

chosen words

Personal Growth

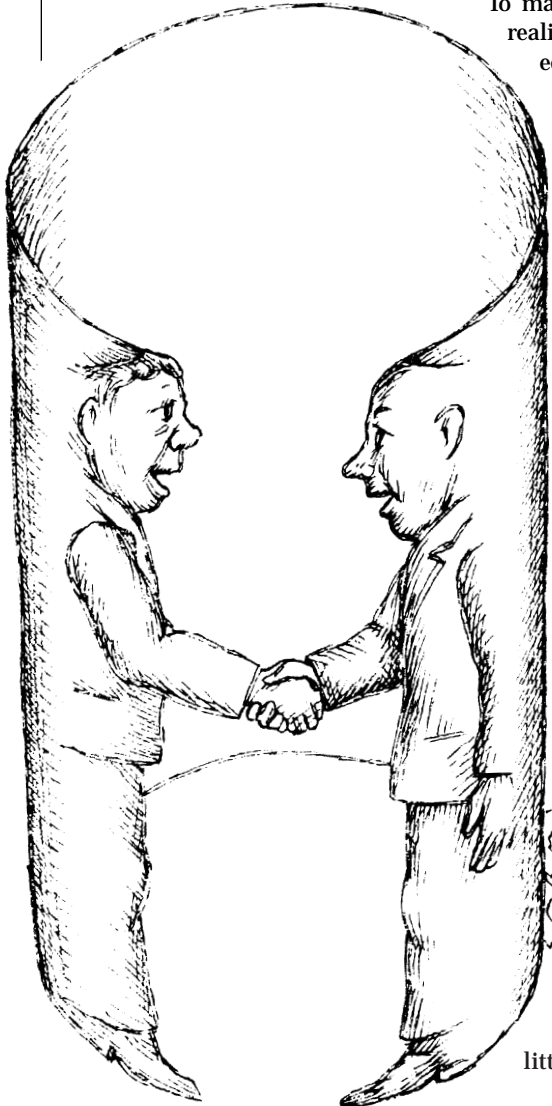
Not Just a Feeling

How do you know when you've fulfilled the mitzvah "V'ohavta l'reyacha k'mocha?" Unlike giving tzedakah or keeping kosher or building a succah, there's no action or set of actions that define this mitzvah. You can't look into your heart, gauge it's feelings and then proclaim, "There, I've done it. I've loved my neighbor as myself."

The Talmud relates that Hillel, when asked to teach

the entire Torah in the space of a few moments, boiled it down to, "What you dislike, do not do to your friend. This is the entire Torah." Though his message stemmed from the mitzvah of "v'ohavta l'reyacha," he worded it in reverse, stressing action rather than emotion. Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz explained that this teaches that the feeling of love alone does not fulfill the mitzvah. It must be expressed in how you treat others.

To make this mitzvah a reality, we are obligated to actively seek ways to help other people, and actively avoid behavior or words that would hurt them. In doing so, we strengthen our positive connection to people,



Better Relationships

I'm Not Me Without You

"Shalom aleichem," says the man as he greets a friend at a simchah. "Aleichem shalom," the friend replies. It's a classic Jewish greeting and response, most often interpreted as "Peace to you," and in response, "To you, peace."

But if we look a little deeper into the

Torah Tools for Personal Growth

Inspiration

▼ Ideas

▼ Excellence

▼ Success

and build a love that's tangible. Each time we go out of our way to show kindness to someone, this seemingly amorphous mitzvah is being fulfilled in a very concrete way. Each kind act builds the feeling of ahavah, and the growing feeling motivates further acts.

Family Project: One family has each child who helps serve the Shabbos meal serve a portion to a sibling, rather than himself. This helps build the habit of doing for others and thereby develop their loving concern for each other.

Adapted from "Growth Through Torah," by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, with permission from the author

Effective Prayer

Reaching the Target

When a person shoots an arrow, he must power it with the force of the bow. The closer he pulls the bow toward himself, the farther and straighter the arrow will go.

We learn from Yaakov Avinu that tefillah operates on the same principal. In bequeathing the land of Shechem to his son Yosef, Yaakov tells him, "I'm giving you Shechem, which I captured with my sword and bow." (Vayechi 48:22) The Targum explains that the word "b'kashti," "with my bow," means "with my tefillah." Like the arrow, tefillah must also start as close as possible to the heart, and that is what gives it the power to reach its target.

The Kotzker Rebbe explains that the more kavanah, the more heart one puts into his prayer, the further his tefillah travels. If the bow—the kavanah—is pulled close enough, the arrow can even "split the heavens."

Shabbos Table Discussion:

What are some ways to build up kavanah at times when you aren't "in the mood" to pray?

—CCHF



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Now, rather than simply wishing our friend peace, we

continued on back

Coming to Your Senses

The first blooms of a flowering tree, the scent of a pleasing fragrance, the grandeur of lightning and thunder. None of these are we allowed to ignore or take for granted. The Torah insists that we take notice by ordaining blessings to be said for all of these natural wonders.

When spring arrives, nature takes center stage. Although its miracles persist even through the dead of winter, it's only when the buds begin to open and the grass begins to green that our senses come alive. Noticing the rebirth of the natural world and pointing it out to our children is a living lesson

in Hashem's kindness and boundless creativity—a lesson available everywhere, every day. It's not just a pleasure to take notice, it's an obligation.

“Noticing the rebirth of the natural world... is a living lesson in Hashem's kindness...”

Throughout history, talmidei chachomim have taken their learning to the mountains, the forest, the sea. Surrounded by Hashem's gifts, they find their learning is enhanced.

When Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, in his later years, expressed the desire to visit Switzerland, his students were surprised that this brilliant leader, so enveloped in the world of thought, would care to see the mountains. “G-d created a beautiful world for

us to enjoy,” he explained. “When I reach heaven, what will I answer when G-d asks me, “Did you see My Alps?”

Shabbos Table Discussion:
What aspects of your daily routine give you an opportunity to enjoy nature?
—CCHF

▼

“All men are precious because they are made in the image of G-d. When one showers others with kindness and respect, he thus honors G-d Himself.”

—The Alter of Slobodka

▲

Kid Stuff

At times, the “tragedies” that evoke complaints from friends or family can seem a bit trivial to our ears. But the great tzaddik Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky showed that chessed often means responding to the other person's perspective.

Taking his daily walk in the Bayit Vegan section of Jerusalem, Rabbi Abramsky, a man of great dignity and seriousness, noticed a little girl sitting in her yard crying bitterly.

“Why are you crying?” he asked.

“Because Miriam said that my dress is not nice,” she wept. “What is your name?” he inquired.

“Shoshana,” she replied. “Tell your friend that the Rabbi said that your name is beautiful and your dress is beautiful.”

The child ran off smiling. Later, the rabbi explained his departure from his normally imposing demeanor. “Chazal tell us that we should imitate Hashem. The prophet says, “May Hashem, G-d, wipe away tears from every face. Why does the verse stress every face? Because, it refers to removing the tears even from the face of a little five-year-old child.”

Adapted from “Along the Maggid's Journey,” by Rabbi Paysach Krohn, with permission from Mesorah Publications

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I'm Not Me

continued from front

are telling him, “I would be incomplete without you,” and he acknowledges to us the same. This time-honored greeting expresses the fact that each Jew is incomplete without every other. Each has a unique value. Each is a distinct and vital part of Klal Yisrael, without whom none of us would be whole. Keeping that in mind makes for an entirely different hello.

—CCHF

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