

You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your resources. (6:5)

In his thesis on *ahavas Hashem*, love of the Almighty, **Horav Eliezer Papo, zl**, author of the *Pele Yoetz*, writes, “Love for Hashem – there is no quality/virtue better than it, for all service to Hashem, and (indeed) all *Yahadus*, Judaism, is derived from it.” Loving Hashem is one of the *Taryag*, 613, *mitzvos*. It is a constant *mitzvah*, one which is fulfilled only through thought and contemplation, resulting in a person’s awareness of Hashem’s beneficence and all that he owes Him. The *Pele Yoetz* writes that love of Hashem takes on two different forms or dimensions. The first, which is the most natural and, hence, most common, is *ahavah machmas atzmo*, one loves Hashem as a result of himself, his personal needs and personal satisfaction. This means one loves someone who benefits him. One has a positive feeling towards someone from whom he derives pleasure. Obviously, we derive great benefits from Hashem, beginning with life itself. Every drop of good that one enjoys in life, and even that which he does not realize is good – all comes from Hashem.

If the Almighty were to “turn off” the flow of good, we would be left with nothing. All of this is reason enough to love Him. It does not take a rocket scientist to understand our obligation to Hashem. Love is a natural expression when one uses his G-d-given mind. There is, however, a second form of *ahavas Hashem*, one which also originates in the recesses of the mind. In this form, one realizes Hashem’s greatness, His consummate perfection, His awesomeness. The more one studies Torah and delves deeper into its profundities, his awareness of Hashem develops greater acuity, thereby instigating greater love. This is referred to as *ahavas ha’Romemus*, love of His transcendence. He is overawed with Hashem’s Divine eminence and sublimity, His magnificence and splendor, with the list of adjectives endless. One begins to realize that the presence of everything that he loves in his life is due to Hashem. Every physical entity from which he derives pleasure receives its power and existence from the Almighty. In other words, our first “love” should be to Hashem. Indeed, our ability to express love is granted to us by Hashem. This sense of cognition is the result of a Torah-developed mind. The more one studies, the greater his acknowledgement of Hashem and the deeper his love for Him. The two go hand-in-hand.

This transcendent sense of love for Hashem is experienced by individuals whose sole focus in life is Torah. While every *ben Torah* experiences this form of *ahavas Hashem*, some experience it in a greater measure. One such individual was **Horav Moshe Pardo, zl**. Born in Turkey in 1910, he was at first a businessman specializing in textiles. He exemplified the *Rabbinic* dictum of, *Asei Torascha keva u’melachtecha aria*, “Make your study of Torah permanent and your work temporary.” This is an attitudinal concept whereby one acknowledges that the only endeavor in his life which has enduring value is the study of Torah, while his sojourn in the world of the mundane is nothing more than that – a sojourn, something casual and necessary.

Rav Moshe spent hours in the *bais hamedrash* learning and teaching. These were followed by constant acts of *tzedakah v’chesed*, charity and kindness, to all segments of the community. At the

age of forty, *Rav Moshe* decided that it was about time that he did something with his life. He saw the challenges confronting young men and women of Sephardi heritage. Many were recent émigrés from North Africa and the Balkans, who were quickly becoming absorbed into secular Israeli culture and society. There were no schools that catered specifically to their needs and heritage. *Rav Moshe* saw this as his Heavenly mandate, so, for the next forty-six years, he devoted his life and soul to establishing, guiding and supporting *mosdos haTorah*, religious institutions of all kinds to save thousands of Jewish children from spiritual extinction. He first established Ohr HaChaim institutions in Bnei Brak. What originated with six girls in a rented apartment has now become a flourishing complex of institutions. Porat Yosef was supported through his endeavors. He did not stop with those. He encouraged young men who were graduates of these *yeshivos* to trailblaze the country and establish *yeshivos* throughout the Land. Tiferes Moshe, Shaarei Teshuvah v'Chaim, Ohr David, Nevei Eretz Talmud Torah, Tiferes Teveria, and Bais Shmaya are but a few of the many Torah institutions which exist as a result of his tireless endeavors for Torah.

Indeed, the **Steipler Gaon, zl**, once said concerning *Rav Moshe*, "It is important and well worth seeing him (*Rav Moshe*) in This World, because, in the *Olam HaEmes*, World of Truth, who knows whether we will merit to see him in his sublime spiritual plane?"

Rav Moshe confronted challenges. Success was not always predestined. He was relentless in his pursuit of Torah and *chesed* endeavors. Whenever an obstacle stood in his way, he pushed forward. His attitude remained the same, as he himself summed up his life's work, "I never thought about my personal honor. The question that was single most on my mind was, 'Is this (endeavor) *l'kavod Shomayim*, for the honor of Heaven?'"

What kept him going against what many considered to be insurmountable odds? He dealt with apathy, spiritual neglect, financial hurdles, and secular cynicism and obstruction. His response was, "The *Navi* quotes Hashem as saying, *V'zocharti lach chesed neurayich, ahavas kelulosayich, lechtach acharai ba'midbar b'eretz lo zeruah*; 'I remember for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals; how you went after Me into the wilderness, in a land unknown' (*Yirmiyahu* 2:2). While one might emphasize the *eretz lo zeruah*, 'unsown land' as a reference to the many hardships which I experienced in my quest to build Torah, my personal focus has always been on the *lechteich acharai*, how you went after Me. My goal was always to follow Hashem, to seek every opportunity to increase *kavod Shomayim*, the glory of Heaven, by saving Jewish souls. Every Jewish home which I catalyzed, every Jewish family which came closer to Hashem made my hardships well worth it. I gave up a successful business and instead became a *baal chov*, very much in debt, so that I could 'follow Hashem.' Whatever I have achieved was purely out of my boundless love for the Almighty."

This is how *Rav Moshe* lived and died. As he aged, he became weaker, as his body was beset with various illnesses. He was attended by dear friends whose sense of gratitude to this unique individual was overwhelming. Their outpouring of love for him was inspiring. His final mortal days were spent in the intensive care unit of the hospital as he fought the last round of infections that ravaged his already frail body. Shortly prior to his final moment, he asked his close friend, *Rav*

Shimon Baadani, to tell him *divrei Torah* on the *parsha*. Even in his most painful moments, he sought the solace of Torah – so great was his unbridled love for Hashem and the Torah. As he felt the end creeping upon him, he turned to Rav Shimon and asked, “I have recited *viduy*, confessional. How may I spend my last minutes?” Rav Shimon replied, “Think about the *mitzvah* of loving Hashem.” At that moment Rav Moshe summoned whatever strength was left in him and whispered intensely, “I love Him so much!” and with these words on his lips – he died.