!'*

The idea that our sense of being able to give to someone else what we don't have ourselves because the person requires it, whereas we don't require it, seems a bit odd, unless one has a concept of גבורה שבחסד. This is the whole point. We are not trying to make the world the images of *our* selves and *our* needs, we are trying to relate to it as it is. So that if someone says they need money for coffee and you say well, coffee isn't healthy, if you want something good to drink, I'll give you the money, גבורה שבחסד says this is inappropriate – let him have the coffee, it's what *he* needs. This means that the deepest חסד of all is the provision of place. This is expressed by the following גמרא:

אמרה כנסת ישראל לפני הקב"ה רבונו של עולם רמוז בעיניך דבסיים מחמרא ואחוי לי שיניך דבסיים מחלבא מסייע ליה לר' יוחנן דאמר ר' יוחנן טוב המלבין שינים לחבירו יותר ממשקהו חלב שנאמר ולבן שנים מחלב אל תקרי לבן שינים אלא לבון שינים (כתובות קיא.)

*The congregation of Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Lord of the Universe, wink to me with your eyes, which*

*[to me will be] sweeter than wine, and show me your teeth which will be sweeter than milk'. [This interpretation] provides support for R. Jochanan who said; The man who [by smiling affectionately] shows his teeth to his friend is better than one who gives milk to drink, for it is said, 'And his teeth white with milk,' read not 'teeth white' but 'showing the teeth.'*

Giving a smile to another gives him the sense that the world is his, that the world has a place for him. Indeed, this goes in both ways, too:

דרש רבי חנינא בר פפא יהי כבוד ה' לעולם ישמח ה' במעשיו פסוק זה שר העולם אמרו בשעה שאמר הקב"ה למינהו באילנות נשאו דשאים קל וחומר בעצמן אם רצונו של הקב"ה בערבוביא למה אמר למינהו באילנות ועוד ק"ו ומה אילנות שאין דרכן לצאת בערבוביא אמר הקב"ה למינהו אנו עאכ"ו מיד כל אחד ואחד יצא למינו פתח שר העולם ואמר יהי כבוד ה' לעולם ישמח ה' במעשיו (חולין ס.)

The דשאים, in developing a discrete and integral DNA, did this basically as part of their own development. That's when *ישמח ה' במעשיו*, because what was happening until that time was essentially robotic, but when things started taking off in their own direction, that is what gave God happiness in the creation process, because that was the first real moment of Creation. The essence of existence is *separate* existence and that's the concept of חסד overall. So the essence of Creation is separate existence. And the desire to lose one's separateness, which has become, unfortunately, a Christian idea that has recently been embedded in certain Jewish מוסר type thinking is antithetical to Jewish thought in the most fundamental way – one *never* should search to lose one's existence, because it is the entire point of Creation!<sup>14</sup>

This means that the method of בריאה is צמצום, as the Ari z"l speaks of, there needs to be a limitation, as it were, of the overwhelming presence of God in order to provide for the separation that מעשה בראשית requires. And this is what gives us the tremendous joy of discovering God in the details, which is the exactly opposite of the pantheistic approach. That approach says that these details are basically illusory and the only thing that really counts is the underlying flow of Being itself. But this is not true. The whole nature of Creation is the details and complexities that are capable of expressing one aspect of Being which would have gotten lost to one in the overall structure of a single reality. And therefore, that is precisely what it is that we want, that is what it is that we look for, that is what it is that we celebrate, that is what gives us our central joy in existence itself and that is what גבורה provides for חסד – space.



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R. M. Weinberg in Jerusalem, Israel in 2003.

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### *endnotes:*

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<sup>1</sup> בראשית טז: יב

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance נבוכדנצר היה מזרעו של נמרוד הרשע (פסחים צד).

<sup>3</sup> ויהי כל-הארץ שפה אחת, ודברים אחדים (בראשית יא: א)

<sup>4</sup> This is why we find welfare states being so dangerous and destroying the ability for real development among the welfare recipients.

<sup>5</sup> ירושלמי חגיגה דף ו, ב פרק א הלכה ז

<sup>6</sup> משלי יא: יז

<sup>7</sup> Although גבורה is indeed an expression of מידת הדין, as will be discussed later on in the series.

<sup>8</sup> אבות פרק ד: א

<sup>9</sup> עולם חסד יבנה (תהלים פט ג)

<sup>10</sup> That's why דין is referred to as the שורת הדין, the wall or boundary of דין, as דין takes on this function of assigning appropriate boundaries.

<sup>11</sup> The need for an organism to mark its territory, claim it, in whatever way it can.

<sup>12</sup> Incidentally, this is not an external definition. This is the meaning of what the term חסד entails. There is no way to conceive of the מידות without their seven existential definitions.

<sup>13</sup> האומר שלי שלי, ושלך שלך--זו מידה בינונית; ויש אומרים, זו מידת סדום (אבות ה: ט).

<sup>14</sup> There is no such thing as a ביטול היש as some might think. There could be a ביטול of a רצון in recognizing that I am more desirous of God's רצון.