

B”H

TO KNOW AND TO LOVE

BEGIN WITH A GRIN

They once asked one of the itinerant preachers of yesteryear. why, in the siddur, when there are two yuds together, they are read as Hashem's name Ad-nai.

The darshan said: If there are two yudim (Jews in Yiddish) who are standing next to one another in peace, that must be an act of G-d.

DON'T KNOW HOW TO LOVE?

This week's double parsha, Acharei-Kedoshim, contains one of the most foundational of all the mitzvos, particularly from a Chassidic perspective, that is, the mitzva of ahavas Yisrael. Everyone can tell dozens of stories about this mitzva. In our childhood, we were taught that ahavas Yisrael is the foundation of the entire Torah, especially Toras Ha'Chassidus. The problem is that in real life, we don't always see it or feel love for another as we love ourselves. We don't always behave with others as we would want them to behave with us.

There would seem to be some justification for this. How can the Torah demand that a Jew love another? How can you command someone to feel love? Can a person be compelled to love? Aside from that, can we truly love another the way we love ourselves?

These questions are (not) only an effect of our personal yetzer, of our less-good side; they are questions that occupied the great commentators already in the time of the Rishonim. The Ramban, in his commentary on the Torah, writes emphatically, “The heart of man cannot contain the ability to love his fellow the way he loves himself.” If that is the case with the greats who are compared to cedars, then what should we, who are compared to the lowly hyssop, say?

KNOWING THAT LOVE IS NATURAL

In an eye-opening sicha, the Rebbe explains how Rashi answers these questions that bother (not only) the “*ben chameish l'mikra*” (the five-year-old child) and he does so in a brief sentence!

“And you shall love your fellow as yourself – Rabbi Akiva says, this is a great principle of the Torah” (Vayikra 19:18, Rashi). It sounds familiar, doesn't it? However, it is possible that this familiar line is something we have never properly understood.

A general principle consists of details; a great general principle includes many details. Fulfilling the general principle is only accomplished by fulfilling all the details. Rabbi Akiva innovates here and says that the mitzva of loving your fellow as yourself is not a particularized mitzva; it is not a command about how to feel. It is a general principle (a great general principle) in the Torah which contains many specific mitzvos that are derived from it: do not steal, do not lie, be careful about harming another Jew bodily or financially. The Torah commands us to behave in a loving manner toward every Jew.

By mentioning the name of the author of the statement, R' Akiva, Rashi is answering the question we asked, about how we can love another as ourselves. R' Akiva is the Tanna who rules (Bava Metzia 62a) that in any dangerous situation, your own life takes precedence over the life of someone else, even at the expense of his! According to this, R' Akiva would explain that “love your fellow *as yourself*” is understood as not meaning literally as yourself, just *like* yourself, because when the question at hand is about *your* life as opposed to *his* life, your life comes first.

R' Akiva is also the one who says in this week's Pirkei Avos (chapter 3, mishna 14), "beloved are Israel who are called children to Hashem," and if we are all children of the same Father, then we are all "brothers." Brotherly love is natural, effortless. R' Akiva is teaching us that we need to contemplate and then feel how all Jews are brothers, under all circumstances.

Just as children or brothers cannot be replaced, so too, a Jew cannot be replaced! Even when a Jew is on a low spiritual level, he is still a brother and he is still a son and he needs to be loved and treated accordingly. R' Akiva teaches us that too. The Gemara in Bava Basra (10a) tells of a debate between the wicked Turnus Rufus and R' Akiva.

Turnus Rufus asked R' Akiva, if your G-d loves the poor, why doesn't he provide for them? R' Akiva said, I will tell you what this is like; it is like a human king who was angry at his son and imprisoned him. He ordered that the son not be fed or given to drink. Someone went and fed and gave the prince to drink. When the king heard about this, wouldn't he send him a gift? And we are called children as it says, (Devarim 14:1), "You are children to Hashem your G-d."

Even when a Jew is in such a low state that the King is angry at him, he is still called a son. The King still loves him. He is still a brother and therefore, we also need to love him!

The aforementioned love is a love which corrects the reason for the exile (caused by unwarranted hatred, as we all well know). It is a love that the great Jewish leaders and Chassidic masters throughout the generations worked to implant in our hearts, to love every Jew, for no reason, just for being a Jew, like a brother.

TO CONCLUDE WITH A STORY

We will end with a story, one of many, that illustrates how the Rebbe loves every Jew like a son. Fifty years ago there was a Knesset member who belonged to the Left and represented an extreme position. He believed that communism is the future of humanity and in every Israeli-Palestinian conflict he automatically sided with the Arabs.

In a session preceding the new year starting in Tishrei 5728, this person delivered a speech in the Knesset that was an attack against the rights of Jews and was in favor of the rights of Arabs. The speech was sprinkled with harsh and extreme expressions disparaging Israel and this speech outraged many people across the political spectrum.

A few days later, a survivor of Nazi concentration camps who suffered under the Russian communists for years after the war and spent two years in Siberia, waited for him near his house and stabbed him in the back with a small knife. He was hospitalized and was later released. At that time, the journalist Mr. Eliyahu Amikam was in New York. He included in his column in *Yediot Acharanot* the following line, "A pity the knife wasn't longer and the blade wasn't sharper."

A few days later, on Hoshana Rabba, Eliyahu passed by the Rebbe who distributed honey-cake (lekach) to thousands. People moved past quickly and it wasn't possible to talk to the Rebbe. The Rebbe wished him, as he did to all, "*shana tova u'mesuka*" and immediately added, "We don't write about a Jew like that."

When Eliyahu tried to inform the Rebbe of how dangerous were the words of that Knesset member, the Rebbe referred him to a sicha that he said shortly before in which he explained at length that "Yisrael, even when he sins, is a Yisrael." The true reality of every Jew is that he is full of mitzvos like a pomegranate, even willful sinners of Israel. Sins only become stuck to him externally but are not a part of him. Thus, the Rebbe expressed his enormous love for every Jew, whoever he might be, even the most distant one.

Based on a sicha of the Rebbe, Likkutei Sichos vol 17, Sichas 2 on Parshas Kedoshim