

Question about selfish behavior

Posted by ontheedgeman - 03 Jun 2011 16:03

I'll ask Dov and whoever has an answer, I'm all ears:

basically, I am told, if I want to be cured, I have to start giving, and to ask myself if what I am doing is helping others. Every step, every breath. I accept that.

For most of my working day, let's say I am working to support my family. Then I spend time with my kids, and virtually everything I do and say is with my kids' in mind, to make sure they feel loved, safe, etc. Then I drive all around the city to do errands for my wife, who doesn't quite drive. So 95% of my time, my steps, my work, my breath, is towards my wife and kids. So 10% of the time, if/when I would act out, I am selfish for that 10%. 90% of the time I'm not selfish. Let's say.

Okay my circle of giving is quite small - that I admit. And my wife is my soul, as are my kids... so maybe giving to them is really selfish, since they are bound with my soul. I give some tzedakah, maybe not enough, that is my way of expanding the circle.

But am I selfish because I only do things for my kids/wife? Does my cure mean expanding the circle, inviting homeless people to my shabbos table and risking shalom bais? or volunteering all my spare time (after all my meetings) to help others, further annoying my wife?

Confused.

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Re: Question about selfish behavior

Posted by Kedusha - 03 Jun 2011 16:08

I think the key is to help at home first, but, at the same time, be open to opportunities to expand your "Chesed portfolio." If having homeless people at your table for Shabbos won't be good for Shalom Bayis, look for something else that your family can handle better.

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Re: Question about selfish behavior

Posted by Me3 - 03 Jun 2011 16:16

Concentrating on being a giver doesn't mean thinking back over your day and seeing how much you gave already or how selfish or unselfish you are already.

It's when your sitting on the couch and you think "What can I do to help my wife right now." It's actively thinking of ways to give, things that you are not already doing. Things you don't particulary want to do.

That's giving.

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Re: Question about selfish behavior

Posted by musicman - 03 Jun 2011 20:10

Giving isn't an action as much as it is a mindset (or, what Me3 said :p)

It's a character trait that you have to develop my finding ways to give. When you become a giver, even your taking becomes giving.

An interesting Hebrew grammar vort here: *hav* means to give. *Ahav*] means love and "I will give" (maybe not 100% accurate, but it gets the point across).

When you realize that, ultimately, giving is not a sacrifice, but is even more beneficial to both parties than taking is, then you're really giving and understanding the idea of giving.

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Re: Question about selfish behavior
Posted by ur-a-jew - 03 Jun 2011 20:39

If someone gives a nice tzedakkah check but gives it with a krectzh and makes the person feel like dirt, he has not given anything. We can do for our wives and kids but I we are doing it just to be "we have to" have we really given them. To be meaningful, the way we give is often more important than what we give.

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Re: Question about selfish behavior
Posted by ontheedgeman - 03 Jun 2011 20:47

wow, thanks for the insightful tips! I am still a bit at a loss - okay the mindset is important. but I've heard many people give in addiction, because it helps them in their recovery. that doesn't seem like a healed mindset! be a moderator cuz it helps my recovery? Thanks but sounds incomplete.

in any event, the question still remains: if I am giving 90% of the time, thinking only of others and loving giving, and for the other 10% of the time I need some me selfish down time, what is the issue with that.

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Re: Question about selfish behavior
Posted by musicman - 03 Jun 2011 21:04

The issue is that the entire time you're doing your calculation of how much you've given, you're thinking about yourself, and whether or not "you've done enough."

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Re: Question about selfish behavior
Posted by willnevergiveup - 05 Jun 2011 22:15

On the hedge,

I am talking out loud to myself here.

Doing Chesed for your wife and kids is usually selfish and many times, although good and necessary, has little to do with Chesed.

You look after your wife and do things for her so she will have clothes to wear and look nice for **you**, so **you** should have shabbos food on the table, so she should be happy and **you** will have a good time in bed, so the kitchen will not be a mess when **you** eat breakfast the next morning, so there should be peace and quiet in the house so **you** can have a better life etc etc.

You do things for your kids so they give **you** nachas and **you** will have pleasure, so they make **you** proud at school, so **you** can stop them screaming, so **you** can sleep better at night, so they will play quietly for a few hours and give **you** a break, so they look cute when you take them out.

YOU YOU YOU

I have struggled with this and have talked myself into this for a long time, that I am not so slefish and I am really doing all of the above selflessly. But I am not so sure anymore.

There needs to be many many things you do each day that are totally selfless and hopefully this will prove on the other items that they are also partly selfless.

???? Any ideas??

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Re: Question about selfish behavior

Posted by ontheedgeman - 06 Jun 2011 10:51

Lots of ideas, but not sure what Chazal say. I always hear "chesed" starts at home. and the issur of lo tonu applies equally to one's wife and children, so meaning, I'm not sure why they

wouldn't be subject to gemilut chesed as another people.

the problem with your argument is that all acts of giving I do for **me**. because they bring **me** pleasure. because they help in **my** addiction.

the only thing I read recently on this is by Batya Gallant, using the teachings of R. Tzadok, that giving comes in stages. we first must know how to give to ourselves, and only then can we be happy and give to others naturally. and the highest level is when giving to others and satisfying their needs is internalized to the point where it does indeed feel like I'm giving to myself. that's the highest. as I understand her.

all this to say, it's grasping at straws. true giving is a feeling of the heart.

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Re: Question about selfish behavior

Posted by musicman - 06 Jun 2011 13:44

[ontheedgeman wrote on 06 Jun 2011 10:51:](#)

true giving is a feeling of the heart.

Which is spiritual-speak for 'It's a mindset, not an action'

That gem from R' Tzadok is awesome. Learning to properly give to yourself builds a sensitivity to how giving will feel to the other person. Once you know and understand what it's like to be given to properly, you can do the same to others simply because you know how good it is, and

want to spread that goodness. And note that even on that level, you're still feeling good about the act of giving. So it's not pure altruism. Only a robot can give and not react. It's important to understand that the feeling we get when giving is not a selfish feeling. It's different than the feeling of 'I have fulfilled an obligation'. It's a more sublime happiness related to the ideal of real simchah.

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Re: Question about selfish behavior
Posted by ontheedgeman - 06 Jun 2011 14:51

Musicman, interesting points. I do notice there are certain people who are SOOOO generous, with their time, property etc, etc, yet it feels funny, their giving feels "robotic". Obviously no one will in their right mind complain or criticize such a person, because they are *doing* good things. but it's like there is no feeling behind their giving, or the feeling is very difficult to read, like a robot.

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Re: Question about selfish behavior
Posted by musicman - 06 Jun 2011 15:04

If you're giving like a robot, you're doing it wrong, and there's no way that the other side is gaining anything from that giving. It's like the husband who hugs his wife everyday because it's rote, and there's no feeling to it. sure, he's giving affection, and sure, it wasn't asked of him, but does anyone gain from that? No.

As with any Middah, there is a golden rule. Too much giving is a bad thing, because it can lead to all sorts of bad behaviors, robotic giving one of them. It's why H' tried to create the world with only Chesed and failed. he had to temper it with Gevurah (Din), and ultimately achieve Tiferes, the ideal combination of the two (now we're getting spiritual).

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