

The Rest Of The Story

By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

Here we are into the third week of *Sefirah*, the second *perek* of *Pirkei Avos*, and studying *Parshas Kedoshim*, all intertwined and charged with the theme of the *posuk* found in this week's *parsha* of "*Ve'ahavta lerei'acha kamocho.*"

The obligation to love our fellows as we love ourselves is fundamental to being an observant Jew. The story is often repeated about the man who came to Hillel Hazokein and asked to hear the entire Torah while standing on one leg. Hillel told him, "*Mah de'aloch senei lechavroch lo sa'avid, v'idoch zil gemor* – Don't do to others what you don't want others to do to you, and the rest go learn." Basically, he told him, "*Ve'ohavta lerei'acha kamocho,*" to treat others the way he would want to be treated.

I never really understood Hillel's response. What does he mean that the entire Torah is wrapped up in the command of "*Ve'ohavta lerei'acha kamocho*"? There really is much more to the Torah than one *mitzvah*. The Torah is, as the *posuk* states (*Iyov* 11:9), "*Arucha m'ereetz middah urechova mini yom.*" It is "longer than the earth and wider than the sea." What, then, is the understanding of Hillel's response to the man?

I saw an anecdote involving Rav Chaim Soloveitchik that answers the question. It happened that in his city of Brisk the community was searching for a *chazzan* to lead the *Yomim Noraim davening*. They interviewed many candidates as they sought to find someone who fulfilled the conditions usually sought, namely that the *chazzan* preferably be virtuous, excel in Torah, be over 30 years of age, be married, possess a nice voice, and be acceptable to the people in the *shul* etc.

In the end, they hired the person who filled the most criteria. The only box he didn't check was that his voice was not all that great. When Rav Chaim was informed of the decision, he said that he would not have chosen the person they chose. The committee didn't understand his objection. The man was a fine person, an outstanding *talmid chochom*, and had every condition the job required except one. That was a lot more than the other candidates.

Rav Chaim explained that the other attributes sought for in a *chazzan* are advantages for a *chazzan*. But a person who doesn't have a good voice is not a *chazzan* at all. Once you find a candidate with a good voice who knows how to lead the *davening*, then you check to see if he has the other attributes, but without the voice, he is simply not a *chazzan*.

That was what Hillel was teaching the impatient man who wanted to convert. To be a *Yid*, you have to love the other *Yidden*. That is the *Alef-Bais*. Everything else is commentary.

As we count down towards *Shavuos* and *Kabbolas HaTorah*, we not only need to engage in introspection to prepare ourselves for the great day, but we also have to consider our lives as Jews. We are all no doubt proud *bnei Avrohom, Yitzchok, v'Yaakov*, but sometimes we forget what it is all about. We become engaged in pursuits that take over our lives and fail to remain dedicated to Torah study and behavior. We become consumed with ourselves, our families and our immediate buddies, and are apathetic to other people's needs and desires.

Everybody wants to be appreciated. Everyone wants to be noticed. Nobody minds a compliment every now and then. People want friends. They want to be included in things. And sometimes, people need help. They need someone to talk to, someone to understand them, someone to lend them money, or time, or a shoulder to cry on.

There is much more to being a *Yid*, but being thoughtful and caring and treating other people the way you like to be treated is where it starts. And it should become our second nature.

The Alter of Kelm would say that included in the *mitzvah* of *Ve'ohavta lerei'acha kamocho* is that we care about the other person not because we are commanded to do so, but because we really love him. He would explain that the *mitzvah* is to love the other guy as you love yourself, and just as you love yourself because that is your nature and not because anybody told you to, we are to love others as part of our nature.

And just as there is no limit to how much people love themselves – it's not as if they love a certain amount and with that they have fulfilled their obligation of self-love – so too, when it comes to loving other people, the same applies. We need to be preemptive in anticipating the needs of others, caring

about them, celebrating with them, grieving with them, assisting them, and helping them achieve a sense of satisfaction and happiness.

It is something we can all do, or else it wouldn't be a *mitzvah* in the Torah. Let no one say, "This isn't for me. I'm not that guy. I don't have patience or I'm too busy or I can't be bothered going to other people's *simchos* or, *lo aleinu, shivahs*. I can't be nice to everyone."

It is who we are meant to be and what our essence should be.

The great *gaon*, Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer, was an uncle to three *roshei yeshiva* of the Chevron Yeshiva, Rav Aharon Cohen, Rav Yechezkel Sarna, and Rav Moshe Chevroni. At the *levayah* of Rav Isser Zalman in Yerushalayim in 1953, Rav Moshe Chevroni was *maspid* and told a fascinating story about his uncle's love of Torah. This is the story he told.

During the period of British control of Eretz Yisroel in the lead-up to the founding of the State of Israel, a bitter guerilla war was ongoing between the British occupiers and the Jewish underground. In an attempt to curtail the activities of the underground, the British imposed strict overnight curfews, forbidding anyone to be out of their homes between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. British soldiers would patrol the streets, and anyone who was found disobeying the curfew was taken to jail and locked up, no questions asked. If the person looked suspicious to them, they would shoot him on the spot.

During one of these curfews, Rav Moshe Chevroni was learning in the *yeshiva* at 2 a.m. when he heard knocks on the door. He became frightened, afraid that British soldiers were looking for weapons or suspects. He did not understand English and had no way of communicating with them. He feared that they would take him away. As the knocking continued, he said a *tefillah*, asking Hashem to protect him, and approached the door. He stood by the door and, in a shaking voice, asked who was there.

"*Der feter*. It is your uncle," said the voice on the other side in Yiddish.

He opened the door, and there, at 2:00 in the morning, was his uncle, Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer. Relieved, he let him in and began asking questions. "What are you doing here at this hour? Why would you leave your house in middle of a curfew and put your life in jeopardy to walk here? It is dangerous to be seen outside on the street."

Rav Isser Zalman explained that he was learning at home and arrived at a difficulty in understanding a ruling of the *Rambam*. As hard as he tried, he could not come up with a solution to his question, and he knew that he would not be able to sleep until he understood the *Rambam*. "I was wondering who I could ask my question to at this late hour. I told my wife, 'Our nephew, Rav Moshe Chevroni, is certainly awake. He must be in the *yeshiva* learning now. I will go to him, and together we will review the *sugya* and the *Rambam*. We will figure it out and arrive at an understanding. Then I will return home.' So here I am."

As he was delivering the *hesped* and recounting this, Rav Chevroni said in amazement that he was astonished by Rav Isser Zalman's love for Torah. How at 2 a.m., he left his house, during a curfew no less, to walk to the Chevron Yeshiva in pursuit of an answer to his question on the *Rambam*. Then he continued with the story.

"He told me his brilliant question and looked at me. I asked Hashem to enlighten me and help me offer an explanation. A thought came to my mind. I shared it with him and he was satisfied that he now had the proper understanding of the *Rambam*.

"He got up to leave and return home. I said to him, 'Where are you going? You can't go back home. It is too dangerous. Stay here with me and rest until 6 a.m. Then you can safely return home.'

"But he wouldn't hear of it. He said that he had to write down the answer. I told him that he could write the answer there in the *yeshiva*. I would supply him with a pen and paper. But he said that he needed to write it in his notebook and that he couldn't write it in *yeshiva*. He had to be home in order to write it properly. So he went home.

"Look at that love for Torah! Look how dedicated he was to understanding Torah! What a wonderful story. What an amazing lesson. What an astonishing person he was!"

He finished his *hesped* and everyone was impressed with his story and buzzing about it.

During the *shivah*, when he went to be *menachem avel* his aunt and family, his aunt called him over. "That was not what happened," she said. He looked at her. "What do you mean that's not what

happened? It happened with me. I was there. I heard and saw everything. He came to me in the middle of the night during a tough curfew and asked me the *kushya* on the *Rambam*.”

“That part is true. He came to you during the curfew at night and asked you a *kushya* on a *Rambam*. You told that story to demonstrate the love of Torah of your uncle, and that is true, but everybody knew that before you told them the story. Everybody is aware of his love for Torah and his *hasmodah*. But now I’m going to tell you the rest of the story, and you will see a different side of his greatness.”

This is what she told him.

“He wrote his *sefer Even Ha’azel* and I helped him with it. He very much wanted it to be printed, as did I. But in those days, it wasn’t simple. The printer had a lot of work and it moved along very slowly. The printer told him that there would be a multi-year wait to get the *sefer* out. He was very upset, but there was nothing we could do other than wait.

“One day, I was notified by the printer that there was a cancellation. If I would get him Rav Isser Zalman’s transcripts by 8:00 the next morning, they would immediately get to work on the *sefer*. But, they told me, if they are not there by 8:05, we would lose our opportunity and they would give the slot to someone else.

“When he came home that night, I told him the good news. I was thrilled. Everything was prepared. The *kesovim* were all organized and ready to go to the printer. And now, we had an opportunity to have the *sefer* finally printed.

“But when I told him this, he turned white. I asked what happened and he explained: ‘You know that I included in the *sefer* a *kushya* and *teirutz* from Rav Aharon Cohen. I also have a *kushya* and *teirutz* from Rav Yechezkel Sarna. But I do not have anything from Rav Moshe Chevroni.’

“I told him that Rav Moshe Chevroni is humble and would not be hurt if there is nothing from him in the *sefer*, but he wouldn’t hear of it. He said that he couldn’t fathom the risk of hurting him, even if it meant not printing the *sefer*.”

The *rebbetzin* related that she was so upset that she almost began to cry, but she had a brainstorm. She told Rav Isser Zalman that he should go to Rav Moshe Chevrone. “Ask him to answer a question that you have in your writings on a difficult *Rambam*, even though you already know the answer. Then erase the answer that you wrote and insert his answer into the *Even Ha’azel* and it will be ready to go to press.”

The *rebbetzin* told Rav Chevrone, “Rav Isser Zalman accepted my proposal and left the house, arriving at the *yeshiva* at 2 a.m. to hear your answer to the question, so that there would be no chance of your feelings being hurt.

“He came to you with his difficult *Rambam* and told you that he could not sleep. And that was the truth. He could not sleep if there was any chance that you would be insulted. He desperately wanted to print the *sefer* that he had worked so hard on. So he went out in the wee hours of the morning, at great danger to himself, to ensure that he would not hurt the feelings of another person. He asked the question to which he knew the answer, and then he ran back home to adjust the transcript and get it to the printer by 8 a.m.”

Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer was famed as a great *talmid chochom*, a great *rosh yeshiva*, and a great *masmid* who loved the Torah. But he was also exceedingly considerate of other people, to the extent that put his life in danger to prevent hurting another. And that is the greatness demonstrated in the story that Rav Chevrone told at his *levayah*.

May we learn the lesson taught by Rav Isser Zalman, who knew what it means to be a *Yid*: kind, considerate, gentle, and unfailingly thoughtful. May we learn the lessons of *Sefirah* and the passing of Rabi Akiva’s 24,000 *talmidim*, the teachings of *Pirkei Avos*, and the obligations included in the *posuk*, “*Ve’ohavta lerei’acha kamocho*.”

If we do, we will be better *Yidden*, we will make life better for other *Yidden*, and we will help prepare the world for the coming of *Moshiach*, speedily in our day.