AHAVAS YISROEL THROUGH The lens of chassidus

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לזכות החיילת בצבאות ה' מושקא שתחי' לרגל הולדתה כ' שבט ה'תשפ"ד ולזכות הוריה הרה"ת ר' אליהו וזוגתו מרת שיינא רוחמה נדפס ע"י זקניה הרה"ת ר' יצחק זאב וזוגתו מרת ברכה ומשפחתם שיחיו סאפאטשקינסקי הרה"ת ר' חיים ברוך וזוגתו מרת שטערנא שרה ומשפחתם שיחיו אלבסקי



enton, France, 5673. The Rebbe Rashab strolls along the beach with his only son, the Frierdiker Rebbe. The Rebbe Rashab has been here on *datcheh* (respite). His son, who had come to join him for several weeks, listens as his father relates wondrous anecdotes about the previous Rabbeim, traditions they handed down, visions, stories, and explanations of concepts in Chassidus.

Among the topics discussed is the matter of *hisbonenus*. The Rebbe Rashab dedicates sev-

eral days to this topic, extolling the virtues of contemplating concepts of Chassidus whilst garbed in Talis and Tefillin, as preparation for davening. He lists eight specific benefits, which his son later transcribes. While these qualities apply to every individual who invests himself in this practice, the Rebbe continued, it is relevant to Tzaddikim as well, albeit at a much higher level.

He continued, at great length, to glorify the high spiritual standing of Tzaddikim, and concluded: "And one reaches a *derher* in the sweetness of *Elokus*, '*ah Getliche ziskeit*".

The Frierdiker Rebbe later wrote of this scene: "I will never forget that luminous time, seeing the face of the Kodesh Kodoshim ascending in great *dveikus* while stressing the words "*A Getliche ziskeit*"... Strolling in Menton on the oceanfront, in the beauty of nature, and being immersed in G-dly sweetness, basking in a '*Getliche ziskeit*', this can be only by an *Atzmi*, a Rebbe the son of a Rebbe, a *mesirus nefesh Yid*... someone who's *neshama* shines, revealed within him."

They continued to stroll in silence, father and son. The passersby looked on in awe at the unusual and sacred scene, at the Rebbe's holy face, aflame. Suddenly, as if awakened from sleep, the Rebbe turned to his son and exclaimed:

"Yosef Yitzchok! Listen! All of these *maalos* that I listed regarding thinking Chassidus in Talis and Tefillin before davening, both by Chassidim and by Tzaddikim, this is all incomparable to the wondrous *maaleh* that Hashem grants, that one gets a *chush* and *geshmak* in doing a favor for another Yid, to the point that the other becomes more precious to him than himself. Because regarding oneself, one can find several reasons [to justify his suffering]... but for someone else this is not true.

"It is worth toiling for five days, five hours a day, with intense physical and spiritual exertion in G-dly wisdom, for the practical application that emerges [from this *hisbonenus*]—to truly desire to do a favor for a Yid physically, and especially spiritually." The Rebbe concluded by citing the saying of the Baal Shem Tov: "A *neshama* comes down to the world and lives for seventy or eighty years in order to do a favor for a Yid in physical matters and especially in spiritual matters¹."

Ahavas Yisroel: A Primary Theme of Chassidus

Since the inception of *avodas Ha'Chassidus*, Ahavas Yisroel has been its cornerstone. The very term "Chossid" is used in the Gemara to describe someone who is completely devoted to another Yid, even when it comes at a personal price².

The life's work of the Rabbeim, both in sharing the teachings of Chassidus and their other communal activities, was motivated by a deep and abiding love for their fellow Yidden. The Frierdiker Rebbe once said³ that in every line of Tanya, one can see the depth of the Alter Rebbe's Ahavas Yisroel.

On another occasion, the Frierdiker Rebbe shared⁴ in the name of the Tzemach Tzedek, that all the great feats of *mesirus nefesh* that the Alter Rebbe accomplished were insignificant compared to the *mesirus nefesh* the Alter Rebbe displayed in tearing himself away from his great love for Hashem, "עועמך", to dedicate himself to doing a favor for another Yid, and to be concerned with the spiritual state of other Yidden, to desire that they do *teshuvah* on their own accord, and become true servants of Hashem.

The Rabbeim viewed Ahavas Yisroel as the barometer of success for *avodas Ha'Chassidus*, as the Rebbe Maharash once said: "What is the effect of Chassidus and Yiras Shomayim, if the main thing, Ahavas Yisroel, is missing?⁵"

The Frierdiker Rebbe related that in the time of the Alter

Rebbe, the love between Chassidim was greater than the love of brothers, and yet the Alter Rebbe commented that this still did not reach the level of Ahavas Yisroel that the Baal Shem Tov wanted to cultivate in his Chassidim⁶...

In one letter, the Rebbe delineated the great efforts the Rabbeim expended in implanting Ahavas Yisroel among Chassidim⁷: "It is well known how much our holy Rabbeim, our *nesi'im*, went on *mesirus nefesh* in order implant Ahavas Yisroel amongst their Chassidim, their *mekusharim*, the ones who are connected to them; and even among all of Bnei Yisroel..."

In the Rebbe's first Maamer, the Rebbe chose to highlight Ahavas Yisroel as an example of the empowerment we got from the Rabbeim, although it did not seem to have an overt connection to the main theme of the Maamer. This surely contains a message for us in *Dor Hashvi'i*, to realize how vital and fundamental Ahavas Yisroel is to the work of bringing the *Shechinah* down to earth.

In a letter discussing the importance of Ahavas Yisroel, the Rebbe says, "As a Chossid, this point is very dear to me, being that one of the foundations and central themes of *Toras Ha'Chassidus* is how the love of Hashem, Torah, and its Mitzvos are one with Ahavas Yisroel⁸."

The Definition of Ahavas Yisroel

The Mitzvah of Ahavas Yisroel requires us to love each Yid not (only) because of his personal qualities but because he is a Yid⁹. This Ahavas Yisroel comes from the *neshama*, transcending reason. It causes one to love his fellow Yid as much as he loves himself. As long as you place yourself before your fellow, you have not yet reached the required level of Ahavas Yisroel¹⁰.

Moreover, Chassidus demands that not only should you love your fellow Yid as yourself: You should love him even more than yourself! Your fellows' needs should take precedence over your own, because you can easily find adequate fault in yourself but should not be able to say the same of others¹¹.

LEFT TO RIGHT: RABBIS ADIN EVEN-YISROEL (STEINZALTZ), LEIBEL MOCHKIN, AND LEIBEL RASKIN

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The Reasons for Ahavas Yisroel

Every love is motivated by some rationale. It is a product of the closeness the lover feels to the beloved.

Regarding the Mitzvah of Ahavas Hashem, the Maggid asks¹²: How can one be commanded to love Hashem? Love is a feeling. It is subjective and based on the person's disposition and personality.

The answer ties into what was mentioned above, that one can awaken feelings of love towards Hashem by thinking about Hashem's greatness and His kindness to us. This fosters a sense of closeness and intimacy, which in turn generates love.

The same can be said of Ahavas Yisroel: By reflecting on how much Hashem loves a Yid, and the fact that all Yidden are parts of the same whole, one can arouse feelings of love for every single Yid.

The great Chossid Reb Aizik Homiler once expressed this in the following way¹³: "What is a Yid? Torah, Mitzvos, and *Elokus*! How can one not love this?"

How to Get There

The Alter Rebbe explains in Tanya Perek Lamed Beis (*Lev* - the 'heart' of the Tanya), that true Ahavas Yisroel can be achieved only when someone makes their *neshama* their primary identity, and the *guf* secondary.

Moreover, someone who makes his *neshama* primary, but maintains a strong sense of his own **spiritual** identity, still cannot attain the ultimate level of Ahavas Yisroel, a super rational love. Only when he completely nullifies his sense of independent identity can his essence be revealed, the essence he shares with all Yidden, resulting in a transcendent love that connects us all¹⁴.

This is the standard explanation in Chassidus. However, in the *maamar* V'atah Tetzaveh 5741, (the last *maamar* that we merited to receive *mugah* from the Rebbe), the Rebbe reveals¹⁵, that true Achdus Yisroel can be even in matters of *guf*. Through the revelation of the Yid's *Etzem Ha'neshama*, the essence of every aspect of the person, including his physical body, he can unite with every other Yid not just on the *neshama*-level, but even on the level of *guf*.

When people asked the Rebbe how they could implement this Mitzvah, the response was often to study the parts of Chassidus that discuss these ideas. Through study and reflection, one internalizes the message and can begin to implement them.

On one occasion, the Rebbe instructed a woman who asked for guidance in this area to begin to *practice* Ahavas Yisroel. *Acting* altruistically breeds feelings of love towards the people that one helps.

A Boundless Love

Ahavas Yisroel is a Mitzvah that defies boundaries. A chossid is expected to constantly work on his own Ahavas Yisroel and to view fellow Yidden in a positive light¹⁶, creating strong bonds of friendship¹⁷, and doing everything in his power to help others in any way possible¹⁸.

When one hears of the sorrow of another Yid, one should be committed to helping, whether the problem is of a spiritual or physical nature. One must be devoted to Ahavas Yisroel to the point of *mesiras nefesh*!¹⁹

Additionally, Ahavas Yisroel has no limits in the sense that it is to be directed to **every Yid**, regardless of spiritual stature. The Mezritcher Maggid once related to his Talmid, Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk, that he heard it announced in the *mesivta d'rokia* (heavenly yeshiva) that one must love a *rasha gamur* exactly as one loves a *tzaddik gamur*!²⁰

LEFT TO RIGHT: REB DOVID RASKIN AND REB MENDEL FUTERFAS.



LEFT TO RIGHT: REB VOLF GREENGLASS AND REB MOSHE ELIYAHU GERLITZKY.

This idea is underscored by a saying that the Rebbe quotes²¹ in the name of several "*Gedolei Ha'Chassidus*", that it is better to be in *Gehenom* with other Yidden than to be alone in Gan Eden....

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The Frierdiker Rebbe was very involved in being *mekarev* Yidden of all stripes and helping them, *begashmiyus* and *beruchniyus*. Once he was confronted by a Yid who asked "How can you help Yidden regarding whom it is written How can you help Yidden regarding to Halacha, they are not supposed to be assisted)!?"

The Frierdiker Rebbe responded: "There are four sections of Shulchan Aruch. The laws of מורידין ולא מעלין are at the very end of Shulchan Aruch, at the end of Choshen Mishpat. One must first ensure that they are fulfilling the rest of Shulchan Aruch from the beginning before they are so meticulous on these laws..."

The Rebbe explained the words of the Frierdiker Rebbe as follows: Often, someone will do something because of his own personal tendencies, and use Yiddishkeit as a justification. Only when a Yid keeps the rest of Shulchan Aruch is it obvious that his insistence on keeping these Halachos meticulously is a result of Yiras Shomayim, and not from personal feelings about the other (Likkutei Sichos vol. 1 p. 133-4).

Sur Me'ra V'aseh Tov

Ahavas Yisroel is primarily a proactive Mitzvah, which requires us to consciously cultivate positive feelings towards others and act in accordance with those feelings. However, it also requires us to avoid causing pain to another Yid, out of the same sense of love and concern for him. This is expressed, among other things, in the *issurim* of *Ona'ah* (prohibition against defrauding another) and *Lashon Hara* that are mentioned in the Torah and explained in the Poskim.

In several places in Tanya, the Alter Rebbe highlights the importance of this idea. In Perek Yud-Beis of Likkutei Amorim, the Alter Rebbe instructs his Chassidim to immediately reject any thoughts of hatred or anger toward other Yidden. Even upon being wronged, one should respond with loving action.

Later on, in the Iggeres Hakodesh *Katonti*²², written in the immediate aftermath of his arrest and liberation, the Alter Rebbe warns his Chassidim against antagonizing the Misnagdim in retaliation for the ordeal they caused him. The Frierdiker Rebbe recounts²³ learning this piece of Tanya with his father, the Rebbe Rashab, who explained to him the great Ahavas Yisroel which this letter signifies. Even after everything he went through, the Alter Rebbe was adamant that his Chassidim avoid developing any sense of superiority over their opponents. Instead, he wanted them to cultivate *middos tovos* towards every Yid, regardless of past actions.

In another letter²⁴, the Alter Rebbe exhorts his Chassidim to ingrain a love for their fellow Yidden by strenuously avoiding any negative thoughts or judgments about them, demanding that if such thoughts arise, they must immediately reject it as they would thoughts of *avodah zara!* (The Alter Rebbe refers to his Chassidim in this letter as "My brothers and friends." The Tzemach Tzedek commented on this²⁵ that when one follows the Alter Rebbe's instructions here, he can be considered a "brother and friend" to the Alter Rebbe!)

As the Alter Rebbe writes there, thinking badly about another Yid is even worse than the explicit *issur* of *Lashon Hara*-speaking badly about another Yid. The reason for this is because the power of thought (*levush hamachshava*) is more deeply linked to the person's *nefesh* than the power of speech (*levush ha'dibbur*). Thus, by entertaining negative thoughts about another Yid, one contaminates his *neshama* on a deeper level!

In 5750, an individual in Eretz Yisroel made a speech decrying the rampant secularism in Israeli society, and

claiming that as a result of this, the Yidden deserved a second Holocaust, *rachmana l'tzlan*.

The following Shabbos²⁶, in a pained tone, the Rebbe vehemently condemned his words, declaring that "One who speaks badly about Yidden, is essentially speaking badly about Hashem, who chose them to be his nation. As the Novi Zecharia said 'One who touches you, is as if he is touching the apple of His eye'… An expression of disrespect towards Yidden, especially in public…requires rectification and *teshuvah*. Who is greater than the Novi Yeshaya. When he spoke disrespectfully of Yidden, he certainly had good reason to. Nevertheless, he was punished…"

Ahavas Yisroel: Also Because of Maalos

Although Ahavas Yisroel is indiscriminate and geared toward every Yid, without regard for his spiritual stature, the mitzvah also requires that we cultivate love and admiration towards the other not only because of their *neshama*, but also because of the good qualities they might have.²⁷

In this itself, there are two points:

- One should recognize the inherent *maaleh* of the *neshama* of every Yid, and the possibility that the other's *neshama* has a higher source than his own.
- One should also recognize the revealed good qualities that every Yid has. For example, if he is a simple person, one should love him because he believes in Hashem with simplicity. If the person is a *talmid chacham*, one should cultivate love toward him by reflecting on the words of the Gemara²⁸ that "Whoever is greater has a greater *yetzer hara*" and nevertheless, they overcome it to serve Hashem with *Yiras Shomayim*.

The Frierdiker Rebbe once related²⁹ that when he was a child, he asked his father why Hashem granted each person two eyes but just one mouth?

> LEFT TO RIGHT: REB MER ITKIN AND REB YEHUDA CHITRIK.

The Rebbe Rashab answered: There are certain things one must view with love, with the "right eye," and one must look towards other things with the "left eye" i.e. with apathy and disinterest. A Yid must look at another Yid with his "right eye," and at physical pleasures, with the "left eye."

Connection to Ahavas Hashem and Ahavas Ha'Torah

During the farbrengen of the *kabbolas ha'nesius*, on 10 Shevat 5711, the Rebbe shared his "mission statement" for our generation.

The Rebbe spoke of the connection between *Ahavas Hashem*, *Ahavas Ha'Torah*, and *Ahavas Yisroel*, declaring that they are intrinsically linked. This connection is expressed in three ways:

Ahavas Yisroel is an **indicator** of Ahavas Hashem and Ahavas Ha'Torah. If one lacks Ahavas Yisroel, it calls into question his





commitment to Hashem and His Torah...

It **contains** the other two loves. Being that a Yid is a חלק ממעל, loving him is a form of loving Hashem himself.

It **brings about** *Ahavas Hashem* and *Ahavas Ha'Torah*. Even if someone loves another Yid for external or rational reasons, unconnected to the presence of his neshama, but rather out of purely "humanistic" sensibilities, it will nevertheless bring about a genuine, G-dly love of Hashem, Torah and every Yid (Likkutei Sichos vol. 2 p. 499).

In the Rebbe's Torah: Levels of Achdus Yisroel

In the Rebbe's *sichos*, the idea of Ahavas Yisroel is broken down into two components:

Ahavas Yisroel: The Mitzvah to love another Yid.

Achdus Yisroel: The underlying rationale for the Mitzvahthe fact that all Yidden are one.

Ahavas Yisroel has an external element to it, as it is the effort of two separate individuals to love one another. Achdus Yisroel adds a dimension that they are fundamentally the same, and that, at their core, a Yid's love for another is not distinct from his love for himself.

The Rebbe explains this concept³⁰ based on what the Alter Rebbe writes in Perek Lamed Beis of Tanya, when elaborating on the significance of Ahavas Yisroel. The Alter Rebbe writes that all Yidden are "literally brothers" and, therefore, must love each other as such.

The Rebbe asks: There is a *Yerushalmi* that compares all of *Klal Yisroel* to a single body. Seemingly, that is a more powerful *mashal* representing a greater level of *achdus* and therefore demanding a greater love? Why doesn't the Alter Rebbe bring that *mashal* instead of the *mashal* of brothers?



LEFT TO RIGHT: REB DOVID RASKIN, REB ELIYAHU YAICHEL SIMPSON, REB BENTCHE SHEMTOV, MR. ZALMAN SHAZAR AND RABBI HODAKOV.

The Rebbe explains: The Alter Rebbe uses this *mashal* to highlight the **reason** for the Mitzvah of Ahavas Yisroel, not to demonstrate the **level of love** that is required by this Mitzvah.

The reason for the mitzvah is because "Av echad le'kulanah", all Yidden share a common source in Elokus, עלמין עיקרא ושרשא דכל, The same way brothers are both sourced in the "mind of their father", as explained in Tanya Perek Beis, so too the achdus of Yidden is not just as brothers born into separate bodies, but brothers in their original source. The love that flows from this recognition is even more powerful than the idea of all Yidden being one body, because, ultimately, a body is split into different limbs. The *neshamos* in their Divine source—"the father's mind", however, are even more united than that, and there is no element of separation between them, whatsoever. Once this is understood, the love that results is limitless.

On another occasion³¹, the Rebbe analyzes the language of the Alter Rebbe in Likkutei Torah Parshas Nitzavim, where he discusses the *achdus* that Yidden achieve when they stand before Hashem on Rosh Hashanah. The term the Alter Rebbe uses there is that they unite *"Lachodim kechod"*. The Rebbe explains that this is not merely poetic or flowery language, but rather a description of two different levels in *Achdus Yisroel*:

- "Le'achodim" denotes separate entities uniting as one, like different limbs of one body that complement each other. So too, among Yidden, different types each contribute something to the whole of Klal Yisroel.
- 2. *"Kechod"*: This level is representative of a higher sense of unity, the way Yidden are based in their original source in *Elokus*. On this level, their individual identities are not felt, but rather a sense of total oneness.

The Rebbe continues that not only are these two levels not contradictory, they, in fact, depend on one another: Only when the *chitzoniyus* of a Yid recognizes his need for the contribution of the other, can they reach the deeper level of *achdus* where they are all one. The same thing is true in the reverse: If every Yid did not have an intrinsic, *pnimiyus'digeh* connection to other Yidden, they would not be able to unite even in a more superficial way.

In the last *sicha* we merited to hear from the Rebbe, on Shabbos Parshas Vayakhel 5752, the Rebbe again extolled³² the importance of recognizing the inherent oneness and connectedness of all Yidden. The Rebbe elaborated on the significance of the mitzvah of Machatzis Hashekel, which illustrates that every Yid is merely a "half", and reaches completion only when he connects to, and unites with, a fellow Yid.

Ahavas Yisroel: A Matter of Life and Death!

The incredible impact of the Mitzvah of Ahavas Yisroel is evident in the words of Chazal³³: "דורו של אחאב כולם עובדי אלילים היו וע"י שלא היו בהם דילטורין היו יוצאין למלחמה ונוצחים...אבל דורו של דוד...היו יודעים לדרוש את התורה במ"ט פנים טהור ובמ"ט פנים טמא...אבל אחר כל השבח הזה יוצאין למלחמה ונופלים, לפי שהי' בהם דילטורין." (The generation of Achav waged war successfully even though they served avoda zara because they were united, whereas the generation of Dovid Hamelech consisted of incredible talmidei chachamim but would fall in battle because they informed on one another!)

The Rebbe drew a powerful lesson from this Midrash³⁴: Ahavas Yisroel is not just a vital and important Mitzvah-it is a matter of pikuach nefesh!

A Prelude to Geulah

The Medrash tells us³⁵ that "אין ישראל נגאלין עד שיעשו אגודה אחת" (The Jewish people will only be redeemed when they're united as one). This is because the descent of Yidden into golus was a result of sinas chinam.³⁶ It follows that the key to undoing golus is the reversal of baseless hatred to baseless (suprarational) love.

The Rebbe once explained³⁷ his deep focus on

the mitzvah of Ahavas Yisroel the following way: "Being that according to all the signs mentioned in the Gemara Sotah, we are at the very end of the ikvesa de'Meshicha, and being that golus is a result of sinas chinam, we must increase exponentially our ahavas chinam."

In 5751, the Rebbe added a new angle to the avoda of Ahavas Yisroel³⁸. Not only is Ahavas Yisroel a rectification to the sinas chinam that caused the golus, and thus a catalyst for geulah, it is a way for us to begin *living* with the spirit of geulah, when the Yechidah of every Yid will be revealed, and we will see how all Yidden are truly one.

In closing, let us recall the words of the Rebbe during the farbrengen of Yud-Beis Tammuz 5713:

"When the Tzemach Tzedek was arrested, he was asked by [his contemporary] Reb Itz'ele Volozhiner how he could allow himself to go on mesiras nefesh [endangering his own life and potentially leaving his Chassidim without a Rebbe]? The Tzemach Tzedek responded that 'The Chassidim, with their Ahavas Achim, will lead them to the coming of Moshiach'.

"These lessons were taught to us in the stories, maamarim and sichos, which provides us with a clear lesson in our day-to-day life on how to navigate the choshech kaful u'mechupal (exponentially great darkness) of the world...These hora'os we will follow until Moshiach [comes]".39

May it be speedily, in our days!

1. Igros Kodesh Admur HaRayatz vol. 4 p. 293.

- 2. Niddah 17b.
- 3. Likkutei Dibburim vol. 3 p. 114a.
- 4. Likkutei Dibburim vol. 1 p. 88.
- 5. Hayom Yom 8 Menachem Av.
- 6. Sefer Ha'Sichos 5700 p. 117.
- 7. Igros Kodesh vol. 5 p. 180.
- 8. Likkutei Sichos, vol. 36, p. 267.
- 9. Rambam, Hilchos De'os 6:3.
- 10. Likkutei Sichos vol. 2 p. 436.
- 11. Hayom Yom 6 Adar I.
- 12. Magid Devarav L'Yaakov, Hosafos 12.
- 13. Lesheima Ozen (Duchman) p. 191.

- 14. Likkutei Sichos vol. 4 p. 1059. 15. Seif 11.
- 16. Igeres Hakodesh 22, Likkutei

- 19. Sicha Shavuos 5705.
- 20. Sefer Hasichos 5700 p. 117.
- 21. Igros Kodesh vol. 18, p. 535.
- 22. Iggeres Hakodesh 2.
- 23. Likkutei Dibburim vol. 1 page 20a.
- 24. Igeres Hakodesh 22.
- 25. Sefer Hasichos 5704 p. 22.
- 26. Shabbos Parshas Vayikra 5750; Sefer Hasichos p. 385 and further.

- 27. Sicha Shavuos 5705.
- 28. Sukkah 52a.
- 29. See Sefer Hatoldos Admur HaRayatz vol. 1, p. 8.
- 30. Likkutei Sichos vol 31. Beshalach 1.
- 31. Likkutei Sichos vol. 4 Nitzavim.
- 32. Sefer Hasichos 5752 vol. 2 p. 440.
- 33. Devarim Rabba 5:10.
- 34. Hisvaaduyos 5745 vol. 1 p. 295.
- 35. Tanchuma Nitzavim 1.
- 36. Sifri Behalosecha 11:5.
- 37. 24 Iyar 5734.
- 38. Sefer Hasichos 5751 vol. 2 page 717.
- 39. Toras Menachem vol. 14, p. 54.

