

Bonus: Steadfast love

The film, word for word, about 10 min. Hebrew words said aloud are given in Hebrew script, then as they sound.

0:00 The hook

A widow stands on a road in Moab; with her two daughters in law. She has nothing left to give them. So she gives them a wish. May the LORD do, חֶסֶד **chesed**, with you.

And in Jerusalem, a whole congregation sings; twenty-six times in one psalm. כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ **Ki le-olam chasdo**. For his חֶסֶד **chesed**, is for ever.

One word. Your Bible has mercy for it. Or kindness. Or lovingkindness. Or steadfast love.

Or simply, love. Five English words; and none of them is wrong. And none of them is enough.

0:45 Welcome

שָׁלוֹם **Shalom**. I am Moreh Ezra; and this is a bonus. Shorter than a lesson. No new rules. One word.

And if you have come here without the lessons before it; you can still follow every step.

The word is חֶסֶד **chesed**. The first sound comes from the back of the throat; like the end of, loch. And the weight is on the first half. It stands two hundred and forty-seven times in the Hebrew Bible; and more than half of those, are in the Psalms.

Now count what the King James Bible writes for it. Mercy: a hundred and forty-nine times. Kindness: forty. Lovingkindness: thirty. Goodness: twelve.

And then it still needs: kindly; merciful; favour; and pity. Eight English words; for one Hebrew word. I shall leave it in Hebrew. By the end, you will not want it translated.

1:44 Something one does

In English, mercy and love are things you feel. Now look at the verb that stands with our word in Hebrew. Naomi says: may the LORD, do; יַעַשׂ עִמָּכֶם חֶסֶד **immakhem chesed**. With you; חֶסֶד **chesed**. And she goes on: כַּאֲשֶׁר עֲשִׂיתֶם עִם הַמֵּתִים וְעִמָּדִי **ka-asher asitem im ha-metim ve-immadi**.

As you have done; with the dead; and with me. The verb is, do. Twice, in her one sentence. And after it, each time; the little word: with.

Abraham's servant, at the well, prays with the same two words. **וַעֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד עִם אֲדֹנִי אַבְרָהָם Va-aseh chesed im adoni Avraham.** And do **חֶסֶד chesed**; with my master Abraham.

I counted. Do, is the verb that goes with this word more than any other. In forty-nine verses. So it is, first of all, a deed. It can be seen.

It can be remembered. Naomi can point to what the two young women have done.

And look who does it, to whom. Two young women; and their husbands' mother. A servant's God; and his master. The two are bound to each other, before the deed is done. This word is what a person does, who is true to that bond; and does more than the bond could force.

The prophet Micah puts it in a short list, of what is asked of a human being. **עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד Asot mishpat ve-ahavat chesed.** To do justice; and to love **חֶסֶד chesed.**

3:16 The partner word

Some words go about in pairs; and this one has a fixed partner. **חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת Chesed ve-emet.** The partner is **אֱמֶת emet**: faithfulness; truth. It comes from the same root as, amen; and it means: what is firm. What holds.

The two stand side by side, twenty times in the Bible. Where the King James says, mercy and truth; these are the two.

And the pair tells you how to hear our word. This is no passing mood. It is kindness that can be counted on.

A second partner is, good. You know it from the end of a famous psalm. **אַךְ טוֹב וָחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּי Akh tov va-chesed yirdefuni kol yemei chayyai.** Surely goodness, and **חֶסֶד chesed**; shall follow me, all the days of my life. So the King James.

But the Hebrew verb is stronger than, follow. It is the verb for chasing an enemy. All his life, this man has been chased. Now he is chased by goodness; and **חֶסֶד chesed.** He does not seem to mind.

4:24 Three steps in Ruth

The book of Ruth has our word three times. Once in each of its first three chapters. And each time, the story turns on it.

The first step, you have heard: a wish. May the LORD do **חֶסֶד chesed** with you; as you have done. Naomi has nothing to give. So she measures God's **חֶסֶד chesed**, by theirs.

The second step: a blessing. Ruth comes home from the field of Boaz; with her arms full of grain. And Naomi says: blessed be he, by the LORD; **אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָזַב חַסְדּוֹ אֶת הַחַיִּים וְאֶת הַמֵּתִים asher lo azav chasdo et ha-chayyim ve-et ha-metim.** Who has not left off his **חֶסֶד chesed**; with the living, and with the dead.

Who has not left it off? The first word can hang on the LORD; or on the man she is blessing. The Hebrew does not say which; and readers have taken it both ways. If you have Lesson twenty-one; you know that word as the hook. Here is a hook, with two nails to hang on.

And the third step. At night, on the threshing floor, Boaz says to Ruth: הֵיטַבְתְּ חַסְדֵךְ הָאַחֲרוֹן **heitavt chasdekh ha-acharon** מִן הָרִאשׁוֹן **min ha-rishon.** You have made your last חֶסֶד **chesed**, better than the first. Now it is done by a person. By a foreigner.

A young woman from Moab. And it can be counted. There was a first. This is the last.

So the wish of chapter one, comes round. Naomi asked that it be done with Ruth: as you have done. By chapter three; it is Ruth's own, that carries the story.

6:02 The refrain

And the psalm. A hundred and thirty-six. Twenty-six verses; and every one of them ends with the same three words. כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ **Ki le-olam chasdo**. For; for ever; his חֶסֶד **chesed**.

Look for the verb. There is none. No, is. No, endures. Hebrew sets, for ever; and, his חֶסֶד **chesed**; side by side; and lets them stand.

If you have Lesson nineteen; you know this as a clause without a verb. The King James's, endureth; was supplied by the translators.

The psalm is a song for two sides. One voice gives the first half of each verse. To him who alone does great wonders. And everybody answers. כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ **Ki le-olam chasdo**.

The Bible tells of it being sung so; when the foundation of the second temple was laid. And the same words stand in sixteen more verses, outside this psalm. It may be the most repeated line in the Bible.

The prophets use the word in another key. Here, it is God who looks for it. כִּי חֶסֶד חָפַצְתִּי **Ki chesed chafatsti ve-lo zavach.** וְלֹא זָבַח For חֶסֶד **chesed**, I desire; and not sacrifice. The word stands in front of its verb.

If you have Lesson eighteen; you know why.

7:26 Where "mercy" came from

So why does the King James say, mercy; so often? The answer is a chain of translations. More than two thousand years ago, Jewish translators put the Bible into Greek; and for our word, they chose a Greek word for pity. The Latin Bible followed the Greek. The first English Bibles followed the Latin.

Then, in fifteen thirty-five, Miles Coverdale tried something new. He built an English word, for this one Hebrew word. Lovingkindness. And, steadfast love; is the twentieth century's answer, to the same question.

The word has two relatives worth knowing. The first: חֲסִידִים **chasidim**. People marked by חֶסֶד **chesed**. The faithful ones. The King James often writes: saints.

The Hasidim take their name from this word.

And the second relative, has feathers. In the list of birds in Leviticus, stands: הַחֲסִידָה **ha-chasidah**. The stork. It is the same word, with the feminine ending. The loyal one.

The old explanation is, that the stork was known for the care of its own. And Jeremiah calls her as a witness. גַּם חֲסִידָה בַּשָּׁמַיִם יָדְעָה מוֹעֲדֶיהָ **Gam chasidah va-shamayim yade'ah mo'adeiha**. Even the stork in the heavens, knows her seasons. A bird named, loyal.

I know people with less to live up to.

8:50 What the word holds

Put the pieces together. חֶסֶד **Chesed** is done; with somebody; inside a bond. Its partner is faithfulness. People do it; and God does it; and the same word serves for both. It can be asked for.

Counted. Remembered. And sung.

Mercy, hears the kindness in it. Loyalty, hears the bond. Steadfast love, tries to say both at once. Now that you know the Hebrew word; you can hear all of it; wherever your Bible has any one of them.

One thing to do. Open Psalm one hundred and thirty-six; and read it aloud, with somebody. One of you reads the first half of each verse. The other answers each time, in Hebrew. כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ **Ki le-olam chasdo**.

After twenty-six times; you will not forget it. שָׁלוֹם **Shalom**.

Until next time: לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם **lekh leshalom**. Go in peace.