



KIRUV RECHOKIM: NOT JUST FOR PROFESSIONALS

We find ourselves well into Sefer Bereishis, and I believe there are no biblical stories, only Bible lessons. Why doesn't the Torah, our Constitution, begin with *hachodesh hazeh lachem* (this month is for you — Shemos ch. 12) and its flow of mitzvos? After all, other constitutions do not provide any biographical material regarding its authors or their contemporaries. Why the details of the lives of the Avos and Yosef and his brothers? This is much more than *d'rosh vekabel s'char* (study and receive reward). As a prerequisite to the 613 laws of the Torah, the Torah provides a picture, a road map of how to live our lives with the distinctive laws of Shabbos, kashrus, and not charging interest on loans one to another.

Interestingly, the Navi Yeshayah called Avraham Avinu “*ohavi*” (41:8), meaning “the one I love.” Why is he rewarded with this most honorable title? I believe that as Rashi teaches (Bereishis 18:1), *ve'atah siman livanecha*, Avraham is the model for his descendants, in that everyone desires to be a beloved of Hashem. So how do we achieve this honorable title? The Chafetz Chaim, in his introduction to the sefer *Chomas Ha-Das*, postulates that Avraham is called *ohavi* because he fulfilled the obligation/privilege of *ve'avavta es Hashem Elokecha* (you shall love Hashem Your G-d), understood by the Talmud, *Yoma* 86a, and by the *Sifri* as making Hashem beloved to the masses. Others should come to love G-d by observing our actions. The

verse describing who Avraham took with him on his journey to Canaan (Bereishis 12:5), *v'es hanefesh asher asu biCharan*, “the souls they made in Charan,” is understood by the Rambam *Hilchos Avodah Zarah* (1:3) to mean the many tens of thousands he brought under the wings of the Divine, educating masses of the existence and Divine providence of Hashem.

The Torah honors the Jewish people by referring to them in Devarim (14:1), *banim atem laHashem*, “you are children of Hashem.” Therefore, when we experience the loss of a close relative, the Ramban on this verse citing our Rabbis, teaches that we are not to mourn excessively, as Hashem, our Father, will comfort us.

As He comforts us, we owe it to Him to comfort Him. Just as the father is most happy and comforted when his children are united and come close to him, similarly when the Jewish people are united in their service of Hashem, and act in a brotherly manner to each other, this brings Him much nachas. Moreover, if we love our friend, we cannot tolerate others attacking and degrading him. Similarly, our love and allegiance to Hashem should not allow us to sit by idly while others profane His name, and dishonor Him by their neglect and disregard of his mitzvos. *Mesilas Yesharim* (19) cites the verse in Mishlei (28:4), “those who forsake the Torah praise the wicked and the keepers of Torah contend with them.” We must be the challengers, challenging those who don’t yet believe in the Oral Law and those whose lives are devoid of Jewish observance. King David in Tehilim (97:10) teaches “*ohavay Hashem sinu rah*,” lovers of Hashem despise evil. In addition, we are taught *ain HaKadosh Baruch Ho ohaiv elah mi she’ohaiv es Yisroel* — God loves those who love the Jewish people. We can show no greater love to the Jewish people than by returning those of His children that have become estranged from their Father in Heaven. Our showing patience, love, and respect to the not-yet learned and observant Jewish communities is our way of demonstrating our love for Him.

We are taught that when Avraham first arrives in Canaan, Hashem immediately informs him that this land is his and for his progeny that will be forthcoming. Avraham’s response was to build a mizbayach (Bereishis 12:8) “And he called in the name of Hashem.” Targum Unkelus understands this to mean that he prayed to Hashem. The Ramban

understands it as he proclaimed the name — the identity of G-d to all. Avraham was the first to engage in *kiruv rechokim*. Yitzchak also assumed the role of reaching out and touching many more souls, as we are taught and noted by the Sforno, Bereishis (26:5), that initially Hashem blesses Yitzchak because of his father’s accomplishments. However, after Yitzchak builds an altar (26:25) and preaches/teaches to the masses, he is privileged to warrant his own Divine communication. Regarding Yaakov, continues the Sforno, the Torah does not tell us that he was blessed in the merit of his father, since from his childhood on he was the *yoshev ohalim*, understood to mean *l’mod u’lilamed* — he was meant to study and enlighten others with his knowledge. This was especially so at the Yeshiva of Shem viAver, the place where those seeking to learn about Hashem gravitated.

The Talmud in *Succah* (49b) elaborates on the praise attributed to the first Matriarch Sarah, and which is recited/sung Friday night to extol the woman of the home. “*Pihah paschah bichachma visoras chesed al lishonah* — her mouth opens with wisdom and the Torah of kindness is on her tongue.” Asks the Talmud, is there a Torah of chesed and one not of chesed? The Talmud answers in the affirmative. Torah that is shared is *Toras chesed*. Torah that is not shared is not a Torah of chesed. Torah is meant not only to be studied, but taught to others.

Indeed, every morning, in the second bracha recited before the Shema, we petition Hashem to assist us *lilmod ulilamed*, to study and teach and perform all the tenets of your Torah. The immediate question is, are we all

teachers? Most of us are in business or other professions and vocations. The answer is that we are all charged and have the capacity to positively influence others, be it our peers in the workplace, at social gatherings and at Shabbos and Yom Tov tables.

Why are we all charged to be concerned about the spiritual well-being of the others? I would like to share five different approaches.

I. Upon entering the Land of Israel, the Jewish nation became *arayvim* — responsible one for another. This means, explains the Ritvah, that even if I have fulfilled my mitzvah, but another Jew nearby has not, if I can assist or influence him to perform the mitzvah and I don’t, my mitzvah is incomplete until the next one fulfills the mitzvah. On a metaphysical level the Jewish people are considered one soul, and therefore, a part of us is lacking if another Jew does not participate in Torah and mitzvos.

Moreover, the term *arev* literally means “co-signer.” If I co-signed a loan on someone’s behalf and the borrower was going to invest the money in a venture that I felt very strongly would not succeed, I would do everything in my power to dissuade the borrower from squandering the money and investing foolishly, since this could negatively affect my pocketbook. Here too, the Torah (Vayikra 19:17) ordains that we are to rebuke our neighbors and not suffer sins on their behalf. The Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 27b, understands this to mean that if I could have prevented another Jew from violating a Torah law, and chose to mind my own business, I receive part of the sin that could have been prevented.

II. The obligation to be *mekarev rechokim* is derived from the biblical

mitzvah of *hashavas aveidah*, the returning of a lost object. The Torah stresses the great responsibility and effort that we must exert to prevent the financial loss of our Jewish neighbor. The Talmud *Sanhedrin* (73a) teaches that if we are obligated to busy ourselves and show great concern for the material losses of the next one, all the more so regarding spiritual losses of the next one. The *Ohr Hachayim* actually learns this concept from the very text of the mitzvah — to return a lost object. He understands the directive, Devarim (22:2) to bring — gather in the lost object to your home — to also mean to bring the individual who has strayed off the *derech* into your home/ Bais Hamedrash and put him on the proper path.

III. It is interesting to note that the *Tana D'Bei Eliyahu* (27) understands the mitzvah of tzedakah to include not only providing the physical needs of the poor, but their spiritual necessities as well. The verse (Yeshayah 58:7) “surely you shall share your bread with the hungry” includes those hungry for Torah teaching, and bread is meant to refer to Torah. The *Pri Megadim* in *Orach Chaim* (37:4) teaches that if a person cannot afford a pair of Tefilin, the obligation falls on the community to enable him to fulfill the mitzvah. The *Maharam Shick* in his responsa, O.C. (322), writes that purchasing a mitzvah item on behalf of another Jew is a fulfillment of the mitzvah of tzedakah. In addition, the *Gra*, C.M. (292) explains the Ramah, who opined that we force a Jew who has a Jewish library to lend his books to others, that this is a form of tzedakah and the beis din has the power to enforce the giving of charity. All the more so if we are involved in kiruv rechokim it is a genuine fulfillment of

the mitzvah of tzedakah.

IV. The Talmud, *Shabbos* (31a), informs us of the six questions that await when in the next world we need to give an accounting of our life. One of these questions is *tzipisa liyishua* — did you yearn for the redemption? We are not only to pray thrice daily for the geula, but the Rambam, *Hilchos Tshuva* (7:5) sides with the opinion of Rebbe Eliezer that the redemption will not come until the Jewish people repent. Moreover, the Torah, Devarim (30:2) has assured us that the Jewish people will do tshuva. Rav Soloveitchik zt”l emphasized that the belief in the coming of Mashiach and the geula is another way of saying, “I believe in Knesses Yisroel, the Jewish people, and their ultimate return to Hashem, to Torah and mitzvos.”

Thus, each and every committed Jew is an ambassador of Hashem and His Torah and we dare not give up on the Jewish people when Hashem has not! Just as we find by birkas Moshe to the tribe of Levi, (Devarim 33:11), he blesses their effort, understood by Rashi as referring to their future battles against the Greek/Syrian armies, during which the Chashmonaim were most significantly outnumbered, but with their sincere total commitment to Hashem prevailed over the enemy against all odds. Similarly, we dare not be discouraged by the great number of assimilated Jews but should rather focus on our steadfast belief in the eternity of our Torah and people, and with the optimism derived from the promise of our Torah in Devarim (31:21) that Torah will never be forgotten by the Jewish people, we too will prevail in our outreach efforts.

V. Many might agree philosophically that kiruv rechokim is a noble

endeavor. However, with our busy, hectic schedules and limited time for our own Torah study, and recognizing that the study of Torah surpasses all other activities, we justify having no time for kiruv rechokim. We are making a grave error and are missing out on an important aspect of Talmud Torah. The Rambam *Hilchos Talmud Torah* (1:2) explains that an intrinsic aspect of Torah study is to teach Torah to others. Similarly, the Rambam in his *Sefer HaMitzvos* (pos. #11) writes that Talmud Torah is defined as *lilmod Torah ulilamdah*, to study Torah and to teach to others. Not only is the teaching of Torah to others an intellectual endeavor, it can often literally transform lives and those of generations to come.

I know personally of families whose lives were transformed by attending a Pesach seder. Seeing young children excited to share Divrei Torah, the singing, the very festive environment, the genuine feeling of living the Jewish destiny persuaded them to send their children to Yeshiva and the rest is history.

Often, when we are privileged to teach Torah to others, we derive more from the experience. Our understanding of the subject matter becomes clearer and more meaningful, and we become an integral part of our study partner’s family. The wonderful organization called Partners in Torah — where beginners are paired with more knowledgeable laypeople somewhere else in the country to study together over the phone — is to be congratulated not only for the many thousands of hours of Talmud Torah studied (250,000 hours to date!), but for the friendships and life changing happenings that ensue from there.