

The times that we live in aren't easy times for anybody, and the truth is neither has the last 2000 years been easy for anyone, but there is no one who is serious who thinks that we aren't reaching the very end of the cycle. It is up to us to determine what happens next. It is no secret that the Bais HaMikdash was destroyed because of senseless hatred and every time Rav Shimon is asked what should we do about tikkun, he comes down to saying it is all about bein adam l'chavero. The question is why is that so central? It is the key to so many things. Let me tell you why it is so important. It isn't about just being nice. It is about developing a different way of thinking.

The Baal HaTanya tells us that if we really saw ourselves for what we are, the beauty of our own souls and the enormity of Klal Yisroel, then we would look at another person and we would see somebody with whom we have something in common. In the end we all want the same things: we want connection, we want achievement, we want love and it all comes because of our being btzelem Elokim Who gives us the power to be baalei chesed, baalei gevurah, baalei tiferet, etc. So we have commonality but our feeling for commonality is dependent on one factor, how much we look inside as opposed to the outside. On the outside we are all different, different in world view, different in age, in every possible way, because every person is a whole world. So if we see what we have in common and not what separates us, it changes everything, and not just in the great secular world, that we will love secular people more and reach out to them more, which there is no question we should be doing. But it will also change our relationship to ourselves and with our families, the way we relate to our families. Ahavas Yisroel, which means treating people with real respect, speaking well of them and being caring about who they are physically and materially, that has to do with our families. We can often be committed to our families but we don't necessarily love them and speak well of them and treat them with respect and care about them concretely. The last one is probably what we are best at, but how many times have I heard people who tell me about problems with their children and I ask them do you like your daughter and she'll say, "Of course!" So I ask her to tell me something she likes about her daughter and she can't answer. The truth is she doesn't like her daughter. Imagine what her relationship would be if she trained herself to speak well of her own children, to describe their goodness, to herself, even in her inner dialogue and to others. If we took others seriously, if we saw them as people with something to say, people with depth and significance. How many marriages would be different?

So the mitzvah of Ahavas Yisroel has to do with our relationships to our family in addition to our relationships to the world. And when you develop a mentality of seeing what is precious and what is real, it begins with the family and by the nature of things it goes in two different directions. It goes inward, you become more aware of your own spirituality, when you look for spirituality in the other. This will affect your tznius, your ability to treat yourself with respect. And sometimes we reach a point when we look in the mirror and we don't respect what we see, lo aleinu, and we have to ask ourselves where is the point of Hashem's honor within me? And this changes you! So you have to come to a place in your inner dialogue where you speak well of yourself, you respect

yourself and find the part of you that should be respected and is deserving of respect, and you are honest about it and real about it and you treat yourself well.

It is hard to do alone. There is an initiative that is going on now, the Ahavas Yisroel initiative. How does it work? What is it for? It is for women to get together once a week for 7 weeks (This is not a lifetime commitment) either in person or by conference call. And what do they do? They begin by saying a perek of tehillim for the sake of the Jewish people which broadens our sense of commonality and chashivos and for people we know, we review the three crucial dinim of Ahavas Yisroel with each other. We talk about our successes and failures. Do we really have pure and good and praiseworthy inner dialogue about others and outer dialogue? How did we talk about people? What could we share about the beauty that we have seen in other people with the other members of our group? Did we treat others with respect? What could we share about this, our successes and failures so we can strengthen each other? Without lashon hara, chas vshalom of course. Finally the group ends their meeting, after having strengthened each other, by taking on, if possible, something they can do collectively for the sake of the Jewish people. There is one group that takes on thinking of shidduchim once a week for specific people, some who reach out to others in the community, to call lonely people motzei Shabbos, people who are socially abandoned. Once a week, find the words to extend yourself to another person, to open your heart to them, to draw them close to you, to let them know who you are and what you can offer them, by showing them that you really care for them as a person. There are people you can be working together with for ten years and never extended a word of caring to them – this could open up Yiddishkeit and changed their lives. This has happened more once and more than twice. So you come up with the weekly goal and you focus on something beautiful about the Jewish people. This entire meeting takes a half hour to 40 minutes. It has never taken more. It is a small chabura that I am in, only 4 women. Every one of you has 2 friends. Make a chabura. This could be transformational. At the end of the 40 days it could be transformational. At that point you can address yourself to another 2 friends. Or not. This is a 7 week commitment that hopefully will take fire. And move further.

Just yesterday I had the honor of meeting with Rabbi Yitzchok Dovid Grossman who is one of my absolute heroes and I told him about this. He said of course it is a good thing. Even getting together and talking about it is a good thing. Just wanting to do this is a good thing. I am speaking to you much earlier than you will see this, right before Shavuot so he made mention of this, that it says that the Jews encamped (singular) before Sinai, like one person with one heart. On Pesach we say Dayeinu, if Hashem would have only taken us out and not given us the Torah - I have always wondered why? Isn't that anticlimactic to just be there in the desert before Mt Sinai? He said no, if we had that moment of achdus, of really being like one person, with many limbs and organs because Ahavas Yisroel does not mean negating anyone's individuality, Dayeinu for that moment - it would have drawn us so close to Hashem, so close to our inner reality, and it is much easier to do this in a group than it is to do alone. Doing it alone lends itself to later and tomorrow and doing it in the group you draw the strength of the other people in the group and you learn to see their beauty and from there you extend your vision to see the beauty of Klal Yisroel.

How will this affect the future? Klal Yisroel is collectively called the Shechina, meaning the way Hashem's presence flows down to this world. This is who we are. We want things to be different, wanting gilui shechina. This is the way this could occur. This can change everything for anyone and this is why again and again Gedolai Torah say go to ahavas yisroel. It will take with it so many other things. By its nature it will change who you are in terms of lashon hara, in terms of tznius, in terms of shalom bayit, chinuch. There is someone next to you and someone next to them. Use these moments and go to them and say to them, we've got to do a chabura. Bezras Hashem this will change everything for all of you and you can begin now, in the bungalow colonies. You are less distracted by your work-lives, by getting the kids out in the morning -- all of the things that make life pass by so quickly -- use the time. Say we are going to make chaburot. Just start even if you start and you have to start again. Even sitting together and wanting it is enormously constructive and potentially transformative. We should start, and get to where we have to go, so that its opposite sinas chinam is something we can't even begin to imagine.

What is sinas chinam? No one says I hate someone for no reason. This morning I think I will hate so and so. Today I got up and said, "Whom should I hate today? Why not Abigail?" No one thinks like that. Hatred means distance, just as love means closeness. The reason people hate randomly is oftentimes first they feel alienation, and then the deed that the person did or their personal style gets in the way, but first there was the feeling of distance, that I have nothing in common with this person. I don't like this person. The word "like" even in English means "similar". This person is dissimilar. The effect of these chaburas is to make us realize how similar we are, and when we talk about how praiseworthy people are, we see the same kinds of motivations. It won't matter so much if they are my brand or yours, old or young. And when we see people's failures, which is part of the picture, let's not deceive ourselves. Instead of letting their failures be a cause of distancing ourselves, their failures will be something that we feel compassion for and we will try to reach out to them from their place of brokenness because we care about them. Moving beyond sinas chinam will take us eventually to a place of achdus, to a place where the separations that are legitimate between us will no longer be the ikar but what joins us will be the ikar. At that point, the force of the shechinah within us has to bring the geulah. There is absolutely no two ways about it

So we should be able one day to count ourselves amongst those who were on the right side, those who made it happen, amongst those who can say that I stood shoulder to shoulder with my friends and we made it happen, b'ezras Hashem.

All of you have heard about what these chaburas of ahavas yisroel are for -- women getting together - taking on loving each other, caring for each other and not just emotionally, concretely, speaking well of each other, giving kavod to each other, being concerned with our material realities and helping. How did I get involved with this? The reason I got involved with this is that I have no doubt whatsoever that our lack of unity in Ahavas Yisroel is what is keeping us in exile. And on these occasions when I think

deeply (which happens once in awhile, not every day) I realize that everything that we suffer is another word for exile. Exile means that Hashem is unrevealed. Hashem is unrevealed in the face of terrible illness, in the face of terrible political realities that we have to face, in the face of women who want to get married and who don't find the right person. Why am I saying it is exile? Because golui panim is when Hashem shows us the compassion. There is compassion here also, make no mistake, but for it to be seen, we have to be receptive of it, which means that His promises that were made to Klal Yisroel, to the entirety of the Jewish people could be fulfilled when we become Klal Yisroel, when we see ourselves as one body with many limbs and organs. So the reason that I am involved with this is that there is nothing more important than this. There is nothing that leads us back to Hashem and loving His image more than loving our fellow person. There is nothing that changes our relationship to people better than learning the hows and whats of loving them. In addition to this, women working together on this is a very powerful tool. How so? We gain support from each other. For example in my group we are working on how to re-group for the next 7 weeks. We take on our own goals for the week, and sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't, but the one thing that we can count on is on Thursday night when we talk on our conference call, we talk about it honestly with each other, and get support, and hear other ideas, other "takes" on what we could have said, what our options really were. And then moving into saying tehillim for Am Yisroel and speaking well of Am Yisroel which is also part of our weekly plan, the support that we give and the achdus that we feel –we are all different from each other – hopefully instructs our hearts to now feel real achdus and unity towards everyone, so we should just be worthy of it. Let this be our way of bringing the Moshiach, of changing everything...we have to do it.