

Introduction

If one were to ask which *mitzvah* is the source of the requirement to develop *middos tovos* and to perform *mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro*, most people would respond with the *pasuk*, “ואהבת לרעך כמוך.” This is obviously true, but it is an incomplete answer. The *mitzvah* of “והלכת בדרכיו” is in some ways more far-reaching. We are commanded to love our friends as ourselves, but we are also commanded to go *bederech Hashem*, to follow in Hashem’s ways. These are different *mitzvos* with different definitions and rationales.

The first *perek* of *Tomer Devorah* is a comprehensive explanation of the *mitzvah* of והלכת בדרכיו. This *perek* is uniquely important in that it explains the thirteen *middos* of Hashem (by means of the *pesukim* in *Michah*) in greater detail and breadth than any other classical *sefer*, and it also spells out how to apply those *middos* in our personal lives. The *Baalei Mussar* viewed *Tomer Devorah* as the “*Shulchan Aruch* of *middos*,” and in Kelm it was studied every Shabbos.¹

On the one hand, the fact that Rav Moshe Cordevero (the Ramak) took the unusual step of spelling out the applications of Hashem’s *middos* makes the ideas more accessible than those presented in other *sefarim kedoshim*. At the same time, his clarification creates its own complexities. First of all, the Ramak’s “demands” are incredibly high. Moreover, they are often highly situational. He teaches that when x or y situation occurs, one must remember to apply a specific *middah*. This itself is difficult, as there is no regularity to the application.

¹ See *Mesores Eliyahu*, pp. 46, 56, 114.

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Furthermore, it is made even more difficult given that many of the situations do not happen very often. Obviously, the Ramak did not mean that his applications are the only way to apply these *middos*; they are simply the ideal manner, the way most true to the *middah*. However, one could easily misunderstand that the only way to connect to the *middah* is through the specific pathways he shares.

For these reasons, when I led a *vaad* with a component of practical applications (“*kabbalos*”) based on the *Tomer Devorah*, I found myself constantly sidestepping the Ramak’s suggestions. This *kuntres* is not a *peirush* on the *Tomer Devorah*, although it includes some commentary. It is an attempt to bring down the Ramak’s principles in a manner that we can apply in our humble but wonderful generation.

This was based on the approach I acquired from Rav Reuven Leuchter *shlita*. To my mind, the *Mashgiach’s derech* is best summed up as “the constant attempt to find where the Torah’s deep, pristine principles meet us in our non-pristine world.” One can speak about the Torah’s ideas without a real understanding, ability, or even desire to apply them “down below.” On the other hand, one can study self-help books that speak to man at a mundane level, even if they include some correct ideas. Rav Leuchter is always searching for the objective truth of Torah, but with a keen eye of how to apply that truth to our subjective reality, and he has an uncanny understanding of both.

In Rav Leuchter’s approach, almost every *kabbalah* must be investigated. He “tries out” the action item to determine if it is in fact a viable way to connect to the idea. For success-oriented people, this

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is often a challenge, but in Rav Leuchter's view, growth is about the journey, not the arrival at the destination.²

There are often introductory steps needed before even getting to the Ramak's principles. The ideas we will share fall into three categories: 1. full-fledged fulfillments of **והלכת בדרכיו**; 2. *bechsherei mitzvah* of **והלכת בדרכיו** (steps taken towards the *mitzvah*); 3. *eitzos tovos*.

Through these steps, we elevate ourselves towards G-d's ways, and that is among the greatest possible achievements, even if the approach we take is not exactly the same as the *Tomer Devorah*. Of course, in no way should this limit the reader from trying to apply the Ramak's ideas in the way that he advises. On the contrary – fortunate is the one who can act in that manner!

All readers, including first-time learners, should study the words of the *Tomer Devorah* on any particular *middah* and try to apply them before viewing my comments. It is my hope that one who works with the *kabbalos* I suggest will eventually be able to try the *Tomer Devorah*'s applications “head on.”

The Kabbalos in this Kuntres

Kabbalos are a standard, defining feature of *mussar vaadim*. The ideas shared in the *vaad* come alive and are practiced through action items that members accept upon themselves. Rav Shlomo Wolbe's *Alei Shur* (vol. 2) is the most famous work that suggests *kabbalos*. Another

² See his article, “Outside the Glass,” *Mishpacha Magazine* #1043.

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excellent *sefer* that offers practical suggestions is *Hadrachos V'Eitzos B'Avodas Hashem* by Rav Naftali Kaplan. *Baruch Hashem*, increasing numbers of such works are being published.

The nature of a *kabbalah*, like the nature of any idea, is that one *vaad* member may find it extremely meaningful while another may not relate to it at all. This is not only **not** a problem, but it is the very nature of the work and a proof that it is genuine. People are different and live in greatly varied situations. One size never fits all. For example, this *kuntres* was written for both men and women, but some examples will resonate more with men and others with women.

This *kuntres* does not represent a comprehensive, specifically-ordered system (although I believe the *Tomer Devorah* does). My goal in this *kuntres* is to contribute where I thought I had something to add. I did not want to be ingenuine, and I did not comment when I did not have something significant to say. Furthermore, my goal was to apply each *middah* independent of the others. That means there is no specific order and that working on one thing isn't hampered by the fact you didn't (or won't) work on something else. Each idea is valuable on its own; it is perfectly acceptable to skip my suggestion regarding one *middah* if it doesn't speak to you.

For some of the *kabbalos*, I attach a time frame. This is an estimation of the amount of time I think one needs to get "in touch" with the idea in a practical way. To actually acquire the *middah* takes much longer and demands repetition; it is far beyond my abilities to predict exactly how long it will take. When we work on our *middos*, the destination should often be improvement, not radical change. Ultimate *tikkun hamiddos* is a gargantuan task. As Rav Yisrael Salanter famously

said, it is easier to learn *Sbas* than to change a single *middah*! The goal of this *kuntres* is exposure and significant connection to the *middos* of Hashem. These in and of themselves are tremendous accomplishments. Of course, feel free to adopt the *kabbalos* as life-long practices, as they fit you. (I discuss this point further at the end of the *kuntres*.)

For some *middos*, I did not spell out a specific *kabbalah* to take on for a defined period of time. Sometimes this is because the action item that results from the explanation offered is obvious, and it is left to the reader to choose to engage in it.

An optimal way to engage with this *kuntres* is with a *chavrusa*, especially for those newer to *kabbalos*. A *chavrusa* can be a helpful sounding board and thought partner who helps you understand the ideas and keeps you on track in terms of doing the *kabbalos*.

As we embark on the *derech Hashem*, remember that even the smallest step in any aspect of *avodas Hashem* is priceless, all the more so when it comes to a central *mitzvah* like **והלכת בדרכיו**, and even more so in our trying times, when there are so many forces pushing us away from His path.³

³ אלו דברי האריז"ל וז"ל דע לך שאין גדלות הנפש תלויה כפי מעשה האדם הנראה לעינים (כי בוחן לבות וכליות השם יתברך) רק כפי הזמן והדור ההוא, כי מעשה קטן מאוד בדור הזה שקול ככמה מצוות גדולות בדורות הראשונים, כי בדורות האלה הקליפה והרע גובר מאוד מאוד עד אין קץ ואין שיעור מה שאין כן בדורות הראשונים, עכ"ל.

הב' – נושא עון – והרי זה גדול מהקדם שהרי לא יעשה האדם עון שלא יברא משחית בדתנן העובר עברה אחת קנה לו קטגור אחד והרי אותו קטגור עומד לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ואומר פלוני עשאני, ואין בריה מתקיימת בעולם אלא בשפעו של הקדוש ברוך הוא והרי המשחית הזה עומד לפניו ובמה מתקיים, הדין נותן שיאמר הקדוש ברוך הוא איני זן משחיתים ילך אצל מי שעשאו ויתפרנס ממנו והיה המשחית יורד מיד ונוטל נשמתו או כורתו או נענש עליו כפי עניו עד שיתבטל המשחית ההוא, ואין הקדוש ברוך הוא עושה כן אלא נושא וסובל העון וכמו שהוא זן העולם בלוי זן ומפרנס המשחית הזה עד שיהיה אחד משלישה דברים, או שישוב החוטא בתשובה ויבטלו הסגפיו, או יבטלו שופט צדק ביסורים ומיתה, או ילך בגיהנם ושם יפרע חובו. והינו שאמר קין גדול עוני מנשוא ופרשו חז"ל כל העולם בלוי אתה סובל ירצה זן ומפרנס, ועוני כבד שאין אתה יכול לסובלו פרוש לפרנסו עד שאשוב ואתקן, אם כן הרי זה מדת סבלנות גדולה שזיון ומפרנס בריה רעה שברא החוטא עד שישוב.

ילמד האדם כמה צריך שיהיה סבלן לסבל על חברו ורעותיו שהרי עד שעור בזה שעדין רעתו קיימת, שחטא נגדו והוא יסבל עד יתקן חברו או עד שיתבטל מאליו וכיוצא.

נושא עון

Savlanus (translated as both patience and tolerance) is an extremely important *middah* and the one perhaps most lacking to us in modern times. Think about how slowly things moved 150 years ago, or even 25 years ago for that matter. Remember “snail mail”? In case you don’t, I’ll remind you that it used to take weeks for people to be in touch with each other – not seconds. Today, our blood boils when the car in front of us drives too slowly. We order products that arrive

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at our doorsteps in just a few hours time. We walk into a stuffy room and can hardly bear the few seconds it takes the air conditioner to start working. There are obviously great advantages to these advancements, but from the perspective of *middas hasavlanus*, this is a catastrophe.

Our entire experience of the world is built on the assumption that you can expect whatever you want as soon as you dream about it. But the important things will never work that way. *Shalom bayis, kinyan Torah* (or other *chachmos*), and all real growth cannot be “microwaved.” Inner peace is not an effect of getting whatever you want immediately. In fact, getting what you want instantly is a guaranteed way to **not** achieve inner peace. We are so used to getting whatever we want when we want it that we are left nervous and agitated when that doesn’t happen.

We cognitively know all this, but our general experience creates a powerful counter-reality to this truth. This is one of the reasons we see so many quick divorces, people switching jobs at lightning speed, and fewer *gedolim* being raised in our midst.

In order to work on the *middah* of *savlanus*, we must first work on three preliminary stages: 1) Getting in touch with the *middah* on its own (not in relation to other people); 2) Applying it in dealing with others in situations that are not particularly difficult; 3) Applying it in dealing with others in trying situations.

Stage 1

Before applying the *middah* of *savlanus* to human relationships, we must get in touch with it on its own. Stage 1 includes four *kabbalos*:

Kabbalah I: Spend 3 minutes a day⁵ for 2 weeks thinking about how impatient the world around us has become and how impatient you personally are. You may not express your impatience outwardly; pay attention to your inner feelings. Do you want to scream at the driver in front of you or the *baal tefillah* who isn't saying *Barchu* exactly 15 minutes after *davening* begins? Do you get frustrated when you don't understand a *Gemara* or, *l'havdil*, the directions for a machine after a single attempt? Are you patient with your spouse and children? Do you live with inner peace?

⁵ It is crucial that these 3 minutes are spent in a focused and non-distracted way. Put your phone in flight mode and set an alarm for 3 minutes so you won't check your watch to see if the time is up. Also, be sure to find the right time of day to put these focused pockets of time into your schedule. Right after *davening* may be the perfect time, as you are already in shul and hopefully in a *ruchani* mindset. Another option is to set time aside attached to some other set activity, such as a meal. This applies to all such suggestions in this *kuntres*.

I suggest 3 minutes because that seems to me to be an amount of time that many people can work with. If you can only do 2 minutes, that is also okay, and if you can do 4 or 5, by all means do so.

Don't just notice your own impatience. Look at the world around you and take note that it is a *makkas medinah*. No matter how you personally deal with the challenges of technology, take some time to reflect on how the ever increasing speed and ease of our gadgets train us to adopt the exact opposite of *savlanus*. We won't be able to properly work on this *middah* if we don't understand the challenge we face, and much of that challenge is based on the fact that the world's impatience trains us to follow suit.⁶

Kabbalah II: Spend a week thinking about how important *savlanus* is. Realize that not being patient affects you negatively in many ways:

1. You won't attain some of the significant achievements that are in your grasp, since your impatience will hold you back from staying the course.
2. You experience many negative feelings that are in fact avoidable. Imagine driving and not getting

⁶ This should remind us of the distance we need to put between ourselves and the "ways of the world." When it comes to the obviously pernicious actions and attitudes of the outside world, we all understand this, but there are many non-obvious ways that the outside world influences us that don't seem overtly problematic. We need to constantly reflect on the Torah's perspective while evaluating the outside world to be aware of what does and what does not fit.