

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

Understanding the need to promote love and positive relationships between fellow Jews is quite simple. However, how is *Ani Hashem*, “I am Hashem,” connected to *ahavas Yisrael*? The *Rizhiner Rebbe, zl* (*Horav* Yisrael), explains this with a parable. Two friends were inseparable. Even when they grew into adulthood and they chose vocations which created a geographic distance between them, their relationship did not change. They tried to stay in touch with one another as much as possible. One day, “Reuven” heard that his friend “Shimon” had been accused of a trumped-up charge; he immediately prepared to travel to his community to see what he could do to help. In those days, any infraction against the government carried the death penalty. It did not matter if the defendant was innocent. If he was accused, he was immediately found guilty. That was justice in those days. The fact that he was Jewish was not a plus.

Reuven arrived as they were about to carry out the sentence. The gallows was prepared; even the noose was already on Shimon’s neck. “Stop! You are hanging an innocent man! I am the one who is responsible; I am guilty!” Reuven screamed. “That man is a liar! I am the guilty one – not he,” Shimon yelled back. When the executioner saw what was taking place in front of his eyes, he called the king. Never had he seen men bent on being executed to save the other. The king could not believe what he heard. He had to investigate personally. He spoke to Reuven and asked him why he was willing to die in place of Shimon. Reuven explained, “I know my friend Shimon. He is not capable of performing the crime for which he is being accused. If I see that my friend, upon whom my own life depends, is being sent to the gallows, however, it must be that I am in some way guilty. For me to see my friend die, means that I should die.”

When the king heard this, he said, “Both of you, return to your homes. I ask only one thing. Allow me to join in your friendship. I, too, want to have such friends.”

This is what Hashem says to us: “If you will love one another *kamocha* – as you each love yourself, then *Ani Hashem* – I, Hashem, want to join in this relationship.

The *Alter, zl, m’Kelm*, posits that included in the *mitzvah* of *V’ahavta l’reiacha kamocha* is that our love toward our fellow be natural – not Torah-imposed. We must really love him. What does “like yourself” mean? We love ourselves because we do – no one instructs or commands us to care about/love ourselves. Likewise, our feelings toward our fellow man should be part of our natural proclivity.

Gedolim stories are usually about the Torah giant’s scholarship, diligence, humility and devotion to Torah. It is a given that a *gadol* fulfills the *mitzvah* which, according to Hillel, the entire Torah is based on. Just as they took their Torah study and *mitzvah* observance to the extreme, however, their love for their fellow man was exemplary. The following story is not novel. It is a well-known vignette concerning one of the greatest *gedolim* of the last century – a *gadol* both in Europe and in *Eretz Yisrael*, *Horav Isser Zalmen Meltzer, zl*. He was the uncle of three of the *Roshei Yeshivah* of

Yeshivas Chevron: Horav Avraham Cohen, Horav Moshe Chevroni, and Horav Yechezkel Sarna.

The following story was related by *Rav Moshe Chevroni* during the *hesped*, eulogy, he gave for his revered uncle. His goal was to underscore *Rav Isser Zalman's* unparalleled love of Torah. He learned another part of the story, the rest of the story, during the *shivah*. This added part demonstrates an attribute of *Rav Isser Zalman* which complimented his scholarship and explains why he was a *gadol* without peer. During the British mandate, a curfew between 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. was imposed on the residents of Yerushalayim. The British soldiers patrolled the streets, and, because they were in a conflict with the Israeli underground, every Jew was suspect. It was not safe to be out at night, because the soldiers had no problem shooting first and then asking questions.

During the curfew, *Rav Moshe Chevroni* was in the *yeshiva* at 2:00 a.m. when he heard knocking at the door. The knocking became serious and loud. *Rav Moshe* feared for his life in case it was British soldiers looking for weapons. Since he did not speak English, communicating with them would be impossible. In a shaking voice, he asked who was there. "It is your uncle," *Rav Isser Zalman* replied. "What is the uncle doing here at this hour? It is not safe to go outside."

Rav Isser Zalman explained that he was troubled by a ruling of the *Rambam*, and he figured that he would not sleep until he understood the *Rambam*, "I was wondering who could help me at this time of night, and I thought of you. Together, we will learn the *Rambam* and resolve my question." The question was brilliant, but what was most amazing was the exuberance manifest by the senior *Rosh Yeshiva* of *Eretz Yisrael*. A short while later, *Rav Moshe* arrived at an understanding of the *Rambam*, which satisfied *Rav Isser Zalman*. He could now go home. *Rav Moshe* attempted to dissuade him from leaving. He should remain in his home overnight. *Rav Isser Zalman* explained that he must immediately record the explanation in his notebook. "Look at his love for Torah: his sleep, his safety – nothing mattered when it came to Torah study!" This is how *Rav Moshe* ended his *hesped*.

Now, for the rest of the story. During the *shivah*, *Rebbetzin Meltzer* revealed the true reason that *Rav Isser Zalman* had risked his life to go out that night. "The *Rosh Yeshiva* authored *Even Ha'Azel* on the *Rambam*. He wanted very much to have it printed. (It has been a staple in the *yeshiva* world from the moment the book saw the light of day.) The printer was busy, as he had other jobs. He said it would be a wait of a few years before he could get to it. One day, the printer informed us that there had been a cancellation and, if the *Even Ha'Azel* was there in the morning, he would go about printing it. Finally, my husband's *sefer* would be printed."

When I told him it had to be ready by morning, however, he turned white. He explained that he had included a short Torah thought from two of his nephews. He still did not have one from *Rav Moshe Chevroni*. He could not print the *sefer* without including him – even if it meant not printing it! This is when he had a brainstorm. He would go to the *Yeshiva* under the pretext of a question on the *Rambam*. He was certain that, with his brilliant mind and encyclopedic knowledge, *Rav Moshe*

would render an exceptional resolution to his query. Thus, he would ensure *Rav Moshe's* Torah thought in his *sefer*. He risked his life, not only for Torah, but to avoid hurting the feelings of another Jew.