

Kimutz – Frugality

*Be careful with your money. Do not spend even a penny needlessly.*¹

— 1 —

Perhaps no *midda* is as counter-cultural for us as *kimutz*. In our affluent society the idea of frugality, not spending needlessly, has become alien. Yet, when we begin to understand the depths of the soul which are plumbed by attentiveness to *kimutz*, we will be astonished at its importance.

Our tradition does not glorify poverty. It sees in the legitimate attention to our physical needs an appropriate justification for work and for amassing wealth. In fact, as we have learned, it is precisely the task of the *yetzer hara*, the reason we have it as part of our consciousness, to propel us to make a living and meet our material obligations to ourselves and our loved ones. This is the arena in which the *yetzer hara* is most strong because it is most justified. Therefore, it is also in this arena that the *yetzer hara* can and does most easily “overflow” the bounds of legitimacy. Profligate spending feeds and satisfies the *yetzer hara*. Over-feeding it and over-satisfying it, so to speak, comes most naturally. Spending money almost never “feels” bad. Regardless of what we have, the “charge” we get from spending always remains. As most of us are aware, in fact, this “charge” can and is often used by the *yetzer hara* to compensate for compromises it has to make in other areas of life. Hence the placement of this *midda* here: after all the work we have done to restrain and transform our *yetzer hara*, the urge to profligacy increases. It is very nearly the last recourse of the *yetzer hara*.

This is the reason I referred earlier to our need to understand the “depths of the soul” that *kimutz* plumbs. This *midda* is most relevant for one who has done much work to create and cultivate a soul. Working the *midda* of *kimutz* is important for curbing the *yetzer hara*’s rebellion against one’s successful work in creating and cultivating a soul. Since we know that the soul is created and cultivated first by contraction of the self to provide a space to embrace another, and second by the transformation of the energy of the *yetzer hara* so that it derives its satisfaction (serves the self) precisely in serving

¹ Rabbi Mendel of Satanov. (1845). *Chesbon ha-Nefesh*. (D. Landesman, trans.) Feldheim Publishers, New York, 1995. Page 153.

another, we can imagine profligacy as the reversal of that energy so that the self first feels unreasonably needy and then fills that need through spending on needless acquisition of material goods.

Kimutz then is a *midda* that requires significant cultivation of the deeper satisfaction we obtain through our service of another in order to offset the surface satisfaction of spending. This can only be accomplished through serious and strenuous *hesbon*. We must learn to ask ourselves before each expenditure: Is this for a legitimate need of the self? Or might we refrain from this expenditure so that this spending doesn't occlude the other's presence within our consciousness? This might or might not then lead to the further consideration: If we do not legitimately need to spend on ourselves, who might need us to spend on them? Thus, the *kibbush* involved in *kimutz* naturally leads to the *tikkun kimutz* which is *zedakah*, derived from our consideration of *zedek*: Loving the other as ourselves.