YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Before Sinai: Jewish Values and Jewish Law**

**By Rav Dr. Judah Goldberg**

**Shiur #47:**

**Spirituality (2):**

**The Way of God**

This *shiur* continues our exploration of the relationship between spirituality in *berit Avot* (value #4) and the *Avot*’s ethical legacy (value #3).

To recap, in this series we have seen that ethics (value #3) and spirituality (value #4) are related in two ways:

1. They are contingent upon each other. Ritual worship and spirituality are empty if they are not accompanied by moral excellence. This, we suggested in *Shiur* #32, is the dual lesson of *Parashat Vayera*, which begins with Avraham’s generosity towards his guests and concludes with his sacrificial offering (in place of his son Yitzchak) on Mount Moriya.
2. The previous *shiur* demonstrated that through pursuit of *tzedaka u-mishpat*, ethics and spirituality actually merge. As God “loves *tzedaka u-mishpat*” and performs them Himself, human *tzedaka u-mishpat* is a form of imitation and draws one closer to the Divine.

In this *shiur*, we will demonstrate that this second idea, too, is deeply embedded in the narrative of *Parashat Vayera*. Avraham is not only a champion and exemplar of *tzedaka u-mishpat*; he also intuits that they are “the way of God” (*derekh Hashem*) and therefore constitute a religious act.

***Tzedaka U-mishpat*** **and** ***Derekh Hashem***

*Parashat Vayera* opens with a visit to Avraham by God but quickly turns to telling of three desert travelers that catch Avraham’s eye. A cryptic verse follows:

[Avraham] said: “My Master (*A-donai*), if I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass (***ta’avor***) from your servant.” (*Bereishit* 18:3)

The verse is ambiguous about whom Avraham is addressing. The Sages already offer two interpretations (*Shevuot* 35b), as Rashi notes.

One possibility is that Avraham is speaking to one of the travelers, asking them to visit. On the one hand, this fits neatly with the Torah’s continuation: “A bit of water will be fetched, and you can wash your feet… afterwards you will pass (***ta’avoru***) — for you have passed by (***avartem***) your servant” (verse 4-5). On the other hand, this interpretation poses its own textual problems. It doesn’t account for the switch from the singular (*ta’avor*) in verse 3 to the plural (*ta’avoru*) in verse 4. Moreover, it claims that a title usually reserved for God (*A-donai*) is being used in reference to another figure.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Alternatively, *Chazal* suggest that Avraham is indeed addressing God before turning to the travelers in the following verse.[[2]](#footnote-3) In that case, however, how does this brief verse fit into the larger plot about Avraham and his guests? *Shabbat* 127a implicitly addresses this question:

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: Welcoming guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence, as it says, “He said: ‘My Master (*A-donai*), if I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not pass,’” etc.

According to Rav, Avraham is excusing himself from God’s presence in order to welcome guests!

From Rav we might learn that spiritual activities are overridden by ethical demands. One cannot indulgently bask in God’s glory if there are people in need. HaRav Yaakov Medan, however, suggests that we can formulate Rav’s lesson, and thus Avraham’s own insight, differently.

Perhaps Avraham is not preferring the ethical act to spiritual worship; rather, he recognizes that **pursuit of the ethical is itself a spiritual quest,** for imitating God, “Who loves *tzedaka u-mishpat*” (*Tehillim* 33:5), is in fact the greatest way to cleave to Him. Welcoming guests does not override spiritual yearnings; it is itself an essentially spiritual pursuit, and, as such, more powerful than sacrifice or meditation. Avraham understands that sometimes he will find God not by “seeking His face” (see *Tehillim* 27:8) but by deliberately turning away, in order to advance God’s project of *tzedaka u-mishpat*.[[3]](#footnote-4)

Furthermore, HaRav Medan contends that this is exactly what God notices in his subsequent description of Avraham:

It seems that this is the deeper meaning of Avraham’s innovation: “For I have known him…” (*Bereishit* 18:19). Avraham does not only “command his children” in *tzedaka u-mishpat*; he also emphasizes that charity and justice are in fact the “way of God,” and through them one cleaves to God and to His attributes” (*The Word is Very Near — Bereishit* [Heb.; Tel Aviv, 2014], 116-118).[[4]](#footnote-5)

Avraham does not only embrace *tzedaka u-mishpat*. He identifies them as the path of God, and thus the path to God. Welcoming guests trumps receiving the Divine Presence because *chessed* is where God is truly found.[[5]](#footnote-6)

**“Will the Judge of the Whole Earth Not Do Justice?”**

If *tzedaka u-mishpat* are themselves the “way of God,” then we may perhaps better understand Avraham’s subsequent dialogue with God about Sedom. Logically, how is Avraham able to challenge God: “Will the Judge of the whole earth not do justice?” (*Bereishit* 18:25). Shouldn’t the Judge of the whole earth solely determine what justice is?! Is Avraham dictating to God what it means to be just?

However, if Avraham’s sense of justice itself mimics and emanates from the “way of God,” then his argument is more intelligible. Avraham is not accusing God of breaking an external moral rule; rather, he is pointing out an apparent anomaly. As *tzedaka u-mishpat*, in fact, are God’s ways more than his own, Avraham can politely comment when Divine conduct seems to deviate from those principles.

Here, though, we encounter a different paradox: Do the *berit Avot* values of *tzedaka u-mishpat* originate with God, or autonomously with Avraham, as the Sages depict in *Devarim Rabba* (3:9; see *Shiur* #41)?

I think two different formulations are possible:

1. Avraham intuits *tzedaka u-mishpat* as the way of God, just as he intuits God’s transcendence and omnipotence, and embraces them. Thus, their source is Divine, but they are discovered through intuition, rather than through revelation. According to this approach, though, we must argue that not only is God’s existence discoverable, but so are His attributes.
2. Avraham intuits that his own moral impulse towards *tzedaka u-mishpat* is Divine. He recognizes that he is created “in the image of God,” and that his moral sense is the highest expression of this distinction. Avraham does not model himself after God. Rather, he finds a reflection of God inside himself!

R. Samson Raphael Hirsch gives voice to this second approach. The narrative of *Parashat Vayera*, he writes:

is a guarantee of the godliness of the voice within us that appeals for justice. Although we are merely “dust and ashes” (*Bereishit* 18:27) — our basis is dust and our end is dust — not everything in us is dust and ashes. In this body formed of dust and ashes lives a spark of the Creator of the universe, an echo of His spirit. Humanity and justice and all the spiritual and ethical qualities of mankind received their eternal confirmation through this Divine echo in man’s heart.[[6]](#footnote-7)

*Parashat Vayera*, then, contains a story of discovery, parallel to Avraham’s epiphany in his early life. In Ur Kasdim, Avraham looks out upon the universe and discovers its Creator:

Our father, Avraham, would say, “Will you say that this world does not have a Ruler?!”

And God confirms his intuition:

The Holy One, blessed be He, peeked out and said to him, “I am the Master of the universe.” (*Bereishit Rabba* 39:1)

In *Parashat Vayera*, Avraham peers deep inside himself and there, too, finds traces of the Divine. God similarly confirms his discovery and encourages him to grow further and more assertive in his own godliness.

Through His empowerment of Avraham, God also confirms that moral intuition isn’t an accidental feature of human psychology, but a product of careful design. God apparently willed a universe whose moral character would be fundamentally interpretable to humans. This is what makes problems of theodicy rational and legitimate, even if their solutions elude us.

Thus, Dr. Yitzchok Block argues, the Torah gives us a third alternative to the two horns of the “*Euthyphro* dilemma”:

The answer to Plato's question in the *Euthyphro* of whether what God does is good because He does it, or whether He does it because it is good, is that God's world is good because God made it, but He made it in such a way that man is an equal partner with God in maintaining and preserving its goodness. As such, God and humankind must see "eye-to-eye" and agree on the matter.[[7]](#footnote-8)

The enabler for this partnership is our moral intuition, specifically, a universal human inclination towards “the way of God” of *tzedaka u-mishpat*:

To ensure that agreement, God implanted in the human soul the two attributes on which the entire Creation was founded — justice and compassion. Any deviation from these two foundations spells not only the moral disintegration of humanity but the destruction of the world as we know it.[[8]](#footnote-9)

According to Dr. Block, the twin principles of justice and compassion (arguably parallel to *mishpat* and *tzedaka*) are building blocks of the universe God created and inhabited with humans formed in His image. God can no more defy these principles than He can whimsically change the ratio of a circle’s circumference to its diameter or the shortest distance between two points. And just as God granted humanity the capacity to uncover the principles of the physical universe and to use them constructively, so too did He bestow upon us the ability to discern His creation’s moral foundations and to employ them in building and shaping a just society.

At the same time, I think we can distinguish between the universal and particularistic aspects of *tzedaka u-mishpat*. Avraham’s moral sense is not unique, as it is embedded in all of humanity. What is unique, however, is his recognition of it as “the way of God,” and God’s reciprocal recognition of Avraham and formation of a covenant with him around these ideals. All of humanity can and should tap into its innate moral compass, but only Avraham and “his children and household after him” have been elected for partnership with God. More than a privilege, this partnership is a responsibility — not merely to abide by moral rules, but to make *tzedaka u-mishpat* our task for the world.

**Partnering with God**

To welcome guests, Avraham turns away from God, but, paradoxically, in doing so, joins Him in His mission. Avraham is a partner of God and thus himself becomes godly — according to the Midrash, earning the same “uniform,” so to speak. God (*Daniel* 7:9) and Avraham (*Bereishit* 24:1) are both described as appearing aged, and the Midrash explains why:

“And afterwards Avraham buried [Sara]” (*Bereishit* 23:19) — this is what it says, “One who runs after ***tzedaka*** and ***chessed*** will find life, ***tzedaka***, and honor” (*Mishlei* 21:21).

“One who runs after ***tzedaka***” — this is Avraham, as it says, “and they will keep the way of God to ***perform tzedaka***” (*Bereishit* 18:19);

“And ***chessed***” – that he extended kindness to Sarah;

“Will find life” – “And Avraham lived for 175 years” (*Bereishit* 25:7);

“***Tzedaka*** and honor” – R. Shmuel bar Yitzchak said: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: **“My trade is extending *chessed*. You took hold of My trade; come wear My uniform”** — “And Avraham was aged, along in years” (*Bereishit* 24:1). (*Bereishit Rabba* 58:9)[[9]](#footnote-10)

This partnership finds expression in another daring interpretation:

R. Yochanan said: What does it mean, “A lender of God, one who shows favor to the needy” (*Mishlei* 19:17)? If the verse were not written, it could not be said! It is as if “the borrower is subjugated to the one who lends” (*Mishlei* 22:7). (*Bava Batra* 10a)

R. Yochanan imagines a charitable person as extending credit to God and thus indebting Him. Inasmuch as God “gives bread to all creatures” (*Tehillim* 136:25), one who feeds the needy is paying His bills, so to speak.

*Midrash Zuta* puts it this way:

Those who give *tzedaka* are called patrons of the Holy One, blessed be He, as it says, “You are beautiful, My beloved” — in the giving of *tzedaka*; “you are beautiful” — in *gemilut chassadim*; and “My beloved” indicates patrons. **When you support the poor, I consider it as if you are supporting Me.** (*Shir Ha-Shirim* 1:15)[[10]](#footnote-11)

Charity creates a three-way dynamic between the giver, the recipient, and God; God, as it were, is as much a beneficiary as the pauper. Through charity, then, humans enter a joint venture with God, as they join Him in providing for all of creation.

Returning to the litany of rabbinic statements from the previous *shiur*, perhaps now we can also sharpen our understanding of why *tzedaka u-mishpat*, as spiritual pursuits, are not merely equivalent to ritual worship but even more potent. One who offers a prayer or sacrifice, with the purest of intentions and utmost devotion, is still approaching God as a subject. The offering can help bridge the chasm between the Holy One and mere flesh-and-blood, but it cannot overcome this hierarchical relationship. Through *tzedaka u-mishpat*, however, not directed towards God but performed alongside Him, humans are able to join God on His playing field, so to speak. Furthermore, partnership inevitably creates interdependence, so that “the borrower is subjugated to the one who lends”!

Finally, engagement in *tzedaka u-mishpat* is not just emulating God or even partnering with Him, but also sanctifies Him by reflecting His ways in the terrestrial world. Thus, the Midrash reinterprets one of the verses we examined in the previous *shiur*:

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: My children, by your lives, in the merit of your protection of justice, I am elevated. From where? As it says, “God, the Lord of Hosts is exalted through ***mishpat***.” And through that which you elevate Me through justice, I **perform** ***tzedaka*** and rest My Sanctity in your midst. From where? As it says, “And the Holy God is sanctified through ***tzedaka***” (*Yeshayahu* 5:16). (*Devarim Rabba* 5:6)

The Midrash closes by recalling the majesty and power of *tzedaka u-mishpat* together:

And if you observe both of them — ***tzedaka*** and justice — immediately I will redeem you completely. From where? As it says, “Protect ***mishpat*** and **perform *tzedaka***, for My salvation will arrive imminently, and My generosity will be revealed” (*Yeshayahu* 56:1). (*Devarim Rabba* 5:6)

As we have seen, through *tzedaka u-mishpat*, the Jewish people returns to its roots and its purpose and thereby achieves salvation. However, in this context, perhaps the Midrash is drawing a different point out of the verse: Through *tzedaka u-mishpat*, the Jewish people reveal God’s glory in the world. They do not earn redemption; rather, they bring it upon creation.

**The Way of God After Avraham**

Beyond *Parashat Vayera*, the concept of the “way of God” (*derekh Hashem*) recurs frequently in *Tanakh*. While its meaning varies in different contexts, in at least some instances it is understood as relating to God’s ethical attributes and our duty to emulate them.[[11]](#footnote-12) Occasionally, the Sages (or later commentaries) connect a verse directly back to *Bereishit* 18:19. For example:

When the Jewish people perform justice, the Holy One, Blessed be He, strikes down their adversaries in front of them, as it says, “If only My nation would listen to Me, [the Jewish people would go in **My ways** (***bi-drakhai***);] I would swiftly subdue their enemies, etc.” (*Tehillim* 81:14-15).

And what are **the ways** of the Holy One, Blessed be He? ***Tzedek u-mishpat***, as it says, “And they will keep **the way of God to perform *tzedaka u-mishpat***” (*Bereishit* 18:19). (*Midrash Tanchuma*, *Shofetim*, 15)

Not only do the “ways of God” appear throughout Tanakh, but they are also incorporated into the law and thus into *Torah she-be’al peh*. Repeatedly in *Sefer Devarim*[[12]](#footnote-13) and echoed elsewhere,[[13]](#footnote-14) God commands us “to walk in His ways,” which serves as the basis for the positive commandment of *imitatio Dei* (imitating God). The way of God is not an abstract idea trapped in *Parashat Vayera*, but a concrete concept that imposes perpetual obligations upon every Jew.

Here, however, we reach a familiar challenge. If *tzedaka u-mishpat* are indeed part of *derekh Hashem*, and *berit Sinai* codifies a commandment to follow in God’s ways, then what does *berit Avot* add here? Doesn’t proper observance of *berit Sinai* include imitation of *tzedaka u-mishpat*?

I believe that the answer lies in paying close attention to the Sages’ commentaries on the Sinaitic commandment to walk in God’s ways. The ways of God that they focus upon are not those that Avraham disseminates, but those that God teaches Moshe at Mount Sinai!

In the aftermath of the Golden Calf in *Parashat Ki Tissa*, Moshe requests of God:

Make known to me, please, **Your ways** (***derakhekha***). (*Shemot* 33:13)

God responds by revealing to Moshe His celebrated Attributes of Mercy:

God, God, Powerful, Merciful (***Rachum***) and Favoring (***ve-Chanun***), Slow to Anger and Abundant in ***Chessed*** and Truth. (*Shemot* 34:6)

These are the “ways of God” that the Sages primarily incorporate into their formulation of the Sinaitic commandment to follow after Him. For example:

“To walk in all **His ways**” — these are the **ways of God**: “God, Powerful, ***Rachum******ve-Chanun***” (*Shemot* 34:6); and it says, “And it will be, all who call in the name of God will escape” (*Yoel* 3:5) — can a person really be called by God’s name? Rather, God is called ***Rachum ve-Chanun***, so should you be ***rachum ve-chanun***, etc. (*Sifrei* on *Devarim* 11:22)

Similarly:

Abba Shaul says: “*Ve-anveihu*” (*Shemot* 15:2) — be like Him. Just as He is ***Chanun ve-Rachum***, so should you be ***chanun ve-rachum***. (*Shabbat* 133b)[[14]](#footnote-15)

Though both *Parashat Vayera* and *Parashat Ki Tissa* speak of the ways of God, it seems to me that there are subtle differences between those ways, both in their content and in our relation to them.[[15]](#footnote-16) As the *berit Sinai* obligation to “walk” in God’s ways echoes, first and foremost, His revelation to Moshe at Sinai,[[16]](#footnote-17) it does not replace Avraham’s command to his children to “protect” the way of God of *Parashat Vayera*.

**On the *Derekh*: Avraham and Moshe**

In *Parashat Ki Tissa*, Moshe seeks knowledge (“*hodi’eini*”) of God’s ways. God reveals them and subsequently commands us to walk in them, as well as to follow after Him. With regard to Avraham, the verb “*y-d-a*” also appears, but in the inverse: God recognizes Avraham (“*yedativ*”) for **his** ways of *tzedaka u-mishpat*! Avraham intuits that these traits are Divine, but not through a process of revelation.

Avraham does not follow God; to the contrary, he runs out ahead to advance these Divine traits of *tzedaka u-mishpat*, and God “knows” him for it. The Midrash notices this difference in language:

Three qualities are said regarding the righteous: “[Walking] with God,” (*Bereishit* 5:24), “The God Whom my forefathers walked before” (*Bereishit* 48:15), [and] “**After Hashem, your God, shall you walk**” (*Devarim* 13:5).

A parable to one who had three sons: The biggest goes out in front of him; therefore, regarding the *Avot*, it says, “Whom my forefathers walked before,” for they were great in *mitzvot*. The middle one follows after him; therefore, regarding the Jewish people, it says, “After Hashem, your God, shall you walk,” after His humility, after His patience, after His piety. The smallest walks alongside his father so that he does not get lost; therefore, regarding the early generations, it says “with God”: “Chanokh walked with God” (*Bereishit* 5:24); “With God Noach walked” (*Bereishit* 6:9). (*Lekach* *Tov*, *Bereishit* 5:24)

The Midrash contrasts our forefathers, whom God emboldens to go ahead — “Go out before me” (*Bereishit* 17:1) — with the Jewish people, who are commanded to follow. While the parable suggests that the difference is one of spiritual level, I would suggest that we can reframe it as a difference in orientation. *Berit Sinai* is fundamentally about obedience and submission, about following. *Berit Avot*, on the other hand, empowers Avraham to take initiative, to explore and follow one’s intuition, and to run ahead on the “*derekh Hashem*.”

Thus, *berit Avot* and *berit Sinai* both demand commitment to the way of God, but in different fashions. *Berit Sinai* calls upon us to imitate God, but *berit Avot* asks us to take up His mission. *Berit Sinai* commands us to be loyal followers; *berit Avot* asks us, like Avraham, to join God as partners.

Furthermore, a consistent but subtle difference in language distinguishes Avraham’s legacy from that of Moshe’s. The language of *berit Avot* is *tzedaka u-mishpat*. The language of God’s revelation to Moshe is one of *chanina* and *rachamim.*[[17]](#footnote-18) Mercy is a trait that God reveals about Himself and that we must similarly embody. *Tzedaka u-mishpat*, on the other hand, are values that Avraham adopts as his mission while also recognizing their Divine source.

Practically, *berit Avot* and *berit Sinai* may impose different responsibilities regarding God’s ways, as we suggested in *Shiur* #42: *Berit Sinai* (at least as described in *Mishneh Torah*[[18]](#footnote-19)) mainly asks us to fashion our moral personalities after God and embrace His traits. *Berit Avot*, on the other hand, sets an ambitious agenda for the broad pursuit of *tzedaka u-mishpat*.

On the flipside, they do not seem to be equally empowering. Through *tzedaka*, the Jewish people partner with God; conversely, Avraham is invited into dialogue about *mishpat* and is able to challenge, “Will the Judge of the whole earth not do justice?” I do not know if similar statements appear regarding the trait of *rachamim*.[[19]](#footnote-20)

Of course, we are the children of Avraham and the students of Moshe simultaneously as we pursue “all” the ways of God. In some respects, we follow cautiously and dutifully; in others, we set forth with boldness and ambition. Admittedly, I am at a loss to fully delineate all the distinctions — between following and leading, between becoming and pursuing, between *rachamim* and *tzedaka*. But I do know that these two different orientations are both crucial to our tradition and, ultimately, complementary. Thus, *Sefer Tehillim* juxtaposes these two ideas, thereby, I would suggest, integrating them:

God **performs** ***tzedakot*** and ***mishpatim*** for all the aggrieved. **He made known (*yodia*) his ways (*derakhav*)** to Moshe, his deeds to the Jewish people: ***Rachum ve-Chanun*** is God, slow to anger, and abundant in kindness (***chessed***). (103:6-8)[[20]](#footnote-21)

Our mandate is to combine the teachings of our father, Avraham, with those of our teacher, Moshe, and to join God on His path, in its multitude of meanings. Pursued with dedication and earnestness, this “*derekh*” will bring blessing upon us and upon all of creation. As the Rambam closes his discussion of *imitatio Dei*:

One who goes in this ***derekh*** brings goodness and blessing to oneself, as it says, “So that God may bring upon Avraham that which He has spoken of him” (*Bereishit* 18:19). (*Hilkhot De’ot* 1:7)

**For Further Thought:**

In this *shiur*, we highlighted the idea that *tzedaka* is as much a donation towards God as it is towards the needy. For more on the theological and legal implications of this notion, see, for example, the exchange between R. Akiva and Tineius Rufus in *Bava Batra* 10a; Rambam, *Hilkhot Mattenot Aniyyim* 8:1-4 regarding vows towards *tzedaka*; and Rambam, *Hilkhot Issurei Mizbei’ach* 7:11, and *Shulchan Arukh*, *YD* 248:8.

In this *shiur*, we distinguished between performance of *tzedaka u-mishpat*, which is the way of God that Avraham commands his children to keep, and *chessed* and *rachamim*, which are God’s ways that He reveals to Moshe and commands the Jewish people to follow. However, in *Shiur* #41, we contended, following statements by *Chazal*, that *chessed* and *rachamim* are “jewels” that God adds to the “crown” of *berit Avot*; they are not merely positive traits that we are commanded from Sinai to demonstrate, but become defining qualities of the descendants of Avraham. Can these two analyses be reconciled?

While Avraham argues with God about the fate of Sedom, he is curiously silent about the command to offer his son Yitzchak as a sacrifice. Could our distinction between *tzedaka u-mishpat*, on the one hand, and *rachamim*, on the other, help explain this? That is, while Sedom is subjected to Divine judgment, the *Akeida* is not a verdict but an inscrutable Divine decree. Could it be that Avraham has permission to challenge the former but not the latter?

We distinguished in this *shiur* between the language of *tzedaka u-mishpat*, on the one hand, and that of *chanina* and *rachamim*, on the other. How does “*chessed*” (with or without “*emet*”) fit in?

In the passage with which this *shiur* closes, the Rambam intermixes “the way of God” of Avraham with the commandment to imitate God. Read the full passage carefully. Does this undermine the argument presented here?

**Questions or Comments?**

Please email me directly with your feedback at [judahlgoldberg@gmail.com](mailto:judahlgoldberg@gmail.com)!

1. Regarding these difficulties, see Rashi (following *Bereishit Rabba* 48:9), Rashbam, Radak, Ramban and Chizkuni ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. The Rambam rules in accordance with this view, with the consequence that the title has sanctity and may not be erased (*Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah* 6:9). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Also see *Yeshayahu* 51:1-2. *Mori ve-rabbi* HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein once observed that “pursuers of *tzedek*” and “seekers of God” there are one and the same; in this fusion, they turn their eyes towards Avraham and Sara, from whom they have been hewn. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Also see <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/way-god-and-way-righteousness-and-justice>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Also see *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*, Positive Commandments, #162: “Great is ***tzedaka***, for it is called ‘**the way of God**,’ as it says, ‘For I have known him that he will command his children and household after him, that they may keep **the way of God to perform** ***tzedaka***.’” Also see *Ha-Ketav Ve-hakabbala* on *Bereishit* 18:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. *The Hirsch Chumash* (trans. R. Daniel Haberman; Jerusalem, 2002), *Bereishit* 18:28-33. Also see R. Walter S. Wurzburger, “Samson Raphael Hirsch’s Doctrine of Inner Revelation,” in *Covenantal Imperatives: Essays by Walter S. Wurzburger on Jewish Law, Thought, and Community* (Jerusalem: 2008),123-132, as well as his discussion of conscience in *Ethics of Responsibility: Pluralistic Approaches to Covenantal Ethics* (Philadelphia: 1994), 28-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. On *Euthyphro* and Avraham, also see *mori ve-rabbi* HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein, “*Halakha Ve-halakhim Ke-oshiyut Mussar: Hirhurim Machshavtiyyim Ve-chinukhiyyim*,” *Mussar Aviv*, 37-40, as well as “Does Judaism Recognize an Ethic Independent of Halakhah?” *Leaves of Faith: The World of Jewish Living*, 33-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. “G-d and Morality,” *B’Or Ha’Torah*, Vol. 12 (2006), 136, available [here](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/36423/jewish/What-is-Morality.htm). Also see R. Anthony Knopf, “Moral Intuition and Jewish Ethics,” *Ḥakirah*, Vol. 23 (Fall 2017), 208-209, available [here](http://www.hakirah.org/Vol23Knopf.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Compare to *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Noach* (Buber ed.), 4, regarding Noach. Also compare to the following *midrash* regarding *mishpat*:

   When there is justice on earth, the Holy One, blessed be He, says: What is there for me to do? That is My trade, as it says, “For the Lord of Justice is God” (*Yeshayahu* 30:18)!

   [Similarly], it says “If you go in My ordinances and you keep My commandments” (*Vayikra* 26:3) — if you take My trade, I will seek a different trade, as it says, “I will give you rain at its time” (verse 4). (*Midrash Tehillim* 72:3) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. However, the Midrash continues with a parallel interpretation about offering sacrifices. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. See *Devarim* 32:4; *II Shmuel* 22:22 and Abarbanel; 22:31 and Rabbeinu Bechaye on *Devarim* 32:4; *Tehillim* 18:22 and Malbim; *Yeshayahu* 2:3-4; 40:14 and Rashi; 42:24 (see *Ye’arot Devash*, Sermon #10); *Yechezkel* 18:25, 29 and 33:17, 20; *Hoshea* 14:10 and Radak; *Mikha* 4:2-3; *Malakhi* 2:9 and Alshikh (also see Radak on verse 6 there); *Tehillim* 5:9; 25:9 and Alshikh and *Metzudat David*; 86:11 and Malbim (also see verse 15 there); 138:5 and *Metzudat David*; 145:17; and *Mishlei* 2:8-9. See also R. Ovadya Seforno on *Vayikra* 19:9-10. Regarding “*derekh*,” also see *Shemot* 18:20 and Maharsha on *Bava Metzia* 30b**;** *Tehillim*50:23 and the Rambam’s introduction to his *Commentary on* *Avot*, Chapter 4; and 119:1 and Radak. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. See 5:30 and Malbim, Netziv and *Meshekh Chokhma*; 8:6; 10:12 and *Ha-Ketav Ve-hakabbala*; 11:22 and R. Ovadya Seforno; 19:9; 26:17 and Ramban and *Or Ha-chayim*; 28:9 and Rambam, *Hilkhot De’ot* 1:5; and 30:16 and *Midrash Lekach Tov* and Netziv. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. See *Yehoshua* 22:5; *I Melakhim* 2:3 and Radak (as well as Ramban on *Devarim* 11:1); 8:58 and Alshikh; *Zecharya* 3:7 and Malbim; and *II Divrei Ha-yamim* 6:31. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Also see *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Vayishlach*, 10, which explains walking in God’s ways by citing *Tehillim* 25; commentaries there note the parallels between verses 4-10 and *Shemot* 33:13-20, 34:6-7. See *Midrash Tehillim*, Radak, and Malbim, as well as *Da’at Mikra*’s summary of the psalm. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Contrast with the analysis by Prof. Samuel J. Levine [here](https://digitalcommons.tourolaw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1278&context=scholarlyworks). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. The *Sifrei* adds additional descriptors of God that we should emulate, as does the Rambam (*Sefer Ha-Mitzvot*, Positive Commandment #8 and *Hilkhot De’ot* 1:6). Still, those of *Parashat Ki Tissa* seem to be first among equals. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. However, see *Tanna De-vei Eliyahu Zuta* 6, which blurs this distinction. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. See note #5 there. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. In *Parashat Ki Tissa*, Moshe does challenge God and, in that respect, is following in Avraham’s path (also see *Shiur* #31, note #8). However, he does so as a protagonist for the Jewish people (value #1 of *berit Avot*) and not of *tzedaka u-mishpat* (value #3), which, in this case, would rule against them! [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Also see *Shemot Rabba* 2:1. The language of *chanina* and *rachamim* also appears in *Shemot* 22:26; 33:19; *Devarim* 4:31; *Tehillim* 78:38, 111:4, and 116:5; *Nechemya* 9:31; and *II Divrei Ha-yamim* 30:9; as well as in the sources in “For Further Thought” #3, below.

    Also see *Midrash Zuta*, *Shir Ha-Shirim* 1:15:

    “My beloved” – since you go in **My way**, you are My adorer and My friend. Just as God — "***Rachum ve-Chanun*** is God, slow to anger, and abundant in kindness (***chessed***)” (*Tehillim* 103:8), slows His anger with all creatures, extends ***chessed*** and gives ***tzedaka*** to all the world’s inhabitants… you should be like the Holy One, blessed be He, that you should give ***tzedaka*** and extend ***chessed***. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)