

Stories on Ahavas Yisroel

The Mitteler Rebbe

A young man once entered into the office of the Mitteler Rebbe and bemoaned a certain matter that was troubling him. The Mitteler Rebbe rolled up his sleeve, bared his arm, and said, "You see how my arm has shriveled? This is due to your sins." The greatness of the Mitteler Rebbe and his distance from such matters (of sin) is well known, yet he was so bound up with his chassidim that if something was wrong with them, it had a physical effect on the Rebbe.

The Tzemach Tzedek

The Tzemach Tzedek once related to his son the Rebbe Maharash a story that happened to him:

When I was traveling from Dobromisl to Lubavitch, I was very satisfied with the inner kiruv that my grandfather - the Alter Rebbe - had showed me, and I very much hoped that upon my return to Lubavitch I would have the merit to see my grandfather with a shining face (i.e., in a vision, for this story took place many years after the histalkus of the Alter Rebbe). Meanwhile I had many questions that I wished to ask the Alter Rebbe in Chassidus and Nigleh (the revealed parts of the Torah) and I arranged all the questions in my mind.

As soon as I arrived in Lubavitch, I went to the very spot that the Alter Rebbe had told us about when he had come to Lubavitch from Liadi many years before. He had described how he had learned in the shul that had stood there, but now, as a fire had since destroyed the shul, the

place was empty. The Mitteler Rebbe once said regarding that place, that 57 years previously, the Alter Rebbe had made Lubavitch a place befitting for the leadership of Chabad and bestowed upon it its eternal quality until the coming of Mashiach.

The fact was that when I returned to Lubavitch, I did not see the Alter Rebbe and I felt very dejected and broken. I felt as if I had fallen from a high place into a deep pit as my awaited inner kiruv did not come. It pained me greatly and I searched my deeds to find the cause so that I could do teshuvah and again merit to see the holy countenance of my grandfather and to hear Torah from him.

On Wednesday, the 20th of Elul, the Tzemach Tzedek went to shul to pray. On his way there, he met one of the townspeople, Reb Pinchas, who requested from the Rebbe an interest-free loan (gemilus chessed) of three ruble in order to do some business in the market to earn enough money for Shabbos. The Tzemach Tzedek replied that Reb Pinchas should come to his house after prayers and then the Rebbe would loan him the money.

However when the Rebbe was preparing for prayer with his tallis on his shoulder, he remembered that Reb Pinchas had said that today was a market day and that the market opens early in the morning. When he realized that Reb Pinchas would need the money immediately, the Tzemach Tzedek took off his tallis, went home, took five ruble and gave it to Reb Pinchas so that he could earn some money.

Stories on Ahavas Yisroel

Upon returning to shul the Tzemach Tzedek washed his hands, whereupon the Alter Rebbe appeared to him in a vision and answered all his questions in learning.

From this story we see how great is the effect of giving tzedakah on the spiritual worlds. The Tzemach Tzedek, despite all the great kiruvim he received from the Alter Rebbe, and despite all his holy efforts, could not see the Alter Rebbe. It was only when he met a Jew in the street - not in his immediate environs, and not when he was saying Tehillim or the like, and then delaying his prayers to do a material favor for another - did he merit to see the Alter Rebbe.

The Rebbe Maharash

Once, the Rebbe Maharash traveled to Paris accompanied by the gabbaim R. Levik and R. Pinchas Leib, and the chassidim R. M. Monezson and Reb Y. Berlin. When they arrived in Paris, R. Y. Berlin asked his uncle the Rebbe Maharash where they should go, and the Rebbe directed him to the Hotel Alexander, one of the fanciest hotels in Paris, frequented by royalty. He further added that since Reb Y. Berlin didn't speak French, the Rebbe would do the talking.

When they arrived at the hotel, the Rebbe requested a number of rooms and was informed that there were rooms available at 200 francs a day. The Rebbe asked if there were any better rooms and also if they were on the same floor as the game rooms. They replied that such rooms were available but for a huge price, and undeterred, the Rebbe hired three

rooms: one for himself, one for R. Levik and one for R. Pinchas Leib. R. Y. Berlin and R. Monezson stayed in a different hotel due to the astronomical cost of the rooms.

After a few hours in the hotel, the Rebbe went into the game room where the guests were playing a dice game. The Rebbe sat down next to a young man who was playing and who, from time to time, was sipping wine from his glass. The Rebbe placed his hand on the shoulder of this fellow and said, "Young man, yayin nesech (non-Kosher wine) is prohibited to drink." He then repeated, "Yayin nesech defiles the mind and heart - be a Jew. Good night." The Rebbe then returned to his room very excited. R. Y. Berlin said that he never saw his uncle the Rebbe so energized before in his life.

In this hotel, if you wanted to go from one floor to another - in those days there were no elevators - there were special chairs in which you sat and were carried from one floor to another. Out of his great excitement, the Rebbe sat in one of those chairs, and when they lifted him and began carrying him up the stairs, he remembered that he had a room on that floor, and he pardoned himself and returned to his room.

After a few hours, the young man from the game room came and inquired as to the whereabouts of the Rebbe, and he entered the Rebbe's room and remained there a long time. The next day, the Rebbe left Paris.

The Rebbe later explained that it had been many generations that such a lofty and pure soul had been held

Stories on Ahavas Yisroel

captive by the kelipos (evil).

The young man became a baal teshuvah and the head of family K. in France - an Orthodox and G-d fearing family.

The Rebbe, in the maamar Basi LeGani, pointed out that time was very precious to the Rebbe Maharash, even to the extent that his delivery of Chassidus was brief. At certain times it was well known that he would have already prayed by eight in the morning, and even so, he traveled such a long way just for one soul!

The Rebbe Rashab

In the first years of the Rebbe Rashab's leadership, a decree was made against the Jewish people and the Rebbe had to travel to Moscow to see what he could do about it. His older brother, Reb Zalman Aharon, protested that time was too precious for the Rebbe and anyway he could not speak Russian (while Reb Zalman Aharon could speak many languages). In addition, he had to make new contacts and take care of some other matters, so he suggested that he should go in the Rebbe's place and act on his directives. The Rebbe Rashab refused and insisted that he go himself, and in fact succeeded in his mission.

The Previous Rebbe

In the Maamar Basi Legani, the Rebbe doesn't tell any particular story but refers to the fact that there are numerous stories of the great ahavas Yisrael of the Previous Rebbe; of how he would go to great lengths to do a favor, either spiritual or

material, for an individual. He put aside not only his material needs in these matters but even his own spirituality, even though the person he was helping was not always in the category of a "friend" in Torah and mitzvos, and even if he wasn't on that level at all. We will share a story about the Previous Rebbe printed in Sefer HaMaamarim 5701, p. 163:

In the days of Czarist Russia, the head of State for many years was a man called Stulipin, a renowned anti-Semite who made many decrees against the Jews. Once, the Rebbe Rashab heard about one of the decrees that Stulipin was about to make and he instructed his son, Reb Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn (the Previous Rebbe), to try to nullify the decree. The Rebbe traveled immediately to Petersburg, the capital, to discuss the matter with other communal workers. When all other avenues failed, the Rebbe decided to visit the minister Pobiedonostzev who was highly regarded by Stulipin. Although the minister was also anti-Semitic, he was deeply religious and therefore respected ministers of other religions.

After great efforts, the minister agreed to meet the Rebbe; however, the meeting was fixed for a Friday night, and the minister lived a fair distance from the city. The Rebbe decided that the best course of action would be to travel to the minister's town and spend Shabbos there.

In those days, the environs of Petersburg were out of bounds for Jewish dwelling, and although in Petersburg itself there lived a number of Jewish merchants, doctors, etc., outside the city there lived no Jews.

Stories on Ahavas Yisroel

Since there were no Jewish families with whom to stay for Shabbos, and it was impossible to stay in the street because of the freezing conditions, the Rebbe was forced to stay at an inn for Shabbos. He waited at the inn until the meeting, and after the meeting he remained at the inn for the duration of Shabbos.

One could easily imagine how the Rebbe felt staying at the inn among drunken peasants who were virulently anti-Semitic; how much more so since it was doubtful if his mission would be successful. If he had made a "calculation," he could have reasoned that he was not necessarily obligated to go and spend Shabbos among drunken peasants and put his life in danger on a doubtful mission. However, since the matter affected the Rebbe so deeply, he made no calculations and risked his life in order to save his people.

The Rebbe related this same story on another occasion and added that when the Previous Rebbe told the story he said that since the weather was very cold, he put on a fur coat, something that was unusual. The Rebbe asked, why was it necessary for the Previous Rebbe to add what kind of coat he wore? He explained that this teaches us that even if one has to go to a place that is spiritually freezing in order to save another Jew, one must nevertheless take great precaution that one should not be affected by the environment but should wear a spiritual "fur coat" for protection.

Two Stories of the Rebbe

This chapter would be incomplete

without relating a story about the great ahavas Yisrael of the Rebbe. The difficulty in doing so is that the Rebbe is most probably the greatest ohev Yisrael that ever lived, and there are thousands of stories that illustrate this. On a macro scale, one can only stand in awe and amazement of the Rebbe's great ability to set up thousands of worldwide institutions, with intimate knowledge of them all. To the Rebbe, every detail about every organization and every Jew was important.

We will therefore limit ourselves to the micro scale and relate two stories told by a member of the Rebbe's secretariat, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Groner.

Music at the Wedding

It is customary at weddings in Crown Heights to stage the Chupah just outside the Rebbe's room at Lubavitch Headquarters, 770 Eastern Parkway. After the marriage ceremony, the chosson breaks the glass and all present shout mazal tov. The musicians then strike up a lively tune.

On one occasion, during the winter, I was standing in the Rebbe's room and a chupah was taking place outside. We heard the chosson break the glass, followed by shouts of mazal tov and singing, but no band was heard. When the Rebbe asked me why there was no music, I answered that the family getting married is poor and they don't have enough money for a band. The Rebbe then instructed me to go outside immediately and tell them that the Rebbe would pay for the

Stories on Ahavas Yisroel

music!

Money for Pesach

Once, on Erev Pesach, I was sitting in the office when a very respectable woman who lived in Crown Heights (who is now in the World of Truth) phoned me and said, "Reb Leib, I don't know what to do. I do not smell any food cooking in my neighbor's kitchen. I thought about what I could do to help, and finally went across to the neighbor on a pretense and asked her if I could borrow an onion. I knocked on the door and when I entered I saw that the oven was empty - the woman didn't have any food for Pesach. I offered her money but she refused. What should I do?" I answered that I would have to think what to do. I went into the Rebbe's office and related to the Rebbe what this woman had told me. The Rebbe opened his drawer, took out \$500 and gave it to me. I told the Rebbe that the family had already been offered money but had refused. The Rebbe then instructed me to put the money in a plain envelope, slip it under their door, and run away. Afterwards, the same woman called again to say that now she smells the aroma of Yom Tov food coming from that kitchen. That is ahavas Yisrael.

A Story About the Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka

Rabbi Chessed Halberstam recounted the following story of an act of ahavas Yisrael of the Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka.

The Rebbe instructed Chessed to take

the Rebbetzin to the park, and she used to take bread and feed the birds. The park was in Long Island and they would travel along the Long Island Expressway to get there.

Once the highway was blocked off and they made a detour through the local streets. The route was congested and the traffic moved very slowly. As they were driving, they noticed a group of people gathered outside a house and a number of people crying. After passing the house, the Rebbetzin told Chessed that her father, the Previous Rebbe, told her that everything one sees is by Divine Providence and she asked him to return to the spot where the people had gathered.

They returned, and after a brief inquiry found out that a poor Russian family was being evicted from their home because they were in arrears for the rent.

The Rebbetzin asked how much they were in arrears, and the bailiff answered approximately \$8000. The Rebbetzin asked the bailiffs that if she would write a check for \$8000, would they allow the family to continue living in the apartment, and they answered in the affirmative. The bailiff asked how he would know if the bank would honor the check and the Rebbetzin told him to call the bank. He called and the bank gave the approval. The Rebbetzin wrote out a check, gave it to the bailiff, and asked him if the same men who took the furniture out of the house could bring it back in. She then quickly took leave of the scene before the family would recognize who their benefactress was. She also instructed Chessed not to tell anyone about

Stories on Ahavas Yisroel

what had transpired. Only after the passing of the Rebbetzin was the story revealed.[9]

On numerous other occasions the Rebbe told stories connected with ahavas Yisrael. The following is one of them.

A Story From the Baal Shem Tov

The Tzemach Tzedek heard from his grandfather the Alter Rebbe a story that the Alter Rebbe heard in Mezeritch about the Baal Shem Tov:

Before the Baal Shem Tov revealed himself, and then in the first years of his leadership, the Baal Shem Tov used to travel around the Jewish towns, where, in the middle of the marketplace, he would gather people around him - the simple Jews, men women and children - and tell them stories. The stories were primarily from the Aggadic sayings of our Sages, and he would tell them the stories at length and explain them in detail, or he would connect a story with a saying of the Sages so that each idea would be absorbed properly by those hearing it.

Once, at such a gathering, the Baal Shem Tov spoke about the idea of ahavas Yisrael, explaining how great the love of G-d is for each Jew, and he gave the following example:

In that town, there was a Jew called Reb Yaakov, and he knew the entire Talmud by heart including the commentaries of Rashi and Tosafos. He also used to learn verbatim without having to refer to the text. In those days it was not uncommon to find such people.

Learning this way demanded deep concentration, more so than if one was reading from a text. Once, in the middle of learning a large and difficult Tosafos, Reb Yaakov was approached by one of his small children who told him something wise. Reb Yaakov was so excited by what the child said that he interrupted his learning. This is what can be achieved by a small child.

"So too," said the Baal Shem Tov, "G-d is busy, as the Sages tell us that for the first three hours of the day He is learning Torah, etc. However, when a Jew prays and his request comes before the A-lmighty, He interrupts whatever He is doing and He busies Himself with the request of the Jew."

When G-d wanted to create man, the angels asked Him what man would look like. When G-d told them they claimed, "What is man that he should be mentioned?" i.e., what do You need such a person for?

When a Jew gets up in the morning, and he runs to pray communally with the early minyan (vassikin), and then is busy the whole day but manages to tear himself away and go to shul for Minchah, and between Minchah and Maariv he listens to a shiur on the Ein Yaakov, and after Maariv he comes home and relates to his family what he learned in Ein Yaakov in shul...

When this happens, the A-lmighty calls together the angels, along with the man whom He has created, and says to them: "You angels have no millstone on your neck (no living to make), no wife and children, no problems, no taxes to pay. This man

Stories on Ahavas Yisroel

has a living to make, and it is I who placed the millstone on his neck, for according to the Torah he is obligated to sustain his family, and he is busy paying taxes and in general dealing with the pressures of the exile, and yet see how he conducts himself.

Thinking deeply about how G-d is so proud of every good deed a Jew does will itself have a great effect.[10]

A Diamond and a Descendant

We will close this chapter with two stories of the Rebbe which illustrate exactly how one is to view another Jew.

It is well known that on Sunday mornings the Rebbe used to distribute dollars to be given to charity. Thousands of Jews would line up each Sunday for the chance to receive a dollar and a blessing from the Rebbe. On one occasion, an older lady who had been waiting a long time blurted out to the Rebbe that she marveled at how he could stand for so many hours on his feet dispensing the dollars, as she was totally exhausted from her wait!

Replied the Rebbe, "When you are counting diamonds, you don't get tired."

For the Rebbe, every Jew was a diamond.

Another story was related by Mr. George Rohr at a convention for the Rebbe's emissaries in 5757.

Mr. Rohr related how, as a member of the Machne Israel Special Development Fund - a special fund

established to build new Chabad centers around the world, he had the privilege to meet the Rebbe on one occasion just after Rosh Hashanah. Mr. Rohr thought that instead of asking the Rebbe for something, he would give the Rebbe a present of his own. A short time before Rosh Hashanah, he had been instrumental in setting up a beginners' service at his shul in Manhattan. On Rosh Hashanah, 120 Jews attended this new service. Mr. Rohr decided to announce this to the Rebbe and was sure the Rebbe would receive much nachas from this good news. When his turn to meet the Rebbe arrived, he confidently strode up to the Rebbe and shared with him his good news:

"Thank G-d, this Rosh Hashanah we set up a beginners' service in our shul and had 120 Jews with no Jewish background participate!"

Until that point the Rebbe had a broad smile on his face, but when Mr. Rohr told him the news the Rebbe's face dropped, and Mr. Rohr searched his words for anything he may have said that had upset the Rebbe.

"What?" said the Rebbe.

Mr. Rohr repeated, "...120 Jews with no Jewish background."

"No Jewish background?" asked the Rebbe. "Go and tell those Jews that they are all children of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov."

Now Mr. Rohr understood. The Rebbe objected to these Jews, his children, being described as having no Jewish background. The Rebbe pointed out that every Jew has a Jewish background, a great, illustrious background - they are the

Stories on Ahavas Yisroel

children of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov!