

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

In this week's Torah portion, *Kedoshim*, there are many *mitzvot* (commandments), but one is a central pillar of Judaism. This is the mitzva of *Ahavat Yisrael*, love of your fellow Jew. In the Torah's words "And you should love your fellow as yourself." Rabbi Akiva says "This is a great principle in the Torah."

How does one love every Jew, even those he never met? It's hard enough to "like" the ones you know. Why does the Torah have to add the words "as yourself"? The commandment could have been "and you should love your fellow." What can we learn from the words "as yourself"?

From the words "as yourself" it is clear that to "love your fellow," first you need to learn to love yourself. How does loving yourself help you love somebody else?

In order to love yourself, you need to understand what you are. Being a Jew means that at your essence there is a soul, which is truly a part of G-d. When you think about this you realize how amazing you are and that you are one with G-d. You realize that you must be capable of doing great things. You start to love yourself.

Now, if you realize that your soul and "your fellow's" soul are one, then loving him is loving yourself. The more in tune you are with your soul the more your love for other Jews grows. Regardless of their differences you love them because you are tuned to their essence.

This is why every Jew felt loved when he came to the Rebbe, because he was truly in tune with his soul and therefore with yours as well.

It was due to the lack of this love that the Holy Temple was destroyed and it will take this love to have it rebuilt. This is a key aspect to bring Moshiach.

We desperately need Moshiach, we are all suffering in one way or another in this exile, it's time for it to end.

It's time to get past our petty differences and show love to our "fellow". It is unbelievable how small and petty differences drive us apart. You will also be surprised how a show of love will be reciprocated.

It seems that the ones closest to us pose the greatest challenge of all. This one doesn't talk to her mother, that one doesn't talk to his brother, etc.

When I was diagnosed with ALS, it was sobering. What is important became clear. It is clear that family is more important than the stupid arguments. It is clear that differences such as religious level, dress, etc., are petty. It is clear that we need to unite. It is clear that united we will bring Moshiach.

Adapted by Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz from the teachings of the Rebbe, yitzihurwitz.blogspot.com. Rabbi Hurwitz, who is battling ALS, and his wife Dina, are emissaries of the Rebbe in Temecula, Ca.

Angry Birds

by Rabbi Eli Freidman

Every year in the springtime, a crazy bird shows up nearly every day and pecks relentlessly at our van's driver-side mirror. She flutters in place and energetically hacks and pecks at the mirror, sometimes for hours at a time.

As you can imagine, the mirror is suffering, and I imagine, so is the bird.

So of course, I googled it. "Why is this bird pecking at my car mirror?"

And ladies and gentlemen, here is the answer:

"A bird pecking on your car mirrors is not only harmful to the mirrors, it can hurt the bird, too. This seemingly odd behavior is a result of the birds thinking they are fighting other birds."

Well, how about that? During this Omer period, when we are meant to be spending extra time reflecting on the Mitzvah of "Love your fellow as yourself," we are confronted with a bird, imagining that it's fighting a mortal enemy, and doesn't realize it's pecking at itself.

This frantic, furious fighting others is often an illusion. We think we're protecting ourselves while in truth we are hurting ourselves. We just don't realize it.

Imagine your left hand punishing your right hand for making a mistake; the left hand pummeling the right hand for committing a – even a very – serious plunder. All that pummeling may make the left hand feel vindicated and righteous but it won't be long before the left hand starts to feel the painful results of hacking away at a part of itself.

Nothing can survive like this. A

person neglecting and abusing a part of himself will destroy himself. A person doing so to a family member will destroy his or her own family. Community members doing this to one another swiftly destroy their own community. Segments of a society who beat up on other segments, literally and verbally, even if they believe themselves to be utterly righteous, are playing around with the survival of the entire society.

And of course, the opposite is also true, and more powerfully so. When we judge each other favorably and help each other out, we are helping ourselves more than anyone.

We are each other's mirrors. When we see worthlessness in someone, we're seeing a reflection of ourselves. When we see value and potential, once again we are seeing a reflection of ourselves.

When we try and tear people down – and even when we succeed – we can feel as triumphant as this angry bird will feel when it finally cracks the mirror along with its own beak. What a birdbrain.

May G-d, Who challenges us in this week's portion to "Love your fellow as yourself," grant us all the wisdom, knowledge and understanding to look inward and heal ourselves before taking on the world. May He grant us the humility to consider if we aren't our own biggest enemy before declaring war on others. May He grant us the sensitivity to realize that even if all our perceived enemies vanished and the path to success was open to us, it would still be our job to take the big and small steps needed to get there.

SLICE OF LIFE

From Jordon to Yankel
by Yoni Brown



Eighteen-year-old Jordan Meislin crammed himself into a fifteen-passenger van. The palm trees beside the road reminded him of his childhood when he'd come to Florida to visit his grandparents. Things were different now. The van dropped its passengers off at a house of worship, as usual. Jordan knew a circle of chairs would be waiting for them in the basement, along with coffee. "My name is Jordan Meislin," he'd say, "and I'm an addict."

That night's speaker was an older, grandmotherly woman. "I was reading the Bible," she began, "when I came across the binding of Isaac." Meislin's ears perked up; he recognized that story from Hebrew school. As she described Abraham taking his only son to an altar, Jordan's world started spinning, and he burst into tears. "It hit a nerve I didn't know I had," he says, "there I was, barely hanging on in a rehab a thousand miles from home. I was dragging my parents along kicking and screaming to my own altar – the altar of addiction."

Growing up in Long Island had been a rough ride for young Jordan. He had difficulty making friends. Almost everyone in his high school experimented with drugs, but Jordan says his rocky social scene and natural intensity made the escape irresistible. It didn't take long before he had a full-blown addiction and dreamed of being the next Pablo Escobar.

Funding his addiction quickly proved expensive, so the son of a therapist became a drug dealer.

It took years in and out of psychiatric wards,

and several close brushes with death before Jordan knew he wanted to live. "I was an avowed nihilist," he remembers with a shudder. "I told myself that if I ever made it to 25, I'd take my own life." He was convinced that life only went downhill from there. "Society makes you conform after that, and I didn't want that ever," he says. But by the time his parents shipped him off to a rehab center in South Florida in 2006, Jordan knew he wanted a better life. "I truly wanted to get sober, another two weeks on the streets, and I'd have been dead."

Sitting in that basement, he let the tears flow freely for the first time. Somehow, he knew straight away how he'd achieve sobriety. "I called up my father and asked him to send the *tefillin* I'd worn at my Bar Mitzva," he says. In the meantime, he started trying to pray. Lacking a Tallit, he wrapped himself in a bedsheet. Until then, his only visible connection to Judaism had been the "Never Forget" tattoo on his wrist, but somehow he now knew G-d was his best hope of getting sober, and he hung on for dear life.

"Can I get you in touch with a rabbi?" the rehab's director asked one day, noticing Meislin's obvious interest in Judaism.

It wasn't long before Meislin went to Rabbi Meir Kessler's home for a Shabbat night meal. The songs were unfamiliar, and the Torah thoughts were new, but mainly he saw trust and honesty. "The last thing you would want would be to let an addict into your house, but Rabbi Kessler made me feel right at home," he recalls. "I saw a man who lives by his values. Here's a guy who wears a beard and a black hat in the middle of Florida. That impressed me."

Meislin kept coming back, and when he got out of rehab four months later, he moved to an apartment across from the Chabad House. Somewhere along the way, he dropped his old name and became Yankel Meislin. "I started keeping Shabbat, I started keeping kosher." He read all the Jewish books he could find and began to rethink his life trajectory.

He started attending Palm Beach Community College and quickly became president of the campus Chabad Club. But after just eight months, an old face from his underworld days showed up on campus, and Yankel left. "He had robbed me, this guy," Meislin remembered with horror, "That was too close, way too close." By then, he knew he wanted to go to yeshiva to immerse himself fully in a Jewish lifestyle. Leaving Florida, Yankel spent just one week at home in New York before exchanging his old life for a ticket to Israel.

The following months were very intense, but

nonetheless transformational for Yankel. Ensnared in an English-speaking Chabad yeshiva in a Hebrew-speaking country, there weren't many people with whom he could talk. The schedule called for lots of Torah study, and Yankel soaked it in. "Every new thing I learned took me one step further away from my past life," he explains.

During his third year in Israel, Yankel married and moved with his wife to the religious neighborhood of Bnei Brak. While continuing his studies, he started looking for a way to support his family. Meislin consulted with his teacher, and started taking private lessons in *safrut*, the art of Jewish calligraphy.

"It's not as easy as it seems," he soon learned. "It was difficult. I broke a lot of knives and needed a lot of band-aids ironically." Still, he persevered, moving his growing family to the mountain city of Tzfat to better hone his craft. "In safrus, it takes a little while before you start making money." It was tough going, and Tzfat isn't known for a booming economy. But after his fifth year in Israel, he had enough money to cover the move back to America. Settling his family in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, he says he found good mentors, and with time, his career took off.

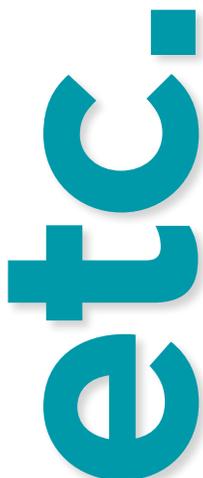
"I believe that the way to sobriety is through G-d and Judaism," he says while sitting in his Brooklyn office. Quills, ink, and rolls of parchment are neatly packed away on big wooden shelves lining the walls. With careful attention to detail, he spends his days here writing Megillos, Mezuzos, and Torah Scrolls.

For years, he tells me, he's shared his story at small gatherings, even driving hours to talk to yeshiva boys. His hard-won lessons, he hopes, can help give perspective to others facing their own struggles.

But sharing his past is also personally healing for Yankel. Empowering even. He's been thinking through his story with a coach and says the most significant realization he's had is "how easy it is to hold ourselves back." Says Yankel, "I realized that there were so many lies I was telling myself that made me smaller than I could have been." For him, growing means he's now much more comfortable sharing his story. He now travels to speak publicly about his experiences and is in the process of writing a memoir.

Yankel Meislin lives in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, with his family. He is a sofer, public speaker, and author. He also coaches private individuals, building on the perspective he has gained from his life experiences.

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New Facility

The Sinai Educational Institutes in **Paris, France**, has purchased a fifth building for the growing educational institution. The magnificent new building will be named "Beis Menachem." Currently, close to 3,000 students study in the four schools of the Sinai institutions. The new building will enable another 750 children to be accepted.

Mikvah Stories

Mikvah Stories: True Stories of Women Overcoming Today's Challenges compiled by Chaya Raichik, is a collection of a wide range of stories from women all over the world about their Mikvah experiences. There are humorous stories. Powerful stories. Inspiring stories. Each story conveys the inner strength that women possess to fulfill this special mitzvah. Available on amazon



TODAY IS...

5 Iyar

Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad, received the following teaching from the tzadik Reb Mordechai, who had heard it from the Baal Shem Tov, founder of Chasidism: A soul may descend to this world and live 70 or 80 years, in order to do a Jew a material favor, and certainly a spiritual one.



IT HAPPENED ONCE

Reb Wolf Kitzes, one of the most devoted and loyal followers of the Baal Shem Tov, had a burning desire to visit the holy land. He tried to push aside this desire because he did not wish to leave his saintly Rebbe, the Baal Shem Tov. His yearning for the Holy Land gave him no peace, though, so he decided to tell the Baal Shem Tov about it.

The Baal Shem Tov listened carefully and replied: "You should not go yet."

The reply was enough for Reb Wolf and he said no more. But after some time, Reb Wolf again was haunted by his unquenchable thirst for the Holy Land, which drove him again to ask the Baal Shem Tov if he could go. The Baal Shem Tov would still not give him permission to go, so Reb Wolf would not travel to the Holy Land.

Reb Wolf allowed some time to elapse before he again approached the Baal Shem Tov, and finally the Baal Shem Tov agreed to give his consent for Reb Wolf to undertake the long and difficult trip.

Before leaving, the Baal Shem Tov said to Reb Wolf: "If anyone on the way asks you a question, think carefully before you reply."

Reb Wolf boarded the first ship sailing to the Holy Land. One day the ship anchored at a small island. All the passengers disembarked and so did Reb Wolf. When it was time for the afternoon prayer, Reb Wolf found a quiet spot and began to pray. He got so carried away with his prayers, he failed to hear the ship's blast calling the passengers to return to the ship.

When Reb Wolf looked up, he suddenly realized with shock what had happened. The ship was disappearing in the distance and he was left behind. The inhabitants who had come to meet the boat also disappeared, and he found himself all alone on this desolate island.

"Don't be discouraged," he told himself. "Have faith in the Alm-ghty. He will not desert you, and everything will be all right."

Feeling thus encouraged, Reb Wolf set off to look for perhaps a Jew on this unknown island. But there was no sign of any human being. Suddenly, as he approached a forest, he noticed some smoke rising to the sky. There seemed to be no road or path to follow, but he made his way through the trees until he came upon a small hut.

He quickly knocked on the door and was delighted and relieved to see the door opened by a dignified, fine looking old Jew, who greeted him with a warm "Shalom." Reb Wolf breathed a sigh of relief. Thank G-d he was now out of danger. He told the Jew what had happened to him and his host assured him that there was no reason to be afraid. The island was not altogether uninhabited. There were people living on the island through not many. True, he was the only Jewish resident, and he, in fact, would not stay there very long.

"Ships pass here regularly," he said. "The island belongs to Turkey, and a Turkish officer and his soldiers take care that the island should be free of robbers and pirates. Don't worry, Reb Wolf," he continued "a ship will soon be here on route to the Holy Land and you will be able to continue your journey. In the meantime, the Sabbath is approaching and you are welcome to be my guest."

Reb Wolf was delighted with his good fortune. He wondered why his host, who was obviously a learned and G-d fearing Jew, was living here, without a family and also, how he knew his, Wolf's, name. But he didn't dare ask.

Shabbat passed very pleasantly. On the following day, a boat docked, and Reb Wolf thanked his gracious host for all his kindness.

Just before leaving, his host said to Reb Wolf: "You have travelled through Russia and Poland. How are the Jews living there in *galut* (exile)?"

"Thank G-d," replied Reb Wolf, "The Alm-ghty takes care of them."

Reb Wolf was already aboard the ship when he suddenly remembered what the Baal Shem Tov had told him to think carefully before answering any question put to him by anyone on his way to the Holy Land. He was terribly upset to think that he had forgotten his Rebbe's advice and had answered his host without thought. He decided that at the next port of call he would disembark and wait for the first ship to take him back to the Baal Shem Tov.

Several weeks later, Reb Wolf presented himself to the Baal Shem Tov. Reb Wolf told the Baal Shem Tov everything that had happened and that because he had forgotten the

Rebbe's advice, he immediately turned back. Now he humbly asked how he could correct his mistake. The Baal Shem Tov replied: "You, personally, have already paid for your mistake by returning home without seeing the Holy Land. Now I can tell you the rest of the story."

"Our Patriarch Abraham had complained to the Alm-ghty about his children and asked why He has kept them so long in exile, making them suffer so much."

"The Alm-ghty replied: 'It's not so bad. They don't suffer so in exile. If you want proof, ask a Jew who never lies and hear what he says. That Jew is Reb Wolf Kitzes. He only speaks the truth.'

"So it was arranged that our Abraham should be your host and the rest you know. Had you been thoughtful enough to add a few words about how much Jews long for Moshiach, and how ardently they pray daily, 'May our eyes behold your return to Zion in mercy...,' Moshiach might have already come by now."

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT
on the weekly Torah portion

You shall be holy, for I am holy (Lev. 19:2)
"Holy, but not removed from the world," comments the Ktav Sofer. Man is enjoined to imitate G-d, the source of all holiness, who actively involves Himself in all aspects of His creation. G-d wants us to live a holy life within the physical world, not to be ascetic. A saying exists that a wealthy man's son never has to worry about making a living. Likewise, G-d reassures His children, the Jewish people, that holiness and sanctity are well within their grasp. "For I am holy" - "I have enough holiness to go around for everyone." (The Rebbe of Alexander)

According to the Midrash, this portion was said at the public Hakhel gathering (held every seventh year) because of its great importance. There are two ways to bring a Jew to repentance: with the carrot or the stick. One may either threaten him with punishment for transgressing, or emphasize the intrinsic value of the Jew and the holiness of the Torah's laws. From the Midrash it is clear that the second method is superior to the first. At a time when the entire Jewish nation is gathered together, the positive -- "You shall be holy" -- is to be stressed over the negative. (The Rebbe)

You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18)
The Midrash relates that although many people have love and affection for others, human nature is such that "a person dislikes another who is of the same profession as he." The Torah therefore emphasizes through the words "as yourself" that a person must make every effort to love his fellow Jew even if they are in the same field of work. (Our Sages)



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Avot Ch 2
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