



RABBI AARON GOLDSCHIEDER

EDITOR, TORAH TIDBITS
RAV, THE JERUSALEM SHUL
BAKA, JERUSALEM

Ahavat Yisrael: Heartfelt Love For Your Fellow Jew

(Midot Hara'aya, Ahava # 9)

LOVING YOUR FELLOW JEW

A well-known story is told about the founder of the Mussar Movement, Rav Yisrael Salanter when he was invited to be a guest at his disciple's table for the Friday night *seudah*. The student promised his master that everything will be carried out with the greatest level of exactitude to fulfill all the halachic requirements. Rav Yisrael made one strange condition with his dear disciple. He asked to lead the procedures of the meal. He agreed and Rav Yisrael joined his family for Shabbat *seudah*.

However, something seemed somewhat strange from the very outset. Rav Yisrael requested to immediately make Kiddush and skip over all of the Shabbat liturgy that preceded it. They then washed their hands and immediately ate. Rav Yisrael appeared to eat relatively quickly and immediately requested the second course and then dessert. Understandably, the student was surprised - is this the way the Shabbat meal is supposed to be?

Rav Yisrael then asked to have the housekeeper come to the table. He asked forgiveness for causing any inconvenience by rushing the meal. She responded by thanking the Rabbi and said that she wished it could be like that every Shabbat. She explained that she was a widow and desperately needed a livelihood,

and therefore needed to work over Shabbat. "On most Friday nights," she said, "I come home to my children and it is so late that they have already gone to bed and we are unable to be together on the night of Shabbat. But tonight, finishing early, I will be able to eat with my children."

When the housekeeper left Rav Yisrael turned to his student and said, "Now you understand why I hurried the meal. The greatest beautification of a mitzvah is when a person beautifies the mitzvot *bein adam le'chavero*. How careful must an individual be not to burden his friend." ("From the Desk of Mordechai Malka," Office of Rabbinate of Elad, Parshat Vayeira)

A FOCUS OF THE MUSSAR MOVEMENT

When Rav Kook eulogized Rav Yisrael Salanter, he made mention that one of the unique contributions that Rav Yisrael made in his teachings was reminding the Jewish world that acts of kindness and sensitivity to others require as much attention, and perhaps more, than one's exactness in mitzvot *bein adam le'Makom* (between man and God). (Mussar Avicha, translation Rabbi Joshua Gerstein, p. 207).

Rav Kook followed in Rav Yisrael Salanter's footsteps, placing enormous emphasis on the area of *bein adam le'chavero* (between a person

and his friend). Even when interacting with a fellow Jew who may be corrupt and sinful, Rav Kook advises that one perceive the potential and see the sanctity embedded within each person:

“It is proper to hate a corrupt person only for his defects, but insofar as he is endowed with a divine image, it is in order to love him. We must realize that the precious dimension of his worth is a more authentic expression of his nature than the lower characteristic that developed in him through circumstance. It is for this reason that the Talmud (*Pesachim* 49b) limits the permission to attack an *am ha-haretz* [a coarse person] to his back, like a fish, but not toward his “front.” (*Midot HaRa’aya* Ahava #9).

Rav Kook argued that the goodness in a person is the true reflection of their essence. A pure soul is embedded in every Jew that needs only to be revealed and refined. In this vein, he quoted a cryptic statement about the correct way to criticize a coarse individual - like cutting open a fish. The back of a person is symbolic of an exterior shell and the front symbolizes the *panim* (face) or *pe’nim* (insides). Attempting to extricate a person’s unseemly traits and actions has its place, but only when one is cognizant of the shining “face” and inner soul which is found in every Jew.

The above talmudic teaching comes to life in a beautiful episode involving one of Rav Kook’s foremost disciples, Rav Aryeh Levin. Rav Aryeh was famously known as the *tzadik* of Yerushalyim. He lived in the quaint area of Nachlaot, right behind the busy market of *Machane Yehudah*. There was a young man who grew up in the neighborhood whom Rav Aryeh knew well, but he felt that the young man was avoiding him, and he didn’t know why.

One day, they bumped into each other in the narrow alleys of Nachlaot, and Rav Aryeh confronted him and said, “I can’t help but feel

that you are avoiding me, tell me how you are?”

The young man sheepishly replied that it was true, he was avoiding the great Rabbi as he had grown up observant but had now chosen to walk away from observant life altogether. He said, “Rebbe, I was so embarrassed to meet you since I have taken off my kippah and am no longer observant.”

Rav Aryeh took the young man’s hand into his own and said, “My dear Moshe. Don’t worry. You know that I am a very short man. I can only see what is in your heart, I cannot see what is on your head.”

Reb Aryeh was teaching that we love others more when we choose to see their Godly soul and highlight their virtues over their faults.

BRURIAH’S LESSON TO RAV MEIR

A well-known talmudic passage tells the story of the revered sage Rabbi Meir who had violent neighbors who caused him tremendous anguish. He was at his wits end from the torment, so he prayed to God that they should die. (Berachot 10a)

His wife, Bruriah, a learned woman quoted numerous times in the Talmud, overheard his prayers and interjected. “Is the basis of your prayers the verse in Psalms where King David says, ‘Sinners will be destroyed from the earth and the wicked will be no more’?” (Psalms 104:35) she asked him. She suggested that the verse does not need to be read to say *sinner*s will be destroyed, but the *sins*. Rather than praying for the people who sinned to be destroyed, pray to God that their *wickedness* should disappear.

Rabbi Meir heard his wife’s wise words and took heed, praying that the neighbors’ evil ways should stop. God heard his prayers, and his formerly violent neighbors repented.

Rav Kook’s teaching above (*Midot Hara’aya* #9) echoes this lesson of Bruriah. The

distinction between Rabbi Meir's original prayer and his subsequent one is profound. It separates the person, who is -in essence - good, from the temporary evil that he or she may be engaging in at the moment.

Rav Kook's world-view was influenced by the thought of Chabad and the Baal HaTanya. It is not difficult to trace this idea back to a passage in the Tanya (Chapter 32) which teaches that one is required to love sinners, even while hating the evil that is in them: "And both the love and the hatred are truthful emotions in this case, [since] the hatred is on account of the evil within them, while the love is on account of the good hidden within them, which is the Divine spark within them that animates their Divine soul. For this spark of Godliness is present even in the most wicked of one's fellow Jews; it is merely hidden" (*Tanya* Chapter 32)

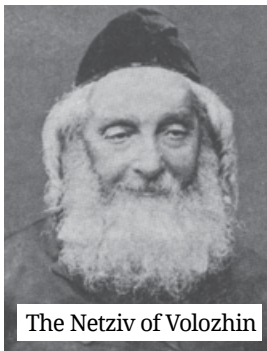
PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

How does one sensitize themselves to be compassionate and loving of others? Rav Kook suggested that we learn a lesson from the Sages who modeled how to argue in a way in which one side does not attack the other. The Talmud employs a unique term to describe the Sages debating in the study hall: *ba'alei trisin*, which literally translates as "masters of shields." Rav Kook explained that the Sages were careful to shield or to defend their position without diminishing the other side. Our tradition which teaches that there are seventy facets to the Torah (*Bamidbar Rabbah*, 13:16) emphasizes that there must be an openness to appreciating the worthiness of every side of the argument. (Ain Aya, Berachot Vol. 1, p. 111)

A LESSON FROM HIS REBBE

As a young man Rav Kook studied at the

Volozhin Yeshiva. He was a devoted and dear student of the Netziv, Rav Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin. In the context of learning to appreciate the opinions of others, the Netziv, in his classic work on the Torah, *Ha'amek Davar*, offers a brilliant comment in regard to the episode of Sarah urging Avraham to expel Yishmael from the home. Avraham is troubled by this and God



The Netziv of Volozhin

speaks to Avraham saying that he abides by the decision of his wife. The verse says *She'ma be'kola*, listen to her voice (Bereshit 21:12). The Netziv, commenting on that verse, points out that it does not say in the verse *le'kola*, to her voice, but rather, *be'kola*, **into** her voice. The Netziv explains that God did not merely desire Avraham to surrender to her

position. Rather, God was asking Avraham to delve deeper into her perspective on the matter, endeavor to appreciate her side of the argument, and only then concede to her position. (*Haamek Davar*, Bereshit 21:12)

The Netziv is emphasizing the importance of elucidating an opposing position, especially when their stance is for the sake of the good. It is of utmost importance that a relationship of deep respect is maintained even in the midst of a disagreement. ■



Rabbi Goldscheider's most recent OU Press Publication, "Torah United" on the weekly Parsha, can be ordered directly from Rabbi Goldscheider at aarong@ouisrael.org at a special price for Torah Tidbits readers.

TRANSFER YOUR OLD FILM/VIDEO'S
(All formats) In Quality to Digital

Preserve Family History from Fading

Michael 052.286.8626

Photography with feeling

Facebook.com/LDorot Photography

