

תורת אביגדור
הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha
Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

Sefer Devarim
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בעזהשי"ת

פרשת דברים

With Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l

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נא לא לקרוא בעת התפלה וקריאת התורה

Part I. Brotherly Love

EXITING THE MIDBAR

In *Sefer Devarim* we find the *Am Yisroel* approaching the end of their journey through the wilderness. They are finally exiting from that unique forty year era of עַם לְבָרָד יִשְׁכֵן, a nation that dwells alone, and they now begin to come in contact with the *mishpechos ha'adama*, the families of the world. During their few hundred year sojourn in *Mitzrayim* and in the *midbar*, many of their long lost cousins, *Moav*, *Amon*, *Edom*, and *Amalek*, had grown into large families, and then into big nations, and the *Am Yisroel* was now going to see them again.

Now, it is very important to point out at the outset of the lecture that coming into contact with others is a big responsibility. And that's because our relationships with others, our feelings for all these families of the world, are to be guided only according to the will of Hashem. How we love, who we love - even who we tolerate or won't tolerate - it's all according to the will of Hashem. Our feelings for *Edom* are expected to be different than our feelings for *Amon* and *Moav*. And for *Midian* it's something else; and for *Canaan* and *Amalek* it's something else altogether. We are

expected to shape our attitudes towards others according to the *ratzon Hashem*.

OUR LONG LOST BROTHER

And so, in this week's *parsha*, as the Am Yisroel passed near the nation of *Edom* for the first time, we pay close attention to the words of the Torah because we find something very queer here that is often overlooked. Surprisingly, the Torah describes our long lost cousins as brothers!

אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים בְּגְבוּל אֶחְיֶיכֶם בְּנֵי עֵשָׂו - "You are now approaching the border of *your brothers*, the sons of Eisav" (D'varim 2:4). And in case you missed it, a few *pesukim* later (2:8) we read again, וַנַּעֲבֹר מֵאֶת אֶחְיֵינוּ בְּנֵי עֵשָׂו - "And we passed by *our brothers*, the sons of Eisav."

Now, you might want to say that it's merely a form of speech, a sort of reminiscing of old ancestral ties. But Hakodosh Boruch Hu tells us that He means it *l'maisah* - it's *halacha l'maisah!* He commands us: לֹא תִתְעַב אָדָמִי בִּי אֶחְיֶיךָ הוּא - "You should not abhor the children of Eisav *because he is your brother*" (23:8). "Be careful with אֶחְיֶיכֶם; with *your brothers*. אַל תִּתְגַּדְּרוּ בָם - Don't antagonize them; don't provoke any trouble with your long lost brother" (2:5).

Now, that extra word "your brother" seems to us superfluous, maybe even inaccurate, because how much of a brother was *Eisav* anyhow? Yaakov Avinu had been very happy to shake off this brother - and now, when our people were encamped on the border of *Edom*, it was already many years after *Eisav* had parted ways from the *Bnei Yisroel*. Two hundred and seventy years of no contact between the families had passed and they had nothing in common anymore, except for a distant ancestor. Even today when we find somebody who comes from the same distant ancestor, it might be interesting, it might be a curiosity, but it doesn't enter our minds that we're blood brothers who must feel affection for one another.

USING EMOTIONS TO ACHIEVE ATTITUDES

And nevertheless, Hashem makes sure to emphasize that the *Bnei Eisav* are our brothers, and we should pay good attention to that. We're learning now that Hashem expected from the Am

Yisroel to shape an attitude towards the people of *Edom*, and in order for a mindset to be genuine it has to be grounded in feelings, in genuine emotions. I'll repeat that again because it's the foundation of what we'll be speaking about tonight. *Attitudes of the mind cannot be developed in a vacuum of emotion.* Without emotions, without attaching feelings to your thoughts, they remain just that - empty thoughts devoid of any meaning.

"Remember that they are your distant blood brothers," says Hashem. And by thinking of them in those terms, that's how you'll you be able to treat them the way I'm demanding from you." Even to such a simple command like *לֹא תִתְעַב אָדָמִי* - "I want you to develop an attitude of tolerance towards the *bonei Eisav*," Hashem added the words *כִּי אָהֳבֶיךָ הוּא* - "I want you to do so by reminding yourself that they're your family after all; even that nominal feeling of affection for distant family should be used as a stimulus to fulfill My command."

That's how it is - the Eskimos feel affection for all the other Eskimos and the Hutus love the Hutus. All those who are called McDougal feel a connection to one another because they all come from the same man, a fellow named Dugall who lived on the west coast of Scotland many years ago. They'll say "It's so far away, maybe five hundred years ago we were one family in Scotland, so what of it?" But it makes no difference. He's your brother - a distant brother, but a brother no less - and that's the most basic form of affection. It's minimal, it's very little, but it's still something.

And Hakodosh Boruch Hu, by means of the extra word *אָהֳבֶיךָ*, taught the Am Yisroel to grab tightly onto that minimal feeling of brotherly kinship - to make use of that ancient "Scottish brotherly love," and use it as a catalyst, a stimulus, for generating the attitude towards the *Bnei Eisav* that He wants from us.

THE ELUSIVE MITZVAH

Now, this extra word in the Torah is quite remarkable because the lesson it teaches provides us with a key to fulfilling a *mitzvah* that is spoken about very often during this time of the year. It's something we talk about a lot, but no matter how much we speak about it, it's not being fulfilled. It's a *mitzvah* that is

difficult to fulfill properly, and that's the *mitzvah* of loving our fellow Jews, וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֵךְ כְּמוֹךְ.

Ahh! The difficult subject of learning to love your fellow-man! But it's the one subject on which it pays to concentrate. You remember when the prospective *ger* came to Hillel, and he requested that the entire Torah should be taught to him while standing on one foot? So what did Hillel say? He told the *ger*, "No problem; pick up your foot, and let's get going." And then Hillel told him the following words. מֵאֵי הֵעֲלֶךְ סְאֵנִי לְחֵבְרֶךְ לֹא תַעֲבִיד - "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man. Loving your fellow Jew, וְאִיִּךְ פִּירִיִּשָׁא, וְזוּ כָּל הַתּוֹרָה כְּלֵהּ, - that is the whole Torah, - and the rest is an explanation, וְזוּלָּה גְמוֹר, - so go learn the rest of the Torah." Because the whole Torah is founded on this *yesod* of loving your fellow Jew.

Now, when people hear this story, they think it was some sort of salesmanship; Hillel was trying to win over the *ger*, so he gave him some easy type of solution, an easy *mitzvah*. But the truth is that Hillel was choosing a *mitzvah* that is a foundation for being part of the Am Yisroel, one of the most important opportunities for perfection this *ger* would have as a Jew. The *mitzvah* of וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֵךְ כְּמוֹךְ, to achieve a genuine love of the Am Yisroel, is one of the prime functions of our lives.

AHAVAS YISROEL TAKES WORK

We're talking now about *avodas Hashem*, a *mitzvah d'oraisah*, but who tries it? Of course, we're willing to say that we agree with the idea. Maybe someday we'll even come around to it. But we won't; there's no chance of coming around to it unless we start doing something about it. You have to understand how far away we really are from even beginning such an *avodah*. It's not simple; you have to exert yourself to be an *oheiv Yisroel*; and if you don't, then you're remiss in the obligation Hashem expects of you.

So when you go outside later and they'll ask you, "What did Rabbi Miller speak about tonight?" so you'll say, "He told us to love our fellow Jews." They'll laugh at you: "What's the *chiddush*? For that you went to a lecture? Who doesn't know that?!" But the truth is *who does it?! Who even makes time to think*

about *how* to do it? If he loves, he loves and if not, not - what could he do already? He's *patur*, he thinks.

But the truth is that you're not *patur* at all. Those three words, וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֵךְ כְּמוֹךְ mean that you have a big career ahead of you. And it's a career that's hard to achieve - it won't happen by itself. We're going to have to train ourselves; we're going to have to work with a program for *ahavas Yisroel*.

THE LESSON OF TISHA B'AV

So the question is, how do you start working on that? How do you start working on this tremendous career of loving our fellow Jews? You're not going to be able to love somebody in a vacuum. You have to seek some motivation that will make it easier to like people. Because no matter how many *Tish'ah B'Avs* go by, no matter how many times you've heard *derashos* about the great virtue of loving your fellow Jew, nothing will help if it remains just empty words. You're *nichuyav* to find *reasons* to love a fellow Jew - and to use those reasons to feel an affection, a devotion; something real. You can't merely talk about *ahavas Yisroel* philosophically, without feeling, and expect to get anywhere.

That's the great lesson in the word *achicha* of our *parsha* - if for the *mitzvah* of לֹא תִתְעַב אֶדְמִי Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants us to make use of the emotion of *achicha*, all the more so should we make use of those emotions in order to come to a genuine feeling of *v'ahavta* towards our fellow Jews. It's important to make use of every means available in order to facilitate and increase the love that Hashem wants you to feel. Instead of being cold philosophers, stoics who are ashamed of emotions, the Torah encourages the employment of natural emotions in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֵךְ כְּמוֹךְ.

TWO TYPES OF BROTHERS

And this is the reason why Hashem refers to our fellow-Jew as an אָחִיךָ repeatedly throughout the Torah. Hashem is teaching us how we should view another Jew - as a genuine brother, a thousand times, a million times more than the feelings of brotherhood that Hashem demanded from the *Am Yisroel* as

they passed by their distant cousins, the *Bnei Eisav*. “He’s your distant brother,” says Hashem, “and you cannot forget that kinship and turn your back on him.”

If towards an Edomite, a descendant of our ancestor’s brother, we must feel an emotion of brotherhood, then how much more, how many more thousands of degrees of brotherhood should we feel towards a fellow Jew, a fellow-Jew who we are commanded to love! If such a brother, a brother that we were happy to get rid of, is still considered a brother after all these generations, then *kal v’chomer ben b’no shel kal v’chomer*, should we consider as brothers those who walk together with us on *derech Hatorah*, dedicated to the ideal of serving Hashem.

Because when we talk about the *Bnei Yisroel*, a completely new dimension is added; a tremendous attitude is included in the concept of אָחִיךָ, a fellow-Jew, much more than by any other nation. Because it’s not a brother like *Eisav* who is merely connected to us by blood, by DNA. A fellow Jew is a brother who is עִמְיִתְךָ, he’s בתורה ובמצוות. Chazal tell us that אָחִיךָ means אָחִיךָ בְּמִצְוֹת, “your brother in *mitzvos*.” It’s not merely a brother of the same ancestor; it’s a brother of the same *mind*! A brother living for the same purpose!

And so, we should begin to reconsider our attitude toward our Jewish brothers, our blood brothers wherever they are. No matter how far away they live, and no matter how much we feel disconnected from them, we have to make efforts to arouse our emotions to an actual affection - a warmth and love for our fellow Jews.

Part II. Career of Loving

THE OPPORTUNITIES ARE ENDLESS

Now I’m far away from this myself. I’m saying this not for you; I’m listening to it myself as I’m saying it. Maybe a little bit will stick to me. But I let you listen along with me because at least we have to learn it - at least *that*. We have to make an effort, a career of loving our fellow brothers-in-arms. When you pass by

homes where *frum* Jews are living, you have to think that Hashem says that the people in that home are *your* people. You have to think these thoughts: "These are my brothers and sisters and I love them." When you walk into Mirrer Yeshiva, or Chaim Berlin, or when you look at a *kehilla* of *frum* Jews anywhere, and you see Jews who are *shomrei mitzvos*, then you have to work on loving them intensely.

When you see a Jew, a *frum* Jew, from the distance. Immediately you should feel an affection for him - you should feel that he is Hakodosh Baruch Hu's chosen one. He represents the holy nation. He's fulfilling the laws of the Torah like nobody else in the world. Who else keeps the Torah if not the *frum* Jews? We're the ones that don't eat pork or snails! We're the ones that fast on Yom Kippur! We keep the things in the *chumash*. Did the people of *Edom* ever keep the Torah? Did the people in *Amon* do *mitzvos*? Maybe *Moav*? No! Nobody else kept the laws of the *chumash* except we. And therefore, a Jew who is observant and demonstrates it with pride, that man is your brother. And we have to work on that feeling with all our *koach* until we gain an absolute love for that Jew.

We're talking now about a remarkable opportunity for success in this world. It's something you can practice all the time in the street. You see a fellow Jew, so what should you think? "He's my brother, this man. He puts on *tefillin* after all. That's enough for me!" When you see a Jew in the street with a covered head, whether it's a black hat or a *yarmulke*, or a woman with a *sheitel*, you're already sold out to that person. "He covers his head like me! He's ours. He's wearing a *yarmulke*, a cap, whatever he has; if he covers his head, he belongs to us." And you need to love him like a brother.

And that can only happen if you think about those things that will stimulate your feelings for him. If he's really a brother, if you spend a little time thinking about *how* he's your brother, so you'll begin to feel a warmth towards him. It's not "love" yet, but you're already on the way.

DON'T LOVE EVERYONE

Now some people are so ambitious that they feel it's not important enough, it's too small a task to love only your fellow Orthodox Jews. Here's a man who tells me he *loves the whole world*. He loves the Hutus and the Eskimos too. He loves everyone!

But the truth is that he *doesn't love anyone*; even his blood brother he doesn't love! He hates him and hasn't spoken to him in ten years. Sometimes his mother and father too. He can't get along with his neighbors either. But the Hutus in Africa who would eat him for lunch if they were hungry, *them* he loves! Why not? It doesn't cost him money. And for the same price he can love the whales and the trees.

I emphasize this point because I have to warn you against a certain infection that has entered the minds of many *frum* Jews - and that is to use the word love in a way that means nothing at all. Today people love everybody; and what that means is that they love nobody - it's just empty words. It's like the liberals; they don't love anybody - it's all *sheker v'chazav*. They put out stamps now, postage stamps, that say "LOVE." Love, love, love, they say, but it's nothing at all. If you "love everybody" then it means you're not serious about putting real effort into this *avodah*.

Now, I know that it's difficult for us to think this way. Many of us recoil when we hear such a thing because our minds are saturated with the *kefirah*, the atheism of the outside world. People think like the world thinks! Liberalism, humanism - *everyone* has to be loved. And that's why it's good you came here tonight.

HERE WE MEAN BUSINESS

In this place, we mean business when we say love. When we say that we want to love our brothers, we mean it. We want to *try* at least. We're actually going to try to love our fellow Jews! And at least the little bit we achieve, however much it is, will be genuine; an *ahavas Yisroel* the way Hakodosh Boruch Hu expects from us. And if we succeed in achieving even a little bit, that's worth more than all the *fakerei* of the liberals.

And so, it's necessary to generate an attitude of love for your fellow Jews. It's not easy; I know it's not easy. Because there is always competition and rivalry and friction. It's not a simple thing at all to really love your fellow Jews because people are interested only in themselves. And to train yourself to think about somebody else *in terms of affection*, is a very difficult matter; it's something that is far away from people's minds. That's the plain truth. And therefore it's a tremendous achievement if you would begin to actually concentrate on this function of learning how to love your fellow Jews.

Now, I won't tell you that all the *Bobover* should become *Satmerer* or the *Satmerer* should become *Bobover*, but in *Satmer* all the Jews should be united behind the *Satmerer* Rov. In *Bobov*, all the Jews should be united behind the *Bobover* Rov. All should be united! In every *yeshiva*, you should be loyal to your *rosh yeshiva*. It's not everything yet - you're not loving all frum Jews yet - but it's a start - you're using the stimulus of camaraderie to begin loving other Jews.

Oheiv es sh'cheinuv. Even your neighbors you have to love! That's something new to most people - you have to learn to love your neighbors. Here you have a neighbor, a quiet fellow. He doesn't bother you, he doesn't call the Buildings Department on you, so you don't even think about him. That's called *ahavas Yisroel*? You don't hate him, OK, but is that called loving your fellow Jew?! How could you live next door to a man for years - for years! - and you don't even like him yet. You tolerate him maybe, but that's for *Edom*; it's not enough for your fellow Jew. The truth is you can love him just because he's a quiet neighbor! He lent you his drill once?! Even better! You can love a man with an intense love for being an *ish chesed* if only you would put your mind to it.

THE REBBI'S PROGRAM

I was once speaking to one of my great teachers in Europe. And he said that the way to work on this is to pick one man. One man! תַּפְסֵת מְרַבָּה לֹא תַפְסֵת - "If you take hold of too much at once, you won't be able to do it." You can't do it to everybody. You have to start out with a system, one step at a time, because to love *all people, all of a sudden*, is not real love. And it's impossible too. So

what you're going to do is pick one Jew. And make up your mind that you'll specialize on him.

And it should be someone who is easier to love. It shouldn't be the worst man in the whole *beis hamedrash*, in the *yeshiva*. Pick someone who's easy to love. A nice looking frum Jew, someone who's friendly to you, and make *him* the object of your practice. It'll be less of a *nisayon* that way. Start working on liking him. He doesn't have to know - Don't tell him! Don't tell him anything but you should spend time thinking about him.

USE ANYTHING YOU CAN

Now, don't tell that to somebody outside. They won't understand; they might even ridicule it. That's always how it is - those who want to be true *ovdei Hashem* appear to be silly in the eyes of those who don't think. But here we're willing to say the things that others think is ridiculous as long as it brings us closer to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. His necktie looks good on him? Maybe you like the color of his hair? He smiles at you? It doesn't matter what it is - *anything* that will stimulate your feelings of affection toward him, grab it and use it to love him more. And little by little it will enter into your heart and you'll gain a certain warmth for that person. And that warmth, as little as it is, is a tremendous achievement. That's why we came into this world.

If a *tzadik* is good looking we should utilize that and love him all the more. Don't say, "I don't care about his face. All I care about is *machshava*, the things he has to say." No, you should love him all the more because of his face. If he's a beautiful *tzaddik* so Hashem wants you to use that to love him even more. You're *michuyav* to love him more - you're obligated to use those emotions to love him more.

I had a *rebbeh* - one of my *rebbehs* in Slabodka - who was a very handsome man. He used to say a *shmooze* an hour and a half twice a week. And if you stood there and looked at his face, it was entrancing. He had a beautiful face. A very handsome man. And he spoke very well by the way. And he had what to say too! But the fact that he looked so good - it was a pleasure to look at him - it enhanced my love for him.

If you see a nice looking Jew - not only is he a *sheiner yid* in his *pnimiyus*; he fulfills everything and he leads a decent life - in addition to that, he's nice looking; so that's an incentive, a stimulus you should make use of.

LOVING CLOSE FAMILY

I'll explain that some more because for some people who are hearing this for the first time, it grates on their nerves; they think it's too silly for them. I'll give you an example. A son and a daughter - everyone has a certain affection for a son or a daughter. But because of that natural affection, you have a *chiyuv* to nurture that love, he's a Jew too after all. Don't say, "I won't be partial like that; I won't fulfill the mitzvah of *וְאָהַבְתָּ בְּמוֹךְ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךְ* and love my son more than anybody else." Just the opposite - because Hashem has given you that bond of kinship you must nourish that bond. Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, "You have to utilize this natural love and nourish it more and more. I want you to increase your love for your children by taking that natural emotion and being *michazeik* it, making it stronger and stronger."

When you have a friend whom you like, and you see that this friend has a nice clean face, or he has nice looking eyes, that causes you to like him even more. So you shouldn't say, "No, I'm going to ignore his *chitzoniyus*; I'm going to love him *only* because Hashem wants me to love a fellow Jew." No; you should make use of any *gashmiyus'dige* stimulus that can cause you to like him. Say - "I love him. He looks so nice, my friend. He dresses so nicely, he always looks good. He even has a nice pair of glasses." Even eyeglasses can be used as a ladder to climb up to a love of a fellow Jew.

Let's say you look at a man and you like his necktie. Now, a necktie is nothing. You can change neckties, a new necktie - it's nothing. But you look at him and yes, you like him because he dresses well, because he looks refined. You have to grab onto whatever you can to feel some affection for your fellow Jew. And by doing that you're getting closer and closer to the feeling of love that Hashem wants you to have towards *achicha*.

Part III. How to Love

LOVING A PERSONALITY

Now, nice looks and neckties are valuable stimulants for this *avodah*, but the truth is that if you'll try to think about a person's *middos tovos*, you'll be surprised that there isn't a person who doesn't have some good in him, some exceptional good in him. Among the *shomrei Torah* everyone has some good qualities. I had a rebbe once, a great rebbe, and he once told us that a person is not one thing, he's a bundle of things. It was sixty years ago that I heard him say that - I remember it like yesterday. "A person is not one *middah*," he said, "He's a bundle of *middos*." So one thing might not be to your liking, but something else is good in him. And therefore you cannot form an opinion just in general about a person. A person is a big bundle of character traits; he's *not* just one thing.

So in case you can't love the person entirely, you can learn to love at least one aspect of his personality. Let's say he davens well. So love him for that. Love that man because he davens well. There's a man who davens in our shul and I can tell you that I love this man for twenty years already. Just because of the way he stands *shemoneh esrei!* Just because of that, I feel a real love towards him. Another person learns well. He comes to the shul to learn and he doesn't waste any time talking. He opens his *seforim* and gets to work on the *sugya*. He doesn't know, but I'm watching him every day, and I love him. Another person gives *tzedakah*. And another one is quiet and polite. Find what you can in each person. You'll be surprised, you'll be surprised! People are full of good things but if you say love, love, love; if you say וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֵךְ a thousand times it won't do much for you until you think about a person's good qualities and use them as stimuli to begin feeling affection for him.

The *shomrei Torah*, no question that they're full of good things. They're raising up families of children who will be *oivdei Hashem*. They're upholding the *batei knesses* and the *yeshivoos* with their money and their participation. They themselves are *mekayeim mitzvos* every day. There are so many reasons why you should love these people. Here's a man who smiles at people! I love him

for that! And another man knows how to speak to his wife, he always treats her with the utmost respect. It's easy to love a man like that. And I do! I do!

EVERYONE HAS SOMETHING

It's so important to develop an appreciation of the good qualities of the people around you. I'll give you a practical *eitzah* for accomplishing this - an *eitzah* that's been tried and tested. One of the most practical programs for success in this endeavor is to attach a good *middah*, a *ma'aleh*, to all the people you know. Your friends, your neighbors, your coworkers, everyone has *something* that makes them special. Every frum person has good things in him, no question about it. He has good qualities. And so you have to study the good qualities.

And you shouldn't forget about your wife either. You have to love your wife! Of course your wife has a bundle, a big bundle of things that you can love, but you have to think about them if you expect to create a genuine attitude of love. She once made a good supper for you, a good breakfast for you - ooh ah, that's a good reason to love your wife. And she does it all the time! She's cleaning the home, she's taking care of the children, she washes your clothes - a husband who wants to fulfill the mitzvah of וְאָהַבְתָּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְרַעַךְ כָּמוֹךָ must spend time thinking about these things.

And a wife as well should be thinking about all the good of her husband. He brings in money to the house for whatever they need - and even though he is not always able to supply her with *all* her needs, but she remembers the good things that he did. He goes to work every day, he doesn't loaf. He goes to *shiurim*, he goes to *minyan*, whatever he does, he does something. And she has to keep in mind all these things and appreciate him.

SEARCHING FOR MOTIVATIONS

It's a very important subject we're discussing now - how to motivate yourself to like this man, and this man, and that man, and that man. You're going to have to think about some good thing that will motivate this love. And if you'll be willing to donate a minute or two of your time to think about a person, you'll discover good qualities that will make it easier to love him.

Absolutely. Try to like a person because of his *ma'alos* - whatever they are - and little by little it will enter into your heart and you'll gain a certain warmth towards that person. And that warmth as little as it is, it's a tremendous achievement.

Even the most simple Jew has many beautiful *middos* that should encourage your *ahavas Yisroel*. We come into contact with all kinds of people, and the way to love them all is by ignoring the bothersome things and instead finding the good that makes him easy to love.

Here's a man, a very nervous fellow. And he argues with people in the *beis haknesses*. He's arguing with the people who sit on both sides of him. "You're taking up too much space." "You're moving too close to me." "Keep in your seat." He pushes your *siddur* away; a very nervous fellow. And he looks like a nuisance, like a very big nuisance.

But if you would take a few minutes to think about him you'll discover that he's an idealist. The man comes every day on time to the *beis haknesses*. Every day! And he tries his best to support his family - it's not easy making a living. And what's he working for? He's not lining his pockets. He's working hard to pay *schar limud*, to raise his children *b'derech hatorah* and to support the *yeshivos*.

EVERYONE DESERVES LOVE

And if you talk to him privately you'll see that there's so much to love. I spoke with him and I was amazed to find out that this man was a fighter for *yiddishkeit*. He came from a home where there was no *yiddishkeit* and he forsook the ways of his family. He kept Torah and *mitzvos* all his life, by himself, against the wishes of his father and mother. It's not easy to do such a thing. He was *moired* against his family to serve Hashem! I came to respect him greatly. I saw what a mistake I had made about him at first and I began to love this man.

It's true, this fellow was a nuisance. He couldn't get along with anybody on all sides of him. But when you come to know him, you see that he's a very important personality. It's easy to love him when you study the good in him. Just because he has a

certain nature, he's a fussy fellow, he doesn't deserve to be loved?! That's his nature; Hakodosh Boruch Hu made him that way. And despite those quirks, you have to recognize his *ma'alos*, and come to respect him. And after a while, if you're willing to spend time on it, you'll admire him; and then a certain love develops toward him. That's a very big achievement! And you should know now that you're living for a purpose if you train yourself to think that way.

It's laboratory work. It takes time. But as you generate some love for him, little by little you'll come to really love him. You'll actually begin to love one Jew! *Mazel Tov!* You did it. You're forty years old and you finally love somebody besides yourself. It was worth coming into this world just for that!

And the girls too. When you go to your girls' school tomorrow, you pick one girl – don't tell her anything – just think, "I want to be *m'kayeim* וְאַהֲבַת לְרַעַךְ and I'm going to work on loving this one girl." Say it with your mouth, quietly, "Chanaleh, I love you." You're not going to school tomorrow; so בְּשֵׁעַת הַדְּחָק you can think about your own mother, if you have nobody else to work on. Your father is also good. Nothing wrong with loving your parents! There's a lot to love in a mother and father - a lot of things to think about. Only that you have to get busy working on it. You have to start somewhere!

START SLOWLY

And so we come back now to my *rebbe's* advice - one person at a time. Pick one man and dedicate to him two minutes a week. For two minutes a week, work on it, think about him. Think about all the *ma'alos* you could think of and you'll be amazed at what it will accomplish for you. And in case you won't go ahead and do it further, so at least once in your life you loved a fellow Jew – thirty years from now you'll be able to look back and boast, "When I was younger I tried once to work on וְאַהֲבַת לְרַעַךְ בְּמוֹךְ. Yes, I worked on it once and I loved my fellow Jew." And you'll be exceptional because nobody else did it. Nobody else except for you did such a thing. They said the words but it never entered into their minds at all. They never thought about *how* to do it. But you at least tried.

That's how you get started. And once you love one Jew a little bit, it'll spread to others too. Once you get started, you'll learn how to do it, and you'll be able to move on to loving the next one, and the next one and so on and so on. But first you have to start with one, you have to work on one person. And don't tire out. Don't lose your grip on this *avodah*. Two minutes every week you can dedicate to this person. And soon you'll begin to understand what *ahavas Yisroel* really feels like.

And if you keep it up, then little by little, it will begin to spread. It's contagious. Once you learn to love one Jew intensely, then maybe the other Jew also; why not? Once you've trained your mind to think lovingly towards another person besides yourself, you'll see that it'll spread. You'll realize that you're starting to look at people differently. And בְּדֶרֶךְ שְׂאֵדָם רוּצָה לְלַכֵּת מוֹלִיכֵי אֹתוֹ, Hashem will provide you the opportunities to keep loving the *Am Yisroel*.

TRIED AND TESTED

I did it once. Years ago when I used to work on *mussar* I did this. In Slabodka I was staying with a certain family, a simple Jew, a butcher. Plain ordinary people. I made it my business to fall in love with the family. Every day I would walk by myself in the woods thinking about how I could love the husband, how I could love the children, how I could love everybody in the family. I spent a lot of time thinking about them. And when I would walk into the home, I would say certain words to make them feel good, to make them happy. I would do whatever I could to help them. I davened for them every day! This was in the olden days, when I was in Slobodka and I still had a *shaychus to mussar*; so I worked diligently on the *middah* of loving them.

It's not a small thing you're hearing tonight. It's a career! But you have to be serious, of course. You have to not only hear it, you have to practice it. Even if you only do it a little bit, it's a tremendous achievement. If you'll think about it once a week, once a week for two minutes, on that one person - and don't change, stick to the same person - until finally you develop a certain respect for him. And then, if you won't give up, you develop a certain warmth for him, and then a certain love for that

person! And now you know that you came into this world for a purpose, and you're fulfilling the purpose of your life.

THE SECRET OF AHAVAS YISROEL

And the pinnacle of this great career is understanding the *reason* why this mitzvah is so important: We love our fellow Jews because we are trying to emulate Hashem. Hashem is *oheiv amo Yisroel*; Hashem loves His people. That means He loves your neighbors, and He loves your boss, and He loves your wife, and He loves that *nudnik* in shul. He loves all *shomrei mitzvos*, the whole frum community. Whether they're from a different group, a different *shtiebel*, a different *rebbeh - sefardim, Ashkenazim*, it makes no difference; Hashem loves all *shomrei mitzvos*, and He expects us to walk in His ways, to fulfill *v'halachta b'drachav*, and love His people just like He does.

We should think that way about every single Jew. Not in general, in a way that's abstract. You'll say, "Yes, in general, all Jews, I love. I love all of them. But when it comes to *this Jew*, no, not this one." "He's from a different *shtibel*," you might think. He's not in your neighborhood, maybe not your *nusach*, maybe he's a *Sefardi* or a *Teimani*. Maybe he's a Russian Jew or a Polish Jew, so you think, "Not him, not him." No, nothing doing! If he's from the *zera yaakov*, then he's yours!

There is nothing Hashem loves more in the world than the offspring of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov. *Nothing* compares to Hashem's love for you. And who is "you"? You could be the most foolish fellow; a fellow with all faults. Ugly, slow-witted, nothing to love. No matter! Hashem loves that person with an intense and fiery love. מִים רַבִּים לֹא יִכְלֹוּ לְכַבּוֹת אֶת הָאֵהָבָה וְנִהְרֹת לֹא יִשְׁטַפּוּהָ - "Torrents of water will never extinguish that love that Hashem feels for our nation. That's what *Shir Hashirim* says. The love of Hashem for a Jew is so intense that we can not even think of measuring the heat of that love that He has for each individual.

EMULATING HASHEM

And therefore, any feeling of affection that you generate in your mind for a fellow Jew, is an emulation of how Hashem

Himself is thinking. The more you love a Jew, and the more Jews you love, the more you are walking in the ways of Hashem.

You're thinking: "These people are more important than anything in the universe. And Hashem loves them intensely!" It's a *yesod ha'emunah!* The second greatest principle in the Torah - after the principle that Hashem is the Borei - is that Hashem is *Oheiv Amo Yisroel*. The whole universe is nothing compared to one from Jew!

Hakadosh Baruch Hu is so excited over the *tzaddikim* that he speaks about them always. עיני השם אל צדיקים - Hashem's eyes are on the *tzaddikim*, he looks at them all the time and He sees the *ma'alos* in them. Now *tzaddikim* can have faults too. אין צדיק בְּאֵרֶץ - No *tzaddik* is perfect.

And yet, it says השם אהב צדיקים - Hashem loves *tzadikim*. And so our job now is to find out who are the people He loves. So now some people they come from Crown Heights, so they will say the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Hashem loves the Lubavitcher Rebbe. If you come from Monsey, certain parts of Monsey, Hashem loves Reb Yaakov Kaminetzky. If you come from the East Side you'll say Hashem loves Reb Moshe Feinstein. If you come from Williamsburg, Hashem loves the Satmar Rebbe. And in my mind there's no doubt that they're all right. But it's not enough for us.

THE TZADDIK NISTAR

"Hashem loves *tzadikim*" - you know what that really means? He loves the Jews who live in Crown Heights, *plain Jews!* He loves the plain Jews who live in Monsey and Williamsburg. They're the *tzadikim!* *Tzadikim* means people who keep the Torah, the *shomrei mitzvos*. It doesn't say השם אהב חסידים, that Hashem loves only the *chassidim*. *Chasidim*, that's already a *madreigah*. It says לפנים משורת הדין, someone who does the *mitzvos* עם קונו, if he does beyond the line of duty, that's a *chossid*. But *tzadikim*, that means plain observant Jews. Those are the ones Hashem loves, and those are the ones we have to love as well.

Now, it's a big order already! To love all observant Jews, that's already a career! And so, the wise man emulates Hashem and concentrates on a person's beautiful character traits and

ignores the *middos* that are less appealing; he does whatever he can to develop a genuine warmth for his fellow *tzaddik* and slowly but surely he grows in *Ahavas Yisroel*.

Ahavas Yisroel is the big success of life. And that success is the biggest favor you can do for yourself. That's the greatness of a man. You're doing yourself the biggest favor when you learn to be an *oheiv Yisroel* because by loving your fellow Jews you're really loving yourself. The biggest success is not what you do for other people; it's what you achieve in the perfection of your own character. And the more you become an *oheiv Yisroel*, you're gaining such perfection, such greatness, that you become tied up to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. You're a partner with Him. Just like He loves the *Am Yisroel*, you're standing at His side and together with Him you're loving the *Am Yisroel*. And אין הקדוש ברוך הוא אוהב אלא מי ש'אוהב ישראל - Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, "I love you because I love only those who love My people" (Mesillas Yesharim Perek 19). And because of the overwhelming love that Hashem has for a *Yisroel*, when you walk in the way of Hashem and love His people, you acquire a merit that will give you reward and happiness in *Olam Habah* forever and ever.

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Q&A

With
Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l



Q:

What practical counsel can be given to a *ben Torah*, or to anybody else, to aid him in building up his self confidence?

A:

Self confidence must be built up on the basis of good sense - and good sense means when people understand the issues of life. When you don't understand what's important in life, so sometimes you become frustrated because you are envious of things that are worthless. You have criteria that are meaningless and you allow yourself to be discouraged because you don't measure up to these criteria.

But suppose you learn and understand how important it is to know Torah. Let's say you learn a *perek gemara* and you know it well inside; you can say it without hesitation. Maybe even two or three *perakim*. Then you know you're somebody! As you walk on the avenue, you are *משכמו ולמעלה*, you know you're something; from your shoulders up, you're higher than anyone else. It makes no difference what others think because you know what's really important and that gives you self confidence.

However, if you don't know what Torah means, if you don't appreciate the greatness of Torah, you can be a big *lamdan* and still you'll cringe in the presence of *amei ha'aretz*. You can be a big *oived Hashem*, but if you don't appreciate your greatness then you'll have no self-confidence. It's because you have no criteria. When people know that righteousness, decency, *emes*, politeness, *chessed* and *yiras shamayim* are above all, that they are the jewels of a man's character and of a woman's character, then these people can hold their heads high in pride knowing that they are the ones who are considered important in the world.

Therefore, self confidence has to be built on values. You must learn the true values and aspire to gain them. If you are a Jew, that should be the first basis for self confidence, "I am from the Am Hashem!" If somebody never learned to respect himself as a Jew, he'll be bashful; he'll try to hide his identity among the *umos ha'olam*, when he comes among gentiles or among irreligious Jews. But when somebody appreciates what's important, when he learns what it means to be chosen, the *bechirai Hashem* - the priests of Hakodosh Boruch Hu, the ones that Hakodosh Boruch Hu and has elevated among all the Nations *Asher bochar bonu mikol hoamim* He elevated us among all the nations; once a person understands that, so every Jew has a reason to be proud. It's only those who don't understand that, who don't have the true criteria, those are the ones who are lacking in self confidence.

TAPE #598

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