

The Handbook On Good Medos

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Chapter 1 With a little effort you will be great!

The Vilna Gaon in “Even Sheleimah” teaches us that trust in G-d and being satisfied with what we have, is the basis of all good medos. He further says that the most important of all medos is trust. One who lacks this feeling will not retain the Torah he has learned.

How do we trust in G-d, which will give us confidence in ourselves? ¹It says in tehillim, “Hope to Hashem, strengthen and make your heart extra strong, and hope to Hashem.” Why does it say hope to Hashem twice? As the Brisker Rav explained, “The reward for trust in Hashem is that Hashem will strengthen a person’s heart and He will make him more trusting in Hashem.” This is good for us so that we should not feel afraid when we have problems and difficult times! When you trust in G-d you know that G-d is running the world in the best way possible for us; what we think is bad, which is really good, and what we know is good! What ever G-d gives us, we should be happy with. As the Rabbis of blessed memory teach us, “Happiness is being satisfied with what you have!” Why should you be jealous of your friend for having something you do not? G-d wanted your friend to have it! G-d can do anything any time! Be happy for the gifts that G-d gave your friend. It is exactly what your friend needs; otherwise G-d would not have given it to him! Jealousy can take a person out of this world, because it blinds a person from seeing the truth and knowing that G-d is running the world. You are allowed to be jealous of your friend if he is a greater scholar than you, or has served Hashem in a way that you desire to. But only if you use that jealousy so that you will achieve greatness by pushing yourself to learn much more and serve G-d better! While it is okay to be happy with whatever G-d gives you, we should never be satisfied with the amount of Torah that we have learned, or doing mitzvahs and chessed! The beginning may be difficult, but in the end your efforts will be sweeter than honey!

It is important to know that there are five steps that take a person away from G-d.

1. Lacking trust in G-d.

¹ Much thanks to Rabbi Aaron Perlow for supplying the information from the Brisker Rav and for disagreeing with me on my original thought. Also thanks to Rabbi Aaron Kaplinsky for disagreeing with me on my original thought. If a person wants to know the truth, Hashem will guide him!

How may we have confidence in our own abilities, if we do not trust that G-d will take care of our needs? I can learn that Rashi, I can complete that tractate in Gemora, because I know that G-d will help me!

It is important to set yourself goals that you can do. It is good to have a hero that you would like to be like. It is wrong to say, "I want to be like my hero!" You should say, "I can be greater than my hero!" Trying to be greater will make you push yourself a little bit harder and help you accomplish your goal! Don't ever let your evil inclination convince you that you cannot succeed!

2. Not fearing G-d.

Is G-d really running the world? Of course G-d is, but the evil inclination will try and make us believe that we can sin and that no one is watching. The ten plagues and the Torah given personally to us on Mount Sinai prove that G-d is running the world and that He cares about what happens to us!

3. Forgetting that there is a G-d.

Once a person stops fearing G-d, they naturally will stop believing in G-d and then they will not care about sinning at all. Was there any nation in the world that G-d took out of bondage and made a nation to G-d alone?

4. Thinking that we are god.

A person with gaava will say that the money he earned and the Torah that he learned was from his own efforts! When a person has gaava, G-d punishes him by not giving him Torah knowledge. It is important for us to stay away from this bad meda!

5. Thinking that we are a righteous god.

Not only does a person think that everything they do was by their hands alone, but what they did is also correct. People who make excuses to make themselves feel good when they did something wrong are pretending to be righteous when they are not! This is dangerous as many Torah laws may be broken, for example such as eating non-kosher food, G-d forbid!

Isn't it amazing that a person who lacks good gaava may end up with bad gaava! Good gaava was created just so that a person may reach for the stars and become great!

What mitzvah did Hashem give us so to remind us not to follow these five steps?

The mitzvah of tephillin!

1. The straps that go around our arm remind us that we should trust that G-d will take care of us as it says in Devorim, chapter 7 sentences 17 through 19, "When you shall say in your heart: These nations (are) more than I; how can I dispossess them?" 18, "you shall not be afraid of them; you shall remember what the L-rd your G-d did to Pharaoh, and to all Egypt:" And in 19, "the great trials which your eyes saw, and the signs and wonders, and the mighty hand, and the outstretched arm, (whereby) the L-rd your G-d brought you out; so shall the L-rd do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid."

2. The two straps that hang down from our head remind us to fear G-d as it says in Devorim, chapter 8, sentences 5 and 6, "And if you will know in your heart, that as a man rebukes his son, (so) the L-rd rebukes you." 6, "And you shall keep the commandments of G-d of Mercy, your G-d, to walk in His ways and to fear Him." The left strap reminds us to fear our father, who will punish us with love if we do not listen to him, so too the right strap reminds us to fear G-d or He will punish us with love.

3. The tephillin of the head reminds us not to forget G-d as it says in Devorim, Chapter 8, sentence 14, "And your heart will be lifted up, and you forget G-d of Mercy, your G-d, who took you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery." The main purpose of the head tephillin is to remember that G-d took us out from the house of bondage in Egypt!

4. The tephillin of the arm reminds us that we are not god as it says in Devorim, Chapter 8 sentences 17 and 18, "And you say in your heart: My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth." And in 18, "But you shall remember the L-rd your G-d, for it is He that gives you power to get wealth; that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day." The tephillin of the arm goes right on the strength of the muscle of the arm!

5. The knot behind our head where our neck turns reminds us that we are not a righteous god as it says in Devorim, Chapter 9 sentences 4 through 6, "Speak not in your heart, after that the G-d of Mercy, your G-d has thrust them out from before you saying: For my righteousness the L-rd has brought me in to possess this land; whereas for the wickedness of these nations the L-rd does drive them out before you." And in 5, "Not for your righteousness, or for the uprightness of your heart do you go in to possess their land; but for the wickedness of these nations the L-rd your G-d does drive them out from before you, and that He may establish the word which the L-rd swore unto your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob," And finally in 6, "Know therefore that not for your righteousness that the L-rd your G-d gives you this good land to possess it; for you are a stiff necked people." The knot of the head tephillin is placed where the head turns.

What is the connection of tephillin to these five steps? It says concerning tephillin in Devorim Chapter 9, sentence 18, "Therefore shall you lay up these words in your heart and in your soul; and you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be frontlets between your eyes." If you noticed these other sentences that were mentioned all had to do with your heart, just like tephillin, as we know that when we put on tephillin we are supposed to circumcise our heart!

What do women do to prevent themselves from leaving the path of G-d, as they do not have the commandment to wear tephillin?

Women do not need to wear tephillin as they are spiritually compared to tephillin! We should listen to our mothers who give us good advice to keep us close to G-d!

Another important meda to have is patience. As Jacob, our father, rebuked his son Reuvain, "You are impatient as water!" Our Rabbis of blessed memory have taught us that if one has patience, they will be able to control all of their bad medos!

Unfortunately we live in a world where everything has to be done as quickly as possible. This is bad for Jews, as they will run away from the service of Hashem by praying too fast and not taking the proper time to study our precious gift, the Torah! We also may push and shove our friends to be at the head of the line. There are many things in this golus that affect us in a bad way. We have to watch out for the bad things that the non-Jews do and be careful not to be like them! In order to protect ourselves from doing bad, it is good to think over what we are going to do, before we do it. Ask yourself what will happen if I do this? Will I be punished? Will G-d be disappointed in what I did? Another way is to always dress like Yidden as the Hebrew slaves did when they were in Egypt. Yidden are special and it is an honor to dress like one! When we go to school it is important to show the non-Jews that we are proud to be G-d's holy nation. We should always make sure that our clothes are properly buttoned and clean. We don't want the non-Jews to say, "What kind of people are these Jews that dress sloppily!" Just by dressing nicely could be a Kiddush Hashem and especially the way we act in public as well! There is a great side benefit to dressing properly, especially when we learn Torah. G-d will see that we respect Him and that our learning is important to us and He will help us learn! It will also make us feel and look important, which will affect the way we think and act. Do you wear sneakers or nice shoes when you learn Torah? Did you know that the non-Jews judge all of us by what any of us do?

Chapter 2

Why does Hashem want us to learn Torah?

Which way do you think is better to learn Torah, for the sake of learning or to learn Torah for the sake of doing?

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, the Vilna Gaon's greatest student, asked the Gaon if he should say "amen" to the end of the final blessing in benching, the long blessing. When the Vilna Gaon told him he could, the Rabbi was overjoyed that he could serve G-d with another amen! This is serving G-d with love!

It is important to know that G-d gave us the Torah so that we should know how to do what G-d wants us to. Even though learning is very important, as you have to learn in order to know how to do properly, doing is much more important! This shows G-d that we really care about the Torah that He gave us! "We will do, then we will hear!" It is certainly good if you enjoy what you learn.

When a golden opportunity comes your way to do a mitzvah, such as picking up an object that someone might trip on and get hurt, you should say to yourself, "This is what Hashem commanded me to do! How lucky I am that I am doing what I learned!" Hashem gives us many golden opportunities to do good, but we must open up our eyes and grab them when they come to us! Why are these called golden opportunities? We cannot imagine the tremendous reward that is waiting for us in the next world for doing what G-d wants!

What golden opportunities can you think of?

One of the best golden opportunities to do is a chessed for someone. It is proper when doing any mitzvah to try and do it to the best of your ability. For example, Shimon asks Reuvain to help him hand out the assignment sheets in their classroom. It would be proper for Reuvain, if he accepts, to hand out the sheets to as many students as possible, without thinking, "Did Shimon hand out as many sheets as me?" Did you know that the Vilna Gaon's mother got more of a reward for collecting charity than her friend? When they were together collecting, the Vilna Gaon's mother pointed to a person that they should ask for money! Just for pointing she received a tremendous reward. Every little action we do is seen and recorded in Heaven!

You should not think that by doing chessed you are taking away from your learning and you will lose out! Hashem will reward you by opening up your mind and giving you much Torah knowledge just for doing the chessed! Of course if you have a set time to learn, your learning with few exceptions should come first!

It is a good idea to keep track of the good deeds that you do in a journal. You will be surprised how quickly you fill up all of the pages. Whenever you feel sad, just looking at these pages will remind you of how much you have accomplished! You will even think of new ways of doing chessed.

Chapter 3

How to get close to G-d!

How do you know if you are doing something right or wrong?

Many times we act without thinking. What we don't think about is, will I be punished in the next world if I do something that is bad? Perhaps if we were able to see the seven chambers of gehinom, each one worse than the next with a special angel in charge, and the terrible suffering that the souls get in order to be cleansed from their sins; we would think twice before doing anything bad! Really we know most of the time when we are doing something wrong! So too it is important to think about the great reward waiting for us when we do good! Every day you should take a little time and think about what will happen to you after 120 years!

Is talking during a test or when your teacher is trying to give a lesson, good or bad?

If you have finished early and you are bored it seems that it may be good. But did you know that by doing so you are disturbing other students. You may have even stopped these students from passing the test. The Torah would consider this stealing! It is also stealing if by your talking with your classmates they do not learn as well, which may cause them to get a lower grade on their report card!

When your teacher asks you why you did something wrong and you make up an excuse, or not tell the truth, is this good or bad?

It may seem to be good that you think the teacher does not know what you did and by not telling the truth you are avoiding punishment. Always being honest will gain you a reputation that is more valuable than gold! Wouldn't it be nice to know that everyone praises you when they see you? Hashem will greatly reward you in this world and the next as well!

Sometimes it is difficult to know when something is good or bad. That is why we have to ask someone much smarter than us what the right thing to do is. If you do not know, it is always best to ask an expert than to guess.

The Torah teaches us how property, food, clothing, and religious items become ours. What do we have to do so that the spiritual world will become a part of us?

²The answer is to give honor! What does this mean? When we give honor to people, mitzvahs and religious items we will gain fear of G-d, which will bring us closer to G-d. Certainly we will then be careful about the feelings of others! How do you do this? Here are some suggestions.

Although these ideas may seem simple, if you choose to do them, the way you think and act will change. It is important to know, that although there are different opinions concerning some of the following suggestions, by listening to my advice, you will gain fear of G-d. By listening to the other opinions, although they are correct and will not hurt you, you will not gain any fear of G-d!

1. There is a proper way to carry seforim and the correct order is from the top to the bottom: Chumash, Tehillim, Sidder, Mishnayos, and Gemora.
2. Never lay a sefer flat on a chair where we sit. Lean it against the back of the chair. Pick up those seforim that are laying flat on chairs.
3. Do not lean on seforim when you pray or learn.
4. Put away your seforim in their proper place when you are finished learning. Did you know that the Steipler Rav, of blessed memory, considers it stealing if you do not put away your seforim where they belong?
5. If a sefer should, G-d forbid, fall on the floor, pick it up and kiss it.
6. When you leave a schul or the bais medrash, walk out backwards and bow to the Aron.
7. Never talk when the Torah is being read or when people are praying. This is a very big sin!
8. Touch and kiss every mezuzah that you pass.
9. Understand and say your prayers slowly and with feeling. Did you know that by saying the Shema slowly, that we cool the fires of gehinom, if G-d forbid, we should have to go there after 120 years!
10. Do not let your titz titz strings or your tephillin straps touch the floor.
11. When saying the Shema and you come to the word, techeiles, (the blue string), take a few seconds to feel bad that you do not have this mitzvah. This is the most important of the entire list as you will not only come to feel bad for the loss of our temple, but will also realize the importance of all mitzvahs!
12. Make a list of ways that you can serve G-d better!

One of the best ways to learn to fear G-d is to learn to fear man as ³Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakay told his talmidum on his deathbed, "You should fear G-d as

² Rabbi Nosson Wachtfogel said this in the name of Rabbi Yeruchim Levovitz.

³ Much thanks to Rabbi Yaakov Forchheimer for supplying this information.

you fear man!" What he meant by this is when you know someone is watching you, you are more afraid to do a sin!

Did you know that in the end of days before the Messiah comes, may he come soon, that there is a prophecy in the Torah that the children will be chutzpadick to the adults! It is very sad that this prophecy has unfortunately come true and we must do everything we can in order to respect adults. It is understood that you want to feel like an equal to an adult. Did you consider that everything that has happened to you, adults have gone through and much, much more. Hashem has tested adults in many ways that you have not been tested and adults have many responsibilities, such as paying bills and making sure that you are clothed properly, well fed, healthy, and are taught in the proper ways of Hashem. It is a big mitzvah in the Torah to honor your mother and father! This mitzvah was also given to us to teach us the proper way to honor Hashem! Your father and mother would never want you to make fun of or be chutzpah to an adult, G-d forbid, or to call an adult by his or her first name. Always say, Rabbi, or Rebbetzin, or Mr. or Mrs. or Ms. When an adult talks to you, you should always answer back politely and it is good to remember to use these words, please, thank you and your welcome! Never interrupt an adult when they are talking, unless it is an emergency. There are many people that when they see a tzadick or an old man entering the room they barely stand up. This is wrong. You should make every effort to stand up all the way, unless you are learning Torah and are afraid that you will lose your place. Did you remember that the Vilna Gaon's mother got a much bigger reward just for pointing to the poor person? While everyone else will get a small reward in Gan Eden for not standing up fully, you will be wealthy beyond your wildest imagination!

It is a good idea to closely watch tzadickim when you see them. There is much you can learn, such as how to properly say a brocha, and act towards other people with the right respect. Sometimes it is hard to be near tzadickim, so the next best thing to do is to read as much as possible about them.

A big mistake some people make when they learn Gemora is to think that these Rabbis are just like you and me. The more you learn Gemora and the more you learn the depth of the wisdom contained inside, you will realize that this is very wrong! Hashem will reward you with great wisdom if you treat these Holy men with the proper awe and respect! Did you know that everyone listed in the Gemora had the power to kill by saying a few words or to bring back someone to life? Hashem only gives knowledge like this to someone who is a completely righteous and fears G-d! We should only be on such a high level of spirituality! If you do not understand why any of these great tzadickim did something, you should pray to Hashem to open your eyes to the truth and have complete trust that someday your prayers will be answered. Who knows, maybe one day,

because of your great respect for these tzadickim, one of these very Rabbis will come to you in a dream and answer a question on the Gemora that was bothering you! This is one of the many rewards for following in Hashem's ways!

There is a way to know if G-d is pleased with what you are doing or He is not happy. Whenever something good happens to you, think, "G-d is happy with me. What did I do that pleased G-d?" Of course if something bad happens to you, like you, G-d forbid, trip on something, you should also think that G-d is not happy with you and try and remember what you did wrong. Sometimes a terrible tragedy happens that kills many people like a tsunami. When this happens we have to think, "G-d is angry with the world and we must do teshuva!" Great tzadickim protect the world from disasters. Perhaps something good you will do will help save many lives! Did you know that you could have that much affect on the world? How great is the power of one Jew who listens to the words of Hashem! How great is our reward! Did you know that the Vilna Gaon said that nothing happens by accident? What he meant was that when, G-d forbid, an accident happens to us it is because of a sin that we did that caused the accident to happen. Sins and good deeds have the spiritual power to affect us with bad or good! This is why we have to always be careful with what we do! If we choose to do good, Hashem will help us reach our goal! Isn't it nice to know that G-d will help us do good?

One of the biggest lessons in life is that it can happen to you! Unfortunately many times we have to learn this lesson the hard way. We think that G-d will always protect us from harm. One should always be careful and realize that divine protection may cost us a great loss of our reward in the next world! That is right, when Hashem has to save us from danger, it could cost us our hard earned reward in the next world for the many mitzvah's that we have already done. Chaim is riding his bicycle at night wearing a reflector belt. Instead of riding on the street with the flow of traffic where the cars can see Chaim, he decides to ride on the sidewalk. A car suddenly turns into a driveway and not seeing Chaim, barely avoids hitting him. Hashem went out of His way to save Chaim from a terrible accident. So be careful if you want to keep all of your precious reward that you worked hard to get!

Chapter 4

Never be discouraged!

A person doesn't become a tzadick overnight! When you take a test you have to first study for the test before you can pass it. There may be times when it seems very difficult to accomplish your goal. This is the evil inclination trying to make you give up. You can succeed and you will succeed if you just try and have trust in G-d and patience.

Every Jew is responsible for one another. We are one Nation devoted to the service of G-d. If you see that your friend is doing something wrong, you should politely tell him to stop. If he doesn't listen, then it is important to make sure an adult is told. The best way to do this is to speak with your teacher or adult privately. It is important not to embarrass your friend in public; this is a very big sin! Do you know why it is a good thing to let an adult know that your friend has sinned? You are helping your friend come closer to G-d so that he will have a much greater reward in the next world. A good suggestion would be to tell the adult what happened without telling him the name of the person. If the adult tells you that this is a sin, he will then advise you whether he needs to know who the person is or how the situation may be improved without you telling him the name of the person. It is very important to stay away from the sin of loshon hora. Did you know that when a person says loshon hora on his friend, his friend gets all of his mitzvahs and the person who said loshon hora gets all of his friend's sins?! It is good to know all of the laws of loshon hora to protect yourself from losing all your mitzvahs!

When your friend tells you to stop doing something wrong, you shouldn't be angry, but tell your friend, "Thank you!" After all he is helping you to become a tzadick so that you will get a much greater reward in the next world! A person who is wise knows this and thinks as stated earlier, "Hashem caused this to happen, because He wants me to get a great reward in the next world!" So too when your parents or teacher rebukes or punishes you, thank them and explain why! This will impress the adults very much and they may even lessen your punishment or decide that a talk with you is good enough! If you keep misbehaving they will know that your words were empty and will then have to punish you, because they want you to grow up to be a great tzadick!

Don't be discouraged when you are punished. Be like King Solomon, and when his mother punished him, he thought of how great of a lesson this was and how it was going to help him improve his ways!

Don't be discouraged, you will have good days and bad days. Try not to get angry when something bad happens. When a person gets angry they forget their Torah learning! Hashem wants us to have good and bad days until the Messiah comes. Did you know that King David had a ring that said on it, "This too will pass!" The good will pass and the bad will also pass!

One of the best ways not to be discouraged is too learn a lot of Torah as the Rabbis, of blessed memory teach us, "Learning Torah makes the problems of the world seem small!"

This entire handbook is mussar and when you get old enough to understand books on mussar that were written for adults, it is good suggestion to learn these books as they will teach you how to improve yourself and come close to G-d. Did you know that an angel told Rabbi Yosef Karo, the author of the Shulchan Aruch, to read, "Duties of the Heart" a very famous mussar book!

Can you think of ways that you should not become discouraged when things do not go your way?

May all Jews live a very, very, very, long, healthy and happy Torah life!