Last night I went to the opening of the JFF which screened the world premiere of “The Unorthodox” (Bilti Rishmi‘im). It is a movie that depicts the founding of the Shas Party in the 1980s. It shows the great difficulties that the Sefardic communities in Israel had to deal with, especially under the rule of the Ashknazim. The director (bamai) Eliran Malka was there and gave a short drash before the screening. He explained that tonight is Tu B’Av – the holiday of love. Not many people, he said, realize that it is known as such because this is the day when the prohibition of marrying between tribes (in the desert) was rescinded (bitlu hagezeira). He explained that the movie shows that we are still tribes but that we need to break down the barriers and work together and love each other.

Now we have known this from the beginning of our people. The Torah itself teaches: v’ahavta l’reicha kamocha – and R. Akiva made this the Klal Gadol Be’Torah. And throughout the history of the Jewish people we have known that this is very important.

But we also know that this command is very difficult to even attempt. In and of itself it seems to broad, too difficult. The RambaN notes:

דב''א, פסוק י’:
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... לשון האבות על הדבר: אל יקבל לב האדם שאהב את חברו כאהבתו את נפשו...

And so the RambaN explains that command is really that you should wish your neighbor well IN ALL THINGS like you wish for yourself.

There are many other rishonim who deal with the question, but tonight I would like to discuss three modern approaches to the meaning and application of this Klal Gadol BeTorah.

Nechama Leibovitz brings R. Moshe b. Menachem who explains that it means your fellow human being as a human being. That is, you love your car, your wine, your money – but you love your wife, your kids, differently. The love of your neighbor should be on the level of a HUMAN being KAMOCHA and not like an object.

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This brings us to Martin Buber who said that we must relate to people as SUBJECTS and not OBJECTS. Not the I-It relationship but an I-Thou relationship. This kind of a relationship, he explains, is brought about through DIALOGUE. So we need to try to talk to one another, we need to try to interact with one another. My sons in the Army explain that indeed, in the Army, there are representatives from all the tribes of Israel and there is dialogue – of course that doesn’t mean every one loves each other, there are interpersonal issues, but at least there is dialogue).

Buber reflects his philosophy directly on the verse:

And this brings us back to the 12 tribes. We are all unique, and our people is made of of unique groups. Indeed, God himself arranged for His people to be made of 12 distinct tribes. This doesn’t make us weaker, it makes us stronger. We need to appreciate all the contributions of each tribe, of each individual. In our diversity, in the varying talents (kishronot) and abilities (yecholot) of each of the 12 tribes, we can accomplish so much more than if we were all the same. It is good that there are Ashkenazim, it is good that there are Russians, it is good that there are French, and Yeminite Americans… So in this season (tekufah) of Ahavah – I suggest that we all try just a little bit harder to think of the OTHER and appreciate him for who he is, for how his difference actually makes Am Yisrael stronger. And perhaps with this bit of extra love, we can rebuild the Mikdash, BBY.

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