

SEASON 2

OTAMI MENTORSHIP

SESSION 4: COMPASSION

DEAR MENTEE AND MENTOR,

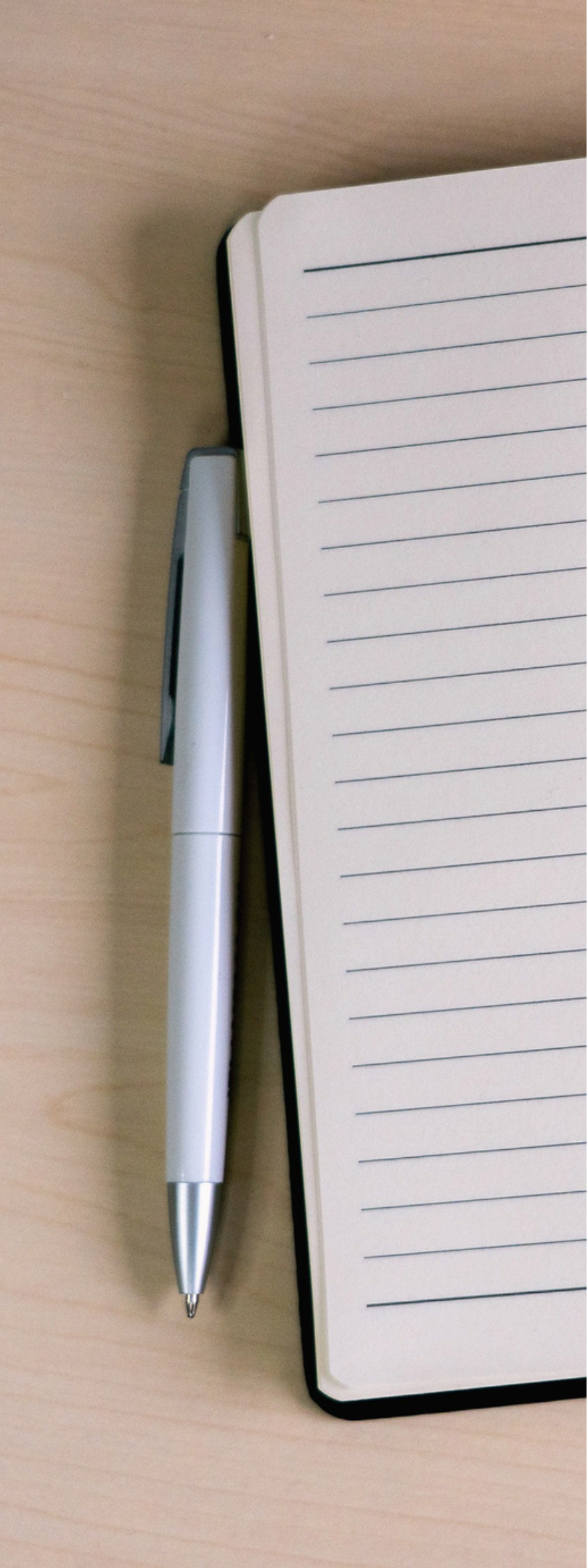
In a world of ever changing morals and values, yesterday's cruelties become today's compassions and yesterday's compassions become today's cruelties. A discussion about compassion from a Torah lens is therefore more important than ever.

In this session (with G-d's help) we hope to present a Torah perspective on mercy and compassion as well as our personal birthright as "Rachmanim", the ultimate compassionate ones. Finally, we hope to present real-life tools to identify and implement more compassionate living standards.

All of this stems from our quest to live more G-d-like lives and to imitate the ways and traits of the ultimate "Kel Rachum Vichanun"- "A merciful and Kind G-d."

Please note: The last thing that this session should spark is political debate and discourse. The goal of this session is not to point fingers at the world around us and the varying constantly changing political value system, but rather an opportunity to look inward and upgrade our own lives with more compassionate living!

With much success!



REMINDERS:

- Check-in: How was your week?
- Journaling: The journal is a space to track progress and growth throughout this journey.
- Set a time for your next meeting.

Intro

Jewish life and literature is replete with stories and lessons about the importance of compassionate living. The hallmarks of our generational giants was not exclusively their Torah scholarship, but their character and particularly their compassion.

In 19th century Kovno, Lithuania, the Jewish community center fell into disrepair, leaving the poor with nowhere to sleep. Various appeals for funds did not solve the problem. Sensing a lack of compassion, the community leader, Rabbi Yisrael Salant, began sleeping in the inadequate facility, pledging "to continue until it's fixed" (which it promptly was).

Another incredible anecdote in the life of R. Salant occurred one Yom Kippur Eve as his congregation awaited R. Salant's arrival to commence the Yom Kippur prayers. They waited and waited for the esteemed Rabbi Salant, but he just did not show. After a substantial amount of time the Rabbi entered with an apology on his lips. He explained that



on his way to the prayers, he had passed a house and heard the wails of an infant. He just could not continue and he stopped and knocked on the door. It turns out that the mother had left her sleeping infant for “just a few minutes” to experience the Yom Kippur prayers. Realizing that no one was home to soothe the child, the elderly rabbi entered the home and rocked the child back to sleep. It was only after the child slept peacefully that the rabbi continued on to the hundreds that were awaiting his arrival at the synagogue!

Here is another classic! Rabbi Aryeh Levine (20th century Jerusalem) accompanied his injured wife to the doctor. When asked the reason for the visit, he told the doctor: "Our leg hurts." Rabbi Levine felt another's pain as his own.

As young adults embarking on the journey of life, it behooves us to better understand the concept of compassion, its benefits, and ultimately tools to assist us in upgrading our day to day experience.

Please approach this session with an open Jewish mind and Jewish heart!

PART 1: COMPASSION DEFINED

1. Do you think that you are a compassionate person?
2. Did you know that as a Jew, you were born with an innate dose of compassion.

Talmud Yevamos 79a

There are three signs [to identify] this [Jewish] nation : they are compassionate; have an inner sense of shame; and perform acts of kindness"

שְׁלֹשָׁה סִימָנִים יֵשׁ
בְּאוֹמָהּ זוֹ:
הֶרְחָמָנִים,
וְהַבִּישָׁנִין, וְגוֹמְלֵי
חֲסָדִים.



3. The Conversation, CC-BY-ND Source: Giving USA

A larger percentage of Jews give to charity than people of other faiths—76 percent compared with 63 percent of other Americans. Additionally, Jews households donate on average almost twice as much as any other American race or religion, donating a whopping \$26 billion to charities more than twice their expected contribution.

4. If you answered yes to question 1, can you think of five moments of compassion that you have experienced in the last week?

5. What did you do with those feelings and sentiments?

6. Ok, now can you give a good definition of compassion?



7. Rabbi Shraga Simmons; Middot Series #10

"Compassion" in Hebrew is rachmanut, derived from the word rechem – womb. The womb is the paradigm of caring for another's totally dependent needs. In metaphysical terms, compassion is a similarly deep commitment to:

- feel the other's reality
- identify their specific needs
- take action to assist

8. Please note that the Torah definition of compassion encompasses so much more than just a feeling or sentiment, but a call to identify another's needs and finally to act on one's compassion.

PART 2:

THE BENEFITS OF COMPASSION

1. Happiness

Neuroscientific research shows that compassion triggers brain activity in the caudate nucleus and anterior cingulate – the regions that register reward and gratification. The saying goes “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”

2. Interpersonal

With compassion one can address the thoughts and feelings of another person in a way that alleviates their distress. Then in turn they are more likely to speak and act more sensibly and reasonably towards you.

3. Pleasure and meaning

Human beings intuitively want to do the right thing. Rabbi E. E. Dessler famously said: More than we want to receive, we want to give. Because when we "invest" a bit of ourselves in another, we experience the pleasure of connecting beyond self. Through compassion, as our sphere of love and influence expands outward, we build a bond of unity.



4. It's a mitzvah!

Talmud Shabbos 133b

Aba Shaul said: the Torah writes the word “vinaveihu” meaning to emulate Him (The Almighty). Just as He is merciful so too you. Just as He is compassionate so too you...

אָבא שאול
אָמַר:
”וְאַנְהוּ” —
הוּא דוֹמֶה לוֹ,
מָה הוּא חַנּוּן
וְרַחוּם — אַף
אַתָּה הָיָה
חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם.

5. Can you identify personal benefits that you experienced during or after an incident of compassion?

PART 3:

ACQUIRING COMPASSION

1. Can the two of you strategize about how to upgrade the trait of compassion in your lives? Do you think compassion would be seen as a weakness professionally? Is there such a thing as too much compassion?

Here are a few ideas:

2. Start being a better listener:

Listen to others without judging or jumping to conclusions. Don't interrupt. Make eye contact. Show that you are listening. Repeat back what you've heard in your own words.

3. Expressing Gratitude:

Proactively focusing on gratitude slows life down and affords an opportunity to shift one's perspective to others. Gratitude fosters opportunities for compassion.



4. Benefit of the doubt

Ethics of our Fathers teaches us that “one should not judge another until they have been in their spot” Try to insert yourself into another’s shoes and into their mindset. How does the saying go? "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle."

5. Small acts of Compassion

Our tradition teaches us that man is impacted by his own actions (Sefer Hachinuch Mitzvah 16). By proactively building small moments and acts of compassion into one’s schedule, one develops compassion muscle which in turn encourages and fosters more compassionate living.



Postscript:

While compassion is such an important Jewish trait, Judaism is very direct about the fact that justice is equally as important as compassion. As Rabbi J. Sacks writes, “Judaism is a religion of love: You shall love the Lord your God; you shall love your neighbor as yourself; you shall love the stranger. But it is also a religion of justice, for without justice, love corrupts... Justice plus compassion equals tzedek, the first precondition of a decent society. Finally, it is important to note the words of the Midrash, “Whoever is kind to the cruel will end up being cruel to the kind”.

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