

and aspirations. These traits signify a theological truth: respecting the Divine image in another person is akin to honoring Hashem's own distinctiveness.

This principle not only establishes the moral responsibility to treat others with dignity but also highlights a profound spiritual reality – when people acknowledge the Divine image in another, they acknowledge Hashem's imprint on creation. Disrespect for *tzdem Elokim*, in contrast, is an affront to this theological principle.

There is a stark contrast between societies that honor this godly image and those that utterly disregard it. This is especially poignant in light of contemporary struggles against cultures of violence, desecration, and dehumanization. Respect for *tzdem Elokim* encompasses both the physical and spiritual dignity of a person, and its denial often leads to atrocities in both realms.

## 2: EMULATING HASHEM'S KINDNESS

The second principle regarding our relationship with non-Jews draws from Hashem's own attribute of *tov la'kol* – His kindness to all creatures. The substance and care God provides to all humans, regardless of their faith or nationality, is a model for human behavior. If He sustains and cares for all of creation, then we, too, are obligated to emulate this Divine kindness in our interactions with others.

These principles take on new urgency and meaning in the era of Jewish sovereignty: No longer merely dispersed individuals in exile, the Jewish people have a national platform to express these values on a larger scale. Whether at the level of state policies or personal actions, we are mandated to cultivate a society that mirrors Hashem's mercy and compassion.

118

## 3: DERECH ERETZ

The third principle, known as *derech eretz* – literally, "the way of the land" – emphasizes the importance of cultivating politeness, pleasantness, and manners in all interactions. *Derech eretz* refers to the practice of conducting oneself with the universal principles of courtesy and respect that form the foundation of a

civilized society. This responsibility extends to all people and does not distinguish between Jews and non-Jews. A world shared with others demands that we act in ways that foster harmony and common welfare.

## Rav Chaim Vital's Mission

Rav Chaim Vital was the principal student of the Arizal, who ignited a spiritual revolution in Tzfat, driven by his vision of redemption on the horizon. The Ari Hakadosh thought deeply about the unfolding of Geulah and sought to prepare the world for its arrival. Recognizing the profound importance of transmitting his mystical teachings, he turned to his devoted disciple and declared, "You are the one. You are my student. I must share with you the hidden mysteries of Geulah so that you can illuminate the world."

But Rav Chaim hesitated. Despite the Arizal's urgings, he resisted, voicing a surprising concern. "If you teach me," he said, "it will provoke jealousy among the others in the bet midrash. I fear it will create tension and discord." But the Arizal continued to press him, insisting that the transmission of these teachings was critical for the redemption process. "No, no," the master pleaded. "The Geulah depends on this. You are the chosen one."

Still, Rav Chaim Vital stood firm, deeply troubled by the potential for causing discomfort among his peers. Eventually, the Arizal, disheartened by his disciple's refusal, reportedly lamented, "If I cannot teach you, then I have no further purpose in this world."

Soon after, the Arizal passed away, leaving an indelible legacy of mystical wisdom and this poignant story of unfulfilled potential. Rav Chaim later recorded this exchange in his writings, preserving the weighty responsibility of transmitting the secrets of redemption.

Shortly after his passing, the Arizal appeared to his disciple in a dream. In this vision, he delivered an urgent message, instructing Rav Chaim to travel from Tzfat to Bagdad, a relatively short journey.

The Arizal explained that in Bagdad, there were prominent Jewish leaders – wealthy and influential individuals – who were openly violating severe prohibitions related to matters of *arayot* (sexual immorality). These transgressions, he

revealed, were obstructing the arrival of the Geulah. He implored Rav Chaim to confront these individuals, to rebuke them for their sins, and to demand they change their ways. According to the deceased kabbalistic master, their repentance was a critical step in hastening the redemption.

Despite the clarity of the mission, Rav Chaim Vital again hesitated. "Who am I to carry out such a task?" he wondered. "I am young and insignificant. How can I stand before these powerful figures and admonish them for their behavior? How can I risk embarrassing them publicly, even for such a righteous cause?"

This story underscored a profound lesson: Even in times of imminent redemption, the path forward cannot bypass the nuances of human interaction. Sensitivity, humility, and respect remain paramount, even when confronting the gravest sins or addressing critical matters of redemption. Whether it was his reluctance to overshadow his fellow scholars in the bet midrash or his unwillingness to publicly shame the transgressors of Baghdad, Rav Chaim Vital demonstrated that the road to Geulah must be paved with *derech eretz*: both moral clarity and deep sensitivity to others.

### **Moshe Returns to Midian**

To me, the primacy of *derech eretz* shines through the story of Moshe Rabbeinu and his father-in-law. When Hashem commanded Moshe to return to Egypt and liberate the Jewish people, his initial response is striking: "I must first return to my father-in-law, Yitro, and seek his permission."

This is perplexing. Why the delay? Why not proceed directly to Egypt and begin the urgent mission of liberating a suffering nation? Every moment lost prolonged the agony of slavery, every day of hesitation risked further oppression or even additional deaths. Yet Moshe felt compelled to take a detour back to Midian, veering off the direct path to redemption. Why?

The answer lies in the profound truth that Geulah cannot override the "little things." Moshe had lived in Yitro's home, married his daughter, and benefited from his generosity. To leave abruptly without seeking his father-in-law's permission would have been an affront to basic human decency, to the fundamental values of gratitude and respect.

Even the grand mission of liberation and redemption the Jewish people could not excuse Moshe from this small but essential act of being a *meisul*. Redemption, no matter how vast its scope, must be built on a foundation of moral integrity and personal responsibility.

### **4: OR LAGYOIM**

The fourth value which underpins our relationship with the non-Jewish world is our mission to serve as *or lagoyim*, a light unto the nations, inspiring the world with the values of Torah, morality, and belief in Hashem.

Rav Amital believed that this role went beyond the inspiration of religious values or the transfer of knowledge; it reflects an investment in human welfare. To teach others effectively, one must treat them with care, dignity, and compassion. This principle imposes a profound responsibility to inspire and elevate through example.

2/16

### **5: KIDDUSH HASHEM**

The fifth principle, one which Rav Amital elaborated on extensively, was the concept of *kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying Hashem's name through our interactions with non-Jews. He believed that the way Jews behave toward others directly impacts how God's presence is perceived in the world. Acts of kindness, fairness, and respect reflect Divine glory, while unethical behavior, God forbid, can bring dishonor.

This idea takes on heightened significance when applied to the national stages, where the collective actions of the Jewish people, particularly in a sovereign state, shape global perceptions of Hashem. Rav Amital distinguished this from *or lagoyim*, while this concept focuses on teaching and inspiring others, *kiddush Hashem* emphasizes the moral and spiritual consequences of Jewish actions.