

On your every offering shall you offer salt. (2:13)

Salt is the only “food” which (since it is a condiment) does not have its own value. Its worthiness is noted only when it is mixed with other foods, thereby imparting its taste into that food. **Horav Yisrael Chortkover, zl**, comments that this is why the Torah demands salt to be placed on every *korban*, as a way of reminding and imbuing us with the notion that there is no value to the Jew who thinks and cares only about himself. A Jew’s true value is manifest when he devotes himself to others. Life is not about living alone, thinking only of oneself, never participating with others. Self-centeredness has no value in Jewish life. One who thinks only of himself – remains alone. On the other hand, once a person mingles and involves himself with the greater community – helping others, reaching out in whichever way that he can – he elevates himself and becomes a worthy person.

One element in reaching out cannot be sufficiently underscored: identifying with another Jew’s suffering. Our attitude concerning our fellow Jew should be: “we” have a problem; “we” are suffering; it is “our” issue. Unless we personally feel and identify with another person’s pain, we cannot properly be of assistance to him. *Rav Yisrael Chortkover* personified this type of communal sensitivity. I have selected one episode from the many examples in the *Rebbe’s chesed* portfolio.

World War I was a difficult time for European Jewry, both from a physical and a spiritual perspective. This was especially true if one was of conscription age. During the war, many Jews were conscripted into the army, where they met their deaths or were wounded. From a spiritual perspective, it was equally harmful, since living as an observant Jew was hardly “encouraged.” *Rav Yisrael* was instrumental in aiding and abetting scores of young men in avoiding conscription. His home became the address for anyone who sought refuge from the army. This, of course, did not sit well with the authorities. They heard about the Rabbi’s activities and sent one of their own, dressed as a Jew, to spy out the *Rebbe’s* home and ferret out the truth. Was the *Rebbe* guilty of treason?

The man came before the *Rebbe* and began to cry, claiming that his *ben yachid*, only son, had been conscripted into the army. He begged the *Rebbe* to do something about it. He could not allow his only son to join the army. The man cried bitter tears, pleading with the *Rebbe* to “intercede” on his behalf. The *Rebbe* listened to the man’s story and then had him repeat it over again. The man did this, with his entire act – tears and all. When he finished, the *Rebbe* had him repeat the story a third time.

When the man completed his third rendition of the story, the *Rebbe* admonished him, “Do you not know the importance of serving in the army? We are living in a country that has just laws which we must follow. Army service is a law, and your son should serve.” A few days later, a high ranking officer visited the *Rebbe* and thanked him for his support of the army. They had heard rumors that the *Rebbe* was undermining their efforts, but, apparently, these were slanderous rumors which were untrue.

The *Chassidim* were thoroughly convinced that they had just witnessed an overt miracle. Heaven had protected the *Rebbe*. *Rav* Yisrael sought to dispel this notion. He explained why he suspected this man of being a government spy: “Normally, when a Jew relates his personal sorrows to me, I feel a sense of kinship to him, and within me, I feel his pain and suffering. Yet, when this man told me his story, I felt nothing. At first, I thought it was my fault. I am not on the spiritual plane such that I feel another Jew’s suffering. I had him repeat the story three times, and still no change was effected in my feelings towards him. I then realized that he must be an imposter. How could I not sense his pain?”