

The RYS Daily 9/11/06 Bein Adam l'Chaveiro

How far does Bein Adam l'Chaveiro go? Does it apply only to fellow Jews or are Gentiles also included? The follow stories about the Alter of Slabodka (Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel), one the foremost proponents of the Mussar movement started by RYS, shed light on the answers to these questions. The stories are taken from The Golden Tradition, The Old Man of Slabodka, by M. Gerz pages 182 - 183.

From time to time the Old Man would disappear. People thought he was probably at home, for where else would he be? But those close to him knew he was not at home. They began to trail him. They caught up to him just as he was setting out with a band of gypsies. His friends appealed to him: "Teach us, rabbi, what is the meaning of this?"

"Gypsies are the most forlorn people in the world. They do not know of rest or home. They torture themselves and their families in their wretched travels. So they ought to be heartened by a cheerful mien, a friendly smile in their roaming and wandering."

Because he believed wanderers were the most forlorn people, he used often steal out to the nearby railroad stations. There he found much work for himself - helping travelers by carrying a bag, or giving advice or comforting them with a kind word, cheering them with a chat and sometimes with a loan. The Old Man used to say: "Love thy fellowman as thyself Just as you do not love yourself because it is a commandment, do not love him because it is a commandment."

Winter, he would rise early, cross the bridge into town, setting out for all the prayer houses and places of study, to start and stoke the ovens. He said that if the prayer houses and study houses would be warm early in the morning a coachman, a porter, or just a poor man would come in to warm up and find himself in a sanctified place. His closest friends asked him: "Rabbi, is it your business to start the ovens and carry packages?" He answered: "Even if it were as hard as you think it is, that would not be the point. The maskilim demand 'light,' humanity must be given light. But we must not forget that a light sheds light for all, but itself is extinguished. Otherwise, it would not be a light."

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