

Positive Recognition

The story is told about a famous author who was walking along the East River promenade in New York City, very depressed. He felt at the end of his rope. His life's work, his writing, was of no value. His life felt empty and meaningless. Had his writing really accomplished anything? There was only one thing to do. Suicidal, he thought about climbing over the railing that divided the promenade from the river and throwing himself in.

He stood there, staring at the dark waters, about to make his final move, when he suddenly heard an excited voice, "Excuse me, I am sorry to impose on your privacy, but are you Christopher D'Antonio, the author?" He could only nod in return. "I hope you do not mind my approaching you, but I had to tell you what a difference your books have made in my life! They have helped me incredibly, and I just wanted to thank you!"

"No, it is I who should be offering gratitude to you," he said, as he turned around, walking away from the East River and heading home.

Space does not permit me to add many more vignettes of chesed through words. As someone who has spent many years in the field of chinuch, however, I can say unequivocally that nothing does more for a student than positive recognition from his rebbe. This equally applies with regard to the rebbe. Parental recognition of a rebbe's efforts on behalf of their child is crucial for the rebbe, the child, and the parents.

And the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden and the Tree of Knowledge good and bad. (2:9)

Sforno explains that daas, knowledge, means to focus one's heart on (what is) good and evil. From this source of the word daas, we also find the phrase v'haAdam yoda, "and Adam knew," i.e., he became aware and now concentrated his heart on her (Chavah). This is also why a relative is called a moda, as it says in Rus 2:1, moda l'ishah, "a relative of her husband," for it is natural that one concerns himself for the needs of his relative. Horav Shmuel David Walkin, zl, infers from here that a relative is a moda, because the foundation of closeness and love is the knowledge and concern for the needs of his relative. This is also why a friend is referred to as meyuda, as it is written in Tehillim 31:12, ufachad limyudoai, "and a fright to those who know me (my friends)." A friend is someone who understands my needs and focuses upon them.

Any love, any relationship in which the two parties are not sensitive to the needs of one another, is not a relationship. Love cannot exist unless there is an awareness of each other's needs and sensitivities. Horav Moshe Leib Sossover, zl, was want to say that he learned ahavas Yisrael, love for all Jews, from an itinerant farmer. A farmer who was totally inebriated asked his friend, "Do you love me?" The friend responded, "Of course I do," and he immediately proceeded to demonstrate his affection by embracing and kissing him. The drunken farmer continued, "Do you know what I am missing? Do you know what I need?" "How should I know what you need?" the other farmer/friend retorted. "Well, if you are not aware of my needs, how can you say that you are my friend?"

This story sums it up. A friend is aware; a friend cares. One who is not aware of his friend's needs is not much of a friend.