

You shall love your fellow as yourself - I am Hashem. (19:18)

Rabbi Akiva said that the commandment to "*love your fellow as yourself*" is the fundamental rule of the *Torah*. Hashem adjures us to be sensitive to the needs of others. Indeed, *Chazal* base a variety of laws upon this rule. Unfortunately, Rabbi Akiva, who expounded this rule, who emphasized its critical importance, did not merit to see this rule adopted by his twenty-four thousand students. They all passed away tragically during the seven week period between *Pesach* and *Shavuous*. According to *Chazal*, they died because they did not give the proper *kavod*, honor, to one another. Rabbi Akiva did not permit this tragedy to deter him from disseminating *Torah*. He found five new students, and they were the ones that taught *Torah* to *Klal Yisrael*.

It is important that we focus upon the sin of "*lo nohagu kavod zeh lazeh*," "they did not show respect one for another". After all, we are not speaking about common people. These students were *Torah* scholars who were exemplary in their *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty. Moreover, *Chazal* emphasize that Rabbi Akiva had twelve-thousand pairs of students - not twenty-four thousand students. This would imply that they truly did benefit each other - they were *zugos*, pairs!

Chazal tell us that Rabbi Akiva told his second group of students: "My sons, the first group of students died because their eyes were intolerant of each other. Be careful not to do as they did. This is enigmatic. If they died because they did not render *kavod* to each other, why did Rabbi Akiva give his new students an apparently different reason? The **Ponevezer Rav, zl**, explains that in reality these reasons are identical with one another. The blemish on their character was a lack of tolerance for the good fortune enjoyed by their friends. This intolerance manifested itself in a lack of respect for one another.

What does "*tzarus ayin*" mean? **Horav Chaim Friedlander, zl**, interprets this in *Yiddish*, "*Min fargint nisht yenem*;" it literally bothers you that your friend has and enjoys something. You feel that he is taking something away from you. This narrow-mindedness causes one to act without proper respect for his fellow. This is the underlying meaning of the command to "*love your fellow as yourself*". *Chazal* interpret the word, "*reiecha*", friend, as referring to Hashem.

By expressing our unequivocal love for Hashem, we negate ourselves and realize that everything we have comes from Him. Once we have purged ourselves of our egocentricity, we have room for our fellow man. One who is obsessed with himself has no room for others.