
Preface

A MAN LOOKS into a mirror and finds dirt on his face. Concerned about his appearance, he takes a washcloth and starts washing the mirror. He vigorously scrubs the mirror in order to remove every fleck of dirt from his face. He looks at the rag from time to time, and when dirt no longer appears on it, he is convinced that his face is clean. If he inspects his face—and not the rag—he will be quite surprised to see that it is just as dirty as before. If he does not bother to check, he may never know.

This quite accurately describes some of our efforts at self-improvement, including not speaking *lashon ha-ra*. We try very hard, but sometimes meet with only limited success. Our words mirror our innermost thoughts and feelings, and if our heart is clean and pure, our words will be, too. If our heart is soiled with hatred, our words will be either harmful or insincere. The Mishnah in *Avos* 2:9 confirms the opinion of Rabbi Elazar ben Arach that a good heart is the most important trait, as it includes all other positive traits. A good heart feels the needs of others, and labors incessantly to provide—quietly, unnoticed—and never tires. A bad heart only feels itself, as it is regretfully full with arrogance, jealousy, grudges, prejudice and hatred.

The Torah (*Kedoshim* 19:17) forbids hating your brother in your heart. When the Gemara in *Yoma* 9b discusses the cause for the destruction of the second Beis HaMikdash, it

refers to *lashon ha-ra* as hatred, because hatred is the root of *lashon ha-ra*. This is why the same person who will refrain from speaking a mild form of *lashon ha-ra*, like saying that “her potato kugel is awful,” may not find it so easy to refrain from saying something really bad. Commenting about a potato kugel stems from frivolity or from a loose tongue, while the urge to speak sinister *lashon ha-ra* is rooted in a heart that is soiled with hatred, jealousy and other related impurities. If only our hearts were pure from hatred, jealousy and arrogance, refraining from speaking *lashon ha-ra* would be very easy.

The Torah commands us (*Kedoshim* 19:17,18): לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך...וואהבה לרעך כמוך—“Do not hate your brother in your heart...love your fellow (Jew) like yourself.” Rabbi Akiva said this is the great principle of the Torah (*Safra, Kedoshim*). These two *mitzvos* encompass the entire Torah and very much determine our fate—both as a nation and as individuals. Quite surprisingly, their halachic parameters and applications remain unclear and undefined. Even the simple translation of the verses is the subject of much halachic dispute.

What constitutes love, and what is considered hatred? Who is your “fellow” and who is your “brother”? What does it mean to love him as yourself? Whom are you obliged to hate? What is hatred “in your heart”? What is “*sinas chinam*,” hatred without reason?

These two *mitzvos* are the heart of all of our *mitzvos*, and we have been enduring this bitter *galus* with all of its tragedies for nearly two thousand years because of our undue hatred toward each other. In order to change our ways, it is not enough to work on restraining the outward expressions of our negative feelings, but we must change those feelings. This is what the prophet meant when he said (*Yoel* 2:13): קרעו לבבכם ואל בגדיכם—“Tear your hearts and not your garments.” “Garments” is not limited to clothing, but represents everything external, as

opposed to the heart which represents everything internal.

Ahavas Chinam

In *Avos De-R' Nosson* it says that you must love your fellow as yourself because *אני ד' בראתי* —“I, Hashem, have created him.” Although Hashem also created everything else and you are not commanded to love anything else, *Chazal* mean that Hashem created you and your fellow Jew as the creation closest to Him. The source of the Jewish soul is the highest level of creation in Heaven, and it is the same as the source of the Torah. That is why the Torah tells us to treat our fellow Jews with *ahavas chinam*, unconditional love.

Since all the Jewish people are rooted in this one great soul of *Klal Yisrael*, we are actually one person. The *Arizal* says this is the reason why we are responsible for each other like one person, and are commanded to love each other as ourselves. The entire Torah is about our connecting ourselves with the root level of our *neshamah*, soul, which is the same as the source of the Torah, as explained in *Nefesh HaChaim* (*Sha'ar* 1). This is yet another reason why Rabbi Akiva called it the great principle of the Torah. Many more reasons for this are discussed in the *sefer*.

Difficult to Be Righteous

It is much easier to be righteous in the observance of *mitzvos* between man and Hashem than in the observance of *mitzvos* between man and his fellow. *Chasam Sofer* writes the following (*Drashos Chasam Sofer*, p. 245): Some extremely righteous people will readily sacrifice of themselves for the slightest detail and nuance of a *mitzvah* between man and Hashem, but will always look for ways to be lenient regarding *mitzvos* between

man and his fellow.”

He adds: “Not everyone merits becoming righteous in the observance of *mitzvos* between man and his fellow man. The rule that יגעתִי ולא מצאתִי אל האמין—‘If one says, “I tried but did not succeed,” do not believe him,’ is true only regarding observance of *mitzvos* between man and Hashem. When it comes to *mitzvos* between man and his fellow, even trying your hardest does not guarantee success. For that, you need *siyatta di’Shemaya*, special assistance from Heaven.”

We pray for this assistance daily in the וּבֵא לְצִיּוֹן prayer when we say יהי רצון שנשמור חקיך בעולם הזה וכו’—“May it be Your will... that we observe Your statutes in this World, and merit that we live and see and inherit goodness and blessing in the days of Mashiach and for the life of the World to Come.” “Your statutes” refers to *mitzvos* between man and his fellow. The “goodness and blessing in the days of Mashiach and for the life of the World to Come” are connected to the observance of the *mitzvos* between man and his fellow, the perfection of which requires special assistance from Hashem.

Tribes of Gad and Reuven

It is written (*BeMidbar* 32:22): וְהִייתֶם נִקְיִים מִד’ וּמִיִּשְׂרָאֵל—“Then you shall be vindicated from Hashem and from Yisrael (the Jewish People).” This verse refers to the tribes of Gad and Reuven who asked to inherit the land to the east of the Jordan River, before the other tribes conquered Eretz Yisrael. Moshe Rabbeinu told them that if they keep their promise and enter as the vanguard of the armies of Israel in conquering the land, they would be vindicated from Hashem and from Yisrael.

Chasam Sofer (*Teshuvos*, vol. 6, ch. 59 in *Likutim*) writes that, although they kept their promise and even remained there for fourteen years longer, until their brothers were settled, they

were only vindicated from Hashem. With regard to Yisrael they were not vindicated because their request had initially caused distress to them and to Moshe Rabbeinu. For this reason, the tribes of Gad and Reuven were the first to be exiled to Bavel. *Chasam Sofer* adds that he is not sure it is possible for a human being to be totally vindicated with regard to Yisrael, and this may be included in what King Shelomo wrote (*Koheles* 7:20): “There is no man so wholly righteous on earth that does only good and never sins.”

Yerushalayim—Center of Unity

Yerushalayim, the city of peace, is the center of unity among Jewry. The return of the *Shechinah*, Hashem’s Divine Presence, to Yerushalayim is central in our daily prayers. *Chazal* say (*Yerushalmi, Bava Kama* 7:7) that Yerushalayim was not divided among the *shevatim*, and is called (*Tehillim* 122:3): כְּעִיר שֶׁחִבְרָה לָהּ יַחְדָּו—“Like a city that is united together.” The *Yerushalmi* there explains that Yerushalayim is the city that unites all the Jews together.

Yerushalayim was destroyed because its inhabitants settled their disputes in accordance with the strict letter of Torah law, instead of displaying compromising flexibility (*Bava Metzia* 30b). *Tosafos* points out that in *Yoma* 9b the Talmud says that it was destroyed because of hatred. *Tosafos* then answers that both reasons are true. According to *Chasam Sofer*, not compromising for the benefit of others is divisive, and is closely related to hatred. It is antithetical to the theme of Yerushalayim, and therefore brought about its destruction.

Since peace and unity are the theme of its holiness, the Satan focuses on creating hatred and dissent in Yerushalayim more than in any other place. It is for this reason that we pray to Hashem that He spread a shelter of peace over Yerushalayim,

because it needs a special blessing in this regard.

It is in the heart of the Jewish people that the *Shechinah* rests—when there is peace and unity in that heart. The *Shechinah's* main dwelling place is in the Jewish heart, even more than in the Beis HaMikdash. (See *Nefesh HaChaim, Sha'ar* 1, ch. 4.) The Beis HaMikdash represents the epitome of the unity of the heart of the Jewish people. The *Shechinah* dwells in its palace—the Beis HaMikdash—when the Jewish people are united. The Torah writes: (*Devarim* 33:5) “He became King over Yeshurun (the Jews) when the numbers of the nation gathered, the tribes of Yisrael together.”

Foundation of Creation

In *Nedarim* 32a, Rabbi Eliezer says, “Were it not for Torah, heaven and earth would cease to exist, as it is written (*Yirmiyahu* 33:25): ‘Were it not for My covenant day and night, I would not have established the statutes of the heavens and the earth.’” *Rav Chaim Volozhiner* explains that if at any given time, nobody in the world would be studying Torah, the creation would instantly cease to exist. This is actually part of the condition Hashem made with the creation, making it dependent upon our accepting the Torah on the sixth day of Sivan, which is the festival of Shavuos.

When receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai it is written: ויהן שם ישראל—“And the Israelites encamped there.” The word ויהן is a singular tense, and *Chazal* (*Mechilta*) explain that they encamped together in peace and harmony like one person with one heart. Had they not reached that level of unity, the Torah would not have been given. *Chazal* also say that ישראל ואורייתא—“Yisrael, the Torah, and Hashem are one.” Unwarranted hatred among the Jewish people weakens this bond, and shatters the foundation of unity upon which the

Torah was given, which is the foundation of the entire creation.

This is one of the reasons for the great destruction that is invoked by the sin of hatred, both at the public level, such as the destruction of the second Beis HaMikdash and our ensuing exile, and at the level of personal tragedies. The destructive power of hatred and discord is even greater than that of idolatry. *Chazal* said that even if they worship idols like in the days of Achav, when there is unity among them they are victorious in battle and the Heavenly judgment cannot touch them.

Hatred toward Yosef

Our first exile to the land of Egypt, which is a map of the ensuing exiles of the Jewish nation, was brought about through the hatred of the brothers toward Yosef. Their hatred is the source of our hatred toward each other throughout the generations. The brothers were convinced that Yosef had committed sins and deserved the death penalty, and that selling him as a slave was a kind gesture to one who deserved the death penalty. In reality, their jealousy over the slight favoritism that their father Yaakov exhibited toward Yosef was the true cause of their hatred. Once they hated him, they found reasons to kill him, and were convinced not only that they were right, but that they were even being kind to only sell him as a slave.

The עשרה הרוגי מלכות, the ten great Sages who were brutally murdered by the Romans, atoned for the ten brothers who sold Yosef. This occurred shortly after the destruction of the second Beis HaMikdash, which was destroyed because of *sinas chinam*. Their atonement was actually a continuation of the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash for *sinas chinam*, at the hands of Edom, the nation of Esav, so notorious for hating his brother Yaakov.

One of the worst things about hatred is that you can often find reasons not only to justify it, but even to turn it into a

“mitzvah”. These dynamics prevailed in the sale of Yosef, and remain typical of many situations. It was also typical of the prevailing hatred in the era of the second Beis HaMikdash, as cited further in the name of the *Netziv* and others.

Hatred is also deeply rooted in character traits, and it is hard to repent for it, and very difficult to change. *Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 7:3* lists hatred as one of the negative character traits that are more serious than sinful deeds, and one of the most difficult to change. In order to properly fulfill the laws of interpersonal relationships, one must remove the trait of hatred from his heart.

Three Levels

Toldos Yaakov Yosef (Va'Eschanan 178a), writes in the name of the *Ba'al Shem Tov* that there are three levels of hatred and three corresponding levels of exile:

1. When the Jewish nation is despised and exiled among the Gentile nations of the world.
2. When the unlearned in Torah disgrace and despise the Torah scholars. This type is more severe than the first.
3. When God-fearing Torah scholars are despised by other Torah scholars. This type is the most severe of all. Those who killed Zechariah the prophet were also Torah scholars.

Rabbeinu Yehudah HaChassid writes in *Sefer Chassidim* (207; 208) that the ignorant Jews despise the Torah scholars because the Torah scholars despise one another. Once the ignorant Jews despise the Torah scholars, they in turn, are despised by the Gentile nations of the world.

All of our problems are rooted in our unsuccessful fulfillment of these two *mitzvos*, to which the entire Torah is con-

nected. These *mitzvos* are most prominent and central in our everyday lives and experiences. These and many other important issues are discussed extensively in this *sefer*. The Halachos of *lashon ha-ra* and *rechilus*, although referred to often in this *sefer*, are not discussed in great detail because they have been elucidated by the Chafetz Chaim and in the many later *sefarim* based on his works.

A Good Soul

The Gemara in *Bava Metzia* 58b mentions some people who have no share in the World to Come. These include a person who self-aggrandizes at the expense of others. The *Rambam* (*Sanhedrin, Perek Chelek*) asks why should one lose his share in the World to Come as the result of what seems to be such a relatively minor transgression? He answers that, while it might appear to be a relatively minor sin, it shows that he has a bad soul, and therefore has no place in the World to Come.

Who you are is even more important than what you do. Being a genuinely nice person is prerequisite to having a share in *Olam Haba*. The importance of perfecting our character traits is discussed often in this *sefer*, and cannot be over-emphasized. Working on a character trait requires a lot of diligent internalizing of a few words of simple truth.

Hatred in Israel

In Israel today, our lack of unity is alarming. Even the unrelenting terrorist attacks with all the ensuing human tragedy do not unite us as much as they did in the past. The serious security problems facing Jews in Israel and the rapidly rising surge of global anti-Jewish sentiment and activism are the handwriting on the wall.

Jews are murdered almost daily in Eretz Yisrael, while attempted murders are virtually incessant. At least one-third of the children in Eretz Yisrael live in poverty, the social fabric is disintegrating, the political leaders are corrupt and heretical. We are experiencing turbulent times.

The hatred that the Jews face around the world surpasses the global hatred toward the Jews prior to the destruction of European Jewry in World War II. This looks like an ominous prelude to the future.

Leaders of Jewish organizations arrange conferences, rallies and solidarity trips to Israel, and invest much effort trying to uncover the causes of anti-semitism. As cited earlier, *Rabbeinu Yehudah HaChassid* (and others) maintains that the expressed hatred of the non-Jews toward the Jews is a reflection of how the Jews act toward one another. If we would direct the same monies and effort to self-improvement, the causes of global anti-semitism may dissipate.

Inexplicable Apathy

Perhaps the most worrisome thing is our inexplicable apathy, our indifference to the clear messages from Heaven. We must wake up now, before it is too late.

Torah observant Jews tend to view the anti-religious and corrupt establishment of the State of Israel that was created by secular Zionists and Jewish communists as an entity that has nothing to do with us, and for which we bear no responsibility. Unfortunately, we are all in the same boat, and a hole can sink a boat regardless of who drills it. Also, many of us are connected to the Israeli government in one or more ways, and cannot disclaim all responsibility. Because we benefit from them, our biased eyes may view their actions with more favor than they are deserving of. The Halachos of how to relate to these people

are discussed in this *sefer*, and the topic is a very sensitive one. The truth is not always what we would want it to be.

Address the Cause

The cause of all of our troubles has been identified countless times as *sinas chinam*—the undue hatred which brings us to speak *lashon ha-ra*, and which is rooted in our jealousy, desire and arrogance. This spills over into many other areas, including corruption in the courts, flattery, dishonesty, and innumerable forms of selfishness, vice and aggrievement.

We must distinguish the important from the insignificant, recognize our emotions, our strengths, our weaknesses and our personal agendas, and appreciate the teachings of the Torah in their absolute truth. We must absorb, internalize, and apply the timeless words of the prophets who reprimanded and implored us to be upright, kind and just, bearing in mind that Torah-true integrity is the foundation, and very being of our existence.

Michah said (6:8): הגיד לך אדם מה טוב ומה ה' דורש ממך כי אם: עשות משפט ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת אם אלקיך—“Hashem has told you, man, what is good—and what does Hashem seek from you: Only to do justice, love kindness, and walk modestly with your God.”

Zechariah said (8:16–17): אלה הדברים אשר תעשו דברו אמת: איש את רעהו ומשפט שלום שפטו בשעריכם. ואיש את רעהו אל תחשבו בלבבכם ושבועת שקר אל תאהבו כי את כל אלה אשר שנאתי נאם ה'—“These are the things you should do—speak with sincerity to one another, truth and peaceful judgment shall you judge in your gates. You shall not think in your heart to harm another (or hate another in your heart) and you should not like to swear falsely, because these do I hate, says Hashem.”

Tzefaniah said (3:13): שארית ישראל לא יעשו עולה ולא ידברו כזב:—“The remnants of Israel will be

those who do no vice, speak no falsehood, and do not have a deceitful tongue in their mouths...”

Yirmiyahu said (9:23): כי אני ה' עשה חסד ומשפט וצדקה בארץ כי — באלה הפצתי נאם ה' — “For I, Hashem, do kindness and justice and righteousness in the land, because in these do I want, says Hashem.”

There are numerous similar verses throughout the Prophets, and their eternal words call out to us to this very day. We must focus on their *mussar*, and apply it to ourselves in our daily lives.

Rav Elimelech of Lizhensk

The great Chassidic leader, Rav Elimelech of Lizhensk ז”ל, wrote that before Mashiach comes there will be a sharp increase in dissent and hatred among the Jews, and this will cause the Heavenly channels of *parnasah*, sustenance, for the Jewish people to become seriously impaired. The great pressures and poverty will awaken the *talmidei chachamim* and those who fear Hashem, to try to bring together all the Jews to make peace among themselves. From that will sprout forth the final redemption.

His prophetic words seem to be today’s reality when we are experiencing ever increasing dissent, hatred and poverty. We need to join together and make peace among ourselves. In this way we hope to merit the witnessing of our final redemption.

About This Sefer

This *sefer* is written for both the young and old, for the layman and the serious *talmid chacham*. It is an encompassing work that contains thousands of Halachos, *mussar*, ethics, stories, many new insights, and many practical applications.

It was originally intended to deal solely with the issue of

undue hatred, but it soon became clear that without discussing the mitzvah of loving your fellow like yourself, a discussion of the sin of hatred would be incomplete. Additionally, many aspects of these two all-encompassing *mitzvos* must be clarified both from their halachic and ethical standpoints, in order to apply them to every day life. There are many subdivisions to these two *mitzvos*, which are discussed in chapters of their own.

In general, the issues discussed in this *sefer* have not been covered in an orderly fashion by the Poskim, and the *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch* have written very little about them. This leaves much room for deliberation over the wording of *Chazal* and the *Rishonim*, and it is often difficult to reach a conclusion.

It is impossible to list everything that pertains to interpersonal relationships, but basically everything is summed up in the Torah when it says (*Devarim* 6:18): ועשית הישר והטוב—“*You shall do what is fair and good.*” Ramban writes that the Torah cannot mention all the possible interactions between people, but after listing several of them, such as not to be a talebearer, not to take revenge, and not to bear a grudge, the Torah commanded all inclusively to do what is “upright and good” in all of your dealings. This includes the mitzvah to compromise instead of strictly insisting on your legal rights, and to speak and act pleasantly with people.

There are many sections that are easy and interesting reading, and there are other sections that require one to switch on the “study mode” in order to comprehend them properly. Some sections address your emotions, and other sections address your intellect.

I pray to Hashem that this *sefer* will help us in refining our character traits, and assist us in removing the hatred from our hearts, and fill our hearts with true love for our fellow Jews. In this way may we merit the coming of Mashiach and the final redemption, speedily in our days.

How to Use This Sefer

Most of the *sefer* is comprised of Halachos, and interspersed with pertinent ethical issues and concepts. However, the beginning chapters (first volume) deal primarily with ethical issues and are interspersed with pertinent Halachos and general rules. The ensuing chapters are more Halachic.

This *sefer* is written with the intelligent reader in mind. While the text is usually fairly simple, the footnotes vary widely from the very simple to the very complex. There are many important questions, answers and insights, that are found only in the footnotes. The second half of the *sefer*, from chapter seventeen onward, is considerably more heavily footnoted than the first half.

Virtually all relevant Halachic opinions on all the issues are cited in this *sefer*, and my humble opinion is expressed by the following rules:

- ◇ When a disagreement among Poskim is cited, the first opinion is intended as the practical Halachah, unless specified otherwise. The entire section must be read to be sure it is not specified otherwise.
- ◇ An opinion enclosed by this mark { } is not meant to be the practical Halachah, even if it appears first on the list.
- ◇ Sometimes my doubts and lack of opinion are stated openly.
- ◇ When in doubt as to what the Halachah should be, the general rule is to be stringent when it pertains to a *d'Oraisa*, and lenient when it pertains to a *D'Rabbanan*.
- ◇ Some Halachos are intricate and detailed, and one cannot draw any conclusion without having learned the entire section or sections. The issue of relating to a sinner covers many chapters, and conclusions may not be drawn until

one studies them in their entirety.

- ◇ These Halachos and ethics are very closely related to what is known as the “fifth *Shulchan Aruch*,” which represents common sense. When acting on the premise of these Halachos, one must make sure he does not violate the fifth *Shulchan Aruch*. When it looks like the two might clash, you must seek guidance from a competent Posek.

As with all issues of Halachah, there are many opinions on virtually every issue. The main benefit of Torah comes from toiling diligently in its endless depths and breadth, and trying to find the true Halachah by which to live. Even when you are unable to arrive at a final conclusion, the toiling in the depths of Torah will purify your soul and place you on the path of righteousness. *Chazal* have taught us that the Torah is the one and only “spice” for the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination. The Torah is not an “antidote,” but a “spice.” This is because Torah not only neutralizes the *yetzer hara*, but it actually turns it into our most useful tool in the service to Hashem. The Torah light of these rather complicated *mitzvos* is certainly bright enough to help us deal with this stubborn *yetzer hara*. With Hashem’s help, we shall be successful.

The following are some useful tips for better understanding this book:

- ◇ The numbered sections are for easy reference. The first number is the chapter and the second number is the Halachah or topic.
- ◇ Footnotes contain many sources for the text, Halachos and Halachic deliberations, and opinions that are not necessarily in the text.
- ◇ Remember that before hating a sinner, many conditions must be satisfied, and until then, you may not hate anyone

unless they fight against Torah, or incite others to sin.

- ◇ Oversimplified Halachah is not Halachah. Small details substantially affect the Halachic outcome.
- ◇ The stories of the *gedolim* are cited as accurately as possible, without frills and embellishments.