

אהבת רעים

Love of Friends

It is well-known how great the love of friends is, so much so that our Sages commented on the verse (VaYikra 19:18), “.... and you shall love your friend as yourself.” – This is a fundamental principle of the Torah.” Our Sages have explained this concept (Shabbat 31a), “That which is despised by you, do not do unto others!” In proportion to the greatness of the benefit received, the evil inclination militates against a man every day to deny that good. And it does so to such an extent that as a result of our wrongdoings, specifically the sin of causeless hatred, Jerusalem is destroyed, the Temple is in ruins, and we have been exiled from our land. And still the satan “dances” among us and prosecutes us. Each man turns to his own profit and is not concerned with the downfall of his friend. There are even some who rejoice at each other’s downfall. Moreover, there are those who for the smallest advantage will “devour” their neighbor alive. Woe unto the eyes that see such things. Our eyes long for the fulfillment of our vision, the looking out for the redemption. But there is no redeemer as long as this attitude remains with us. Therefore, every person needs to be strong and awaken this love. The details of the love of friends have already been clarified in length and depth in the “Sefer HaBrit”. I am coming to be brief and say that a person needs to fulfill this concept by “staying away from evil and doing good”. The necessity of staying away from evil includes both speech and action.

In regards to speech, the guiding rule is: That which is despised by you, do not say. A person needs to be careful and refrain from either speaking to his friend or about his friend anything that he would not want others to say to him or about him. This includes gossip, harmful words, and similar speech. Similarly, one must stay away from acting maliciously to physically hurt his friend or to cause him any damage, the like of which he would not want others to do to him. One needs to look into this deeply, for the evil inclination diligently attempts to deceive him. A person needs to be especially careful when a potential loss of money is involved, for one is likely to decide in his own favor in pursuit of profit, even if it involves the monetary loss of his friend. Not for naught did our Sages say that a man is distinguished by his pocketbook (Eruvin 65b). Fortunate is the man who fears and loves G-d with all of his possessions and does not go astray after profit.

A person also needs to fulfill this command by “doing good” in speech and action. One should speak kind and proper words that gladden the hearts of men, such as good tidings and advice, removing “stumbling blocks” from their path, informing them of any potential danger, consoling them when they experience sorrow, and many similar things. In regards to action, one should perform deeds with his person and money as he would want others to do for him, i.e., to have compassion on him and to exert themselves to have pity upon him. So should he behave in order to perform kindness and to fulfill the mitzvah of loving your neighbor as yourself. Fortunate is the man who does this and embraces it. In accord with his pain will be his reward. In proportion to the greatness of his pain, he provides ever greater satisfaction to his Maker. Just as a father has mercy on his son, and a brother is

“born” at the time of need, so too must each man help his friend. All of us are the son of one man (Adam), like blood brothers. Just as a man has pity on each one of his limbs, likewise he should have pity on every member of the Jewish people, because all of us are like one person, like one body.

A man naturally loves himself, his son, and his brothers. However, in regards to his friend, if the situation might cause him monetary loss or extra effort, his self-love controls him. Especially in regards to a great mitzvah, the evil inclination overpowers him and causes him to violate his Master’s will in order to make him lose a great good. One needs to subdue his evil inclination, to have pity on the honor of his Maker, and to arouse his love. How fortunate are the Jewish people for their efforts, their forbearance of difficulties, and their expenditures for the sake of a mitzvah or good deed. Great is their portion! Yet, the problem is that there are significant mitzvahs which have no one who pursues them because they do not consider them to be so important. If our Sages said (Pirkei Avot 4:2), “One should run after a lighter mitzvah as a more severe one, because you do not know the reward for each commandment” – all the more so, for such an important mitzvah which includes the love of kindness, the love of fellow Jews, and the ways of peace, it is proper to pursue it as one pursues life itself. There is an innate drive which shows a person 49 ways to “purify the contaminated animal,” and to thus achieve his own personal benefit. In addition, there are several matters in which a G-d-fearing person is confused, and is unable to know in which direction there is light. Therefore, the best advice is to follow the words of the wise man who said (Avot 4:13), “Do not rely upon your understanding.” This is a fundamental principle in the entire

Torah, all the more so in monetary matters: One who goes to the Sages will become wise and comprehend the ways of life.

The primary fulfillment of the mitzvah of love is in the heart – that a person should not rejoice in the downfall of his friend. Rather, he must celebrate the success of his friend and be saddened by his pain, to the extent that he is motivated to pray for him. The way of acquiring this love is to take to heart the saying of our Sages (Chagiga 15b), “That even when the wicked are suffering, the Divine Presence suffers with them. What does the tongue say, etc.” Conversely, when a person is content, the Divine Presence is content. If so, a man who loves G-d should rejoice in the happiness of the Holy One, Blessed Be He and His Divine Presence, and be pained by their anguish. Furthermore, when a person is content and has wealth and property, it is impossible that he will not increase his mitzvahs and good deeds. The result will be a source of delight to our Maker. This is not true when a person is in pain – his heart is not with him, and he diminishes his service of G-d. Poverty does not preserve any good character trait, makes a person violate his Maker’s will, and causes him to reject the one who gave birth to him.

A wise man will understand from that which has been said, that one must wholly rejoice when he sees people performing the will of G-d, and be personally pained by those who violate G-d’s will. Even if he is deficient in his service of G-d, he should not desire that his friend should be the same, so that the calamity of the many be the consolation of fools. This can be compared to a matron who has ten sons whom the king commanded to provide and feed her, and to supply all her needs. A day came when one of the sons violated the rule and did not give his portion to his

mother. Even though he will surely be punished, nevertheless, any son who truly loves his mother and is distraught at her loss of the one son's contribution will certainly ask his brothers if they continued giving their share. If their answer is affirmative, it will be, at least, a partial consolation. If they all say that they betraye her just like the one son, his anguish will be great for his mother who cries and sighs for she remains hungry, thirsty, and bereft of everything. The analogy is self-explanatory. Furthermore, a person should be pleased about the success of his friend, because due to his material improvement there will be an increase in the performance of mitzvot and good deeds. This will enhance his own good, because his misdeeds will no longer tilt the universal scale to the side of demerit, for which he surely would be punished for all of the resulting evil. The increase of good resulting from his friend tilting the scale in favor of merit will create a "good day" from which he, too, will benefit.

Shlomo HaMelech said (Mishlei 10:12), "Hatred awakens ill-feelings and love conceals all wrongdoing." There are reasons for which hatred is awakened between a man and his brother – all of them are senseless! There is one kind of man who hates because the other party sinned against his person, money, or honor. Besides anything else, the Torah commanded (Vayikra 19:18), "You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge." Some explain that the reason is because a person is compelled in his action and is simply doing the agency of G-d, i.e. G-d told him to curse. It is the misfortune of his mazal (astrological predisposition) that punishment is delivered through him. Since this is so, there is no reason to hate his friend. He is like the axe in the hand of the woodchopper. "What can a living man complain

about? Each man has his own sins (that account for his adversity)!” There are those who hate because of jealousy, and think that their livelihood is diminished because of their friend. This is nothing more than a lack of faith, as we will explain in the entry, Emunah, G-d willing.

There is also the one who hates because he sees that the other person is not going on the right path. If for no other reason, a person should consider that he too is lacking in various deficiencies relative to his stature. Everyone is judged relative to his own status on the Divine balance scale. Perhaps his friend was overwhelmed by his evil inclination and violated G-d’s will. So, if G-d has bestowed upon him kindness and has guided him on the path of truth, should he not pay tribute to G-d, and be diligent in the minutest detail of the mitzvot according to his knowledge and understanding? He will unquestionably earn Divine assistance. However, he should not shame his friend or hate him in his heart. Hatred was not allowed except for an evil man who, even after we admonish him several times, remains in his rebellious state, angers our Father in heaven, and causes Divine grief. It is forbidden to hate any other person, for the tanna (Pirkei Avot 2:11) already pronounced a fitting condemnation, to the extent that he declared, “The hatred of other human beings takes the man out of this world.”

The greatest key to removing hatred is the implementation of the tanna’s statement (Pirkei Avot 1:6), “Give every man the benefit of the doubt.” Even if one’s eyes see the curse in the cursed, one should not blame him and detest him, since the way of a man is right in his own eyes and what should he have done? We have not but to pour our souls before G-d, that He provide good counsel

and guide him in the circles of righteousness, for the sake of His name. If a person will say, “Does not the Holy One, Blessed Be He punish a man for going according to the stubbornness of his heart and that which is right in his eyes, because he should have learned and did not?” You may answer that this applies only to someone who is difficult, for Heaven is exacting of him. However, one who is forgiving is forgiven for all of his misdeeds (Yoma 23a), because by the measure that one measures others, so is he measured by Heaven (Megilla 12b).

Moreover, a person must not hate his friend for not going on the right path. Because, if this is so, he must hate himself even more! Who is confident enough to say that he has reached the depth and breadth of his ability, and that everything he could do he accomplished as he should? As such, he is no better than his friend, and, perhaps his friend is better than he is according to his position, understanding, and ability. Well-known is the pronouncement of the wise man who would respect every person by saying, “If he is wiser than I, it is befitting to honor him because of his wisdom; if he is more foolish than I, it is proper to honor him because he is better than me – he sins by accident, but I, intentionally.” In this same fashion, one can suggest many similar comparisons. A living being must place upon his heart pure thoughts to remove hatred and to awaken love. His reward is intrinsic, and he increases the measure of good in the world.

It is true that our Sages, of blessed memory, said (Baba Metzia 33a), “If confronted with the choice of retrieving his own lost object or that of his teacher, his own comes first. Nevertheless, the Sages already commented that one who fulfills this dictum as is, will be “as is”. Rashi explains that if a person is always so exacting

in attaining his own benefit, he removes from himself the yoke of acts of kindness and charity, and, in the end, will be impoverished. Rather, a person should be prepared to suffer a small monetary loss in order that his friend does not lose a lot, that he profit greatly, or to save him from trouble. In the merit of his self-sacrifice, G-d will bestow upon this man His blessing.

The fundamental love of friends requires that one place himself in the person of his friend, such that even if his friend is not particular about his own honor and shame, nevertheless, he should think that if he was like his friend and possessed such character, he would want people to respect him, not speak any manner of harmful speech against him, and not offend him. This is the way he must treat his friend! This is the general principle of loving one's friend, and because of this, G-d will give strength to his nation, and G-d will bless his people with peace.

