

The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

ACHAREI-K'DOSHIM 5783

Rav Shimon Shkop zt"l, one of our great rabbinic luminaries of the past century, raises an interesting question in the introduction to his masterful magnum opus on Choshen Mishpat, Sha'arei Yosher. On pasuk 19:2, "You shall be holy. For holy am I, HaShem, your Gd", the Midrash states (Vayikra Rabba 24:9) "Can you be holy like Me? This is why it continues, 'For I am Holy', to teach that My Sanctity is above yours." Given this declaration, how are we to understand the Biblical mandate of "... and you shall walk in His Ways?" (D'varim 28:9). How is it possible to emulate Gd in His transcend holiness if the Almighty Himself asserts that His K'dusha is infinitely beyond ours? Indeed, how can we reconcile these diametrically opposed demands?

The Sha'arei Yosher offers a brilliant solution.

The entire "I" of a coarse and lowly person is restricted only to his substance and body. Above him is someone who feels that his "I" is a synthesis of body and soul. And above him is someone who can include in his "I" all of his household and family. Someone who walks according to the way of the Torah, his "I" includes the whole Jewish

people... And there are more levels in this of a person who is whole, who can connect his soul to feel that all of the world and worlds are his "I", and he himself is only one small limb in all of creation. Then, his self-love helps him love ... all of creation.

In a word, as absurd as this may sound, our egos can actually teach us how to love. A selfish person can learn how to love by seeing himself as interconnected with everyone around them. For many of us, we experience this feeling with family. Rav Shimon Shkop reminds us that we can take this idea further and embrace an even larger definition of what "I" means; we can learn to identify ourselves completely with the Jewish people, all of humanity, and even all living beings. This oceanic feeling that we are a part of a larger whole allows us to redefine ourselves. As such, the imperative to love others ("Love your neighbor...") becomes a magnificent command to rethink - reevaluate - who we really are.

Let us see how this profound insight plays out in the affairs of man.

The Arizal taught that before davening, one should say, "I accept upon myself the mitzva to love my fellow man like myself." The Tanya (ch. 32) writes that when man's primary joy is his neshama (and not his body), it is a straight and easy path towards fulfilling the mitzva

V'AHAVTA L'REI'ACHA KAMOCHA, to love every Jewish soul, from the greatest to the smallest because the concept of neshama reminds us that all of our souls are rooted in HaShem. Our bodies may separate us, but in essence, we are all brothers!

Rav Eliezer Biderman, in his Torah Wellsprings (Acharei-K'doshim 5783), tells the following story. Reb Daniel Frish zt'l, was once in Belgium and saw that before Shacharit, Rebbe Yankele of Antwerp zt'l, (later to become the Pshevorsker Rebbe) went around to all the guests in the Beit Medrash, asking whether he could serve them a coffee or help them in some another way. When he came to Reb Daniel Frish, Reb Daniel rebuked him and said, "It is improper to speak before Shacharit!" Reb Yankele replied, "Yungerman, do you think that when the poskim say one should say HAR-EINI M'KABEIL ALAI... before davening, it is merely a mantra? It means you should keep this mitzva literally!" Years later, Reb Daniel Frish commented that this conversation changed his entire outlook. For although it is an excellent practice not to speak before Shacharit, as that helps one daven with kavana, this shouldn't stop us from assisting a fellow Jew in need. Rebbe Eliezer Mendel of Lelov zt'l, said, "Helping your wife get the children dressed and ready for cheder is the best preparation for Shacharit."

This great moral teaching to love your fellow Jew and overlook his faults is movingly captured in this event told by Rav Soloveitchik about Rav Kook. In the Rav's only trip to Israel in 1935, he visited the secular kibbutz, Kinneret, and was offered some fruit. He politely refused, assuming that the required ma'asrot had not been taken. He was then informed that the local rav takes care of this mitzva and that, in addition, the kitchen was also strictly kosher. Eager for some explanation, the Rav was told that some years back, Rav Kook visited the kibbutz over a Shabbat. He brought with him some wine and challa. Upon arrival and asking if a minyan could be arranged for Shabbat, he was told that everyone would be working and would not be available. During Shabbat, the members of the kibbutz did not observe Shabbat at all. At the communal meals, Rav Kook joined with the kibbutz, made kiddush alone and ate his challa while all around the Shabbat laws were being violated. He did not say a word. The next morning, the situation was the same. Still, no word of rebuke from Rav Kook.

After Shabbat, when the kibbutz members joined for song and merriment, Rav Kook happily participated and danced with them. Soon, he found himself surrounded by crowds listening intently as he told them of his family and recounted his many

experiences. The next morning, upon leaving, everyone came out to bid the Rav farewell. Rav Kook responded and said, L'HIT-RA'OT, See you soon, and may we eat one meal together." The next morning, all the kitchen dishes were thrown out and the kitchen was made kosher. The sincere and passionate love that Rav Kook had for every Jew was so palpable and evident that without even uttering a single word of disapproval, the members of this Shomer HaTza'ir kibbutz elected to ensure that their kitchen would become completely kosher.

As the Sha'arei Yosher taught. when a Jew can expand his/her "I" to genuinely embrace the "Thou" and become a "we", good things can happen - even miracles! And it can all begin when, at the start of each day, we remember the Arizal's exhortation to recite, HAR-EINI M'KABEIL ALAI the mitzva of V'AHAVTA L'REI-ACHA KAMOCHA - and mean it!

To conclude with one final story.

A wagon driver saw the renowned Slonimer chassid, Reb Moshe Minder zt'l, walking along the roadside, and offered him a ride. Reb Moshe replied that he wanted to walk. However, the driver insisted he comes on the wagon, so Reb Moshe acquiesced. On the wagon, Reb Moshe asked, "Why was it so important for you that I ride with you?" The wagon driver pointed

to his ears and said, "These ears heard from Rebbe Moshe Kobriner that a day upon which you do not do chesed is a geshtorbiner tug, a dead day. The day is almost over, and I haven't yet done chesed. That's why I wanted you to ride with me." He didn't want the day to pass without doing chesed.

And neither should we! 🙌