

# The 13 Ikkarim (Principles) of the Chaver/a Bnei Akiva

## THE CHAVER/A :

### 1. Is loyal to the Torah of G-D, His people, Land and Language

Loyalty can be defined as a commitment and dedication to something loved and respected. This loyalty is initially established through love, which is based on familiarity and knowledge and is deepened by learning and understanding. This devotion to these four inseparable components of Judaism sometimes requires self sacrifice at the highest of levels.

**LOYALTY TO THE TORAH OF G-D** – Our loyalty to Torah is based on the belief that it is of Divine origin. There is of course also the Oral tradition, passed on by the Rabbis. We believe that both were given to Moshe Rabbeinu at Sinai. This loyalty not only includes respect and reverence of the Torah, but also for the scholars who study, and teach it.

In addition to the loyalty we have to Torah, for it being our national heritage, we expect our chaverim to personally accept the Torah as a way of life.

Loyalty to G-D's Torah is at the forefront of our principles, for the Torah is the source of our ideology of TORAH VA'AVODAH, and all other ikarim flow from it.

**LOYALTY TO HIS PEOPLE-** Just as we believe that the Torah is Divinely written, so too do we believe that Am Yisrael is the Chosen People (Am Segulah), by Divine Will. The unlimited loyalty to Am Yisrael that we demand of our chanichim is not predicated on the actions of the Am - be they righteous or evil .For the choice of Am Yisrael was decreed by Hashem, irrespective of man's actions.

This unique singularity of Am Yisrael has other ramifications. For example, there is a group responsibility amongst all the members of the Am. "Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh Bazeh." We are responsible for one another's actions. In addition to the group responsibility of our actions, there is also a responsibility for all the members' well being. The problems and suffering of one Jew become the worries of all Jews. "Al Tifrosh Min Hatzibur" means that it is forbidden for any individual to separate himself from the rest. We all must mourn the tragedies that befell the Jewish people, on Tish'a Ba'av, even though none of us personally saw the destruction of the Temple, or the decimation of the nation. Conversely, we all celebrate on the holidays, even one who personally is in mourning over a loved one.

We must feel the suffering of the imprisoned Iranian Jews and Israeli soldiers, as well as celebrating the establishment of the State of Israel and the Liberation of Yerushalayim.

These are all examples of loyalty to His people.

**LOYALTY TO THE LAND** In addition to our loyalty to Torat Yisrael and to Am yisrael, we also demand a limitless loyalty to Eretz Yisrael.

In order to be truly loyal to Eretz Yisrael, one must develop a deep love of the Land. For this love to foster, it is necessary to have a thorough acquaintance with its geography and its glorious history. Specific attention must be given to understanding the unique connection between Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael. Although the Jewish people have been in exile for close to two thousand years, and sometimes the galut can even be a safe haven for the Jewish community, there is still only one place that can be called "home" for the Jewish people, and that is Eretz Yisrael.

Countless stories of martyrdom and self-sacrifice from past history up until modern times have practical application. They should inspire us to demonstrate political and financial support for the land of Israel, in her time of need.

**LOYALTY TO THE LANGUAGE** - Why is this so important? Nowadays Ivrit is a spoken, living language. But the situation was different 100 years ago. Jews spoke almost every well-known language, with the exception of Hebrew. Who needs to know Hebrew? First of all, without a thorough knowledge of Hebrew one can't acquire a deep understanding of Torah and Rabbinic writing. Also, with the ingathering of the exiles, the only hope of communication among the different groups was with the development of one common language. This also became the foundation of our cultural renewal. The revival of Ivrit was crucial to the success of the absorption of the exiles in Israel, and it became a symbol of the national revival as well. In Pirkei Avot we learn (2,1) "Be cautious with simple Mitzvot as with difficult ones..." Rambam in his explanation gives an example of simple mitzvot, "like aliya laregel and lashon hakodesh." **Yes. Speaking Hebrew is a Mitzva. A simple Mitzva.**

## **2. Sets aside definite periods for the study of Torah**

Our ideology of Torah Va'avodah strives to build a society in Eretz Yisrael based on the Torah. Therefor we demand of our chaverim to learn Torah in order to know for themselves; to practice; and to teach others.

Torah study cannot be just haphazard reading. There must be definite time set aside each day (likboa itim laTorah) for the systematic study of the different parts of the Torah – Halacha, Gemarah, Tanach and Machshevet Yisrael. The learning process consists of reading, analyzing, and reviewing. "Vehagitah bo yomam valailah," means that time should be set aside in the day as well as in the night for Torah study. This concentrated learning will inevitably lead us to kiyum mitzvot – observance. This also molds our moral thinking.

## **3. Loves work and hates idleness**

Love of work – We learn in Pirkei Avot "Ehov et hamelacha," one should love work. This directive of our Rabbis implies more than simply tolerating work for its practical benefits. Rather we should see the moral and ethical values inherent in work, as well.

Work is the basic foundation of society and has at all times been dignified and championed in the Torah. Just as the Torah was given in a covenant, a Brit, so too was labor. We are commanded "For six days you shall work..." which is a positive commandment, just as we are commanded to refrain from labor on the seventh day.

It is our belief that no matter how great and learned a person may be it is still his duty to actively participate in society. Working together with his fellow man to make the world a better place is part of the Divine plan.

Through work we develop the character of a civilization and establish the social, moral and cultural standards. Since our ideal is to create a healthy, economically sound, and morally secure home for our nation, all of our efforts should be of the most productive nature. Time is valuable, especially because we "lost so much time" while in Galut

Our attitude towards Avodah also helps mold the kind of society we want to live in, where one will be respected and valued as long as he is honest and productive, contributing to society. Work will develop in us a sound outlook on life, including an appreciation of the Work of G-d, and that of our fellow man. Idleness, on the other hand, leads to a lack of appreciation for the efforts of others; to exploitation; to excessive amounts of leisure time; to the insatiable pursuit of pleasure; and subsequently, to other social evils.

Our Rabbis teach us (Ketubot 59:) that "battalah meive le'shiamum,"(Idleness leads to boredom and boredom leads to sin.) The sages anticipated a modern discovery: boredom may lead to mental breakdown. The mind cannot long maintain its integrity if unoccupied and without stimulation. This boredom is the principle product of idleness. This boredom often finds excitement and stimulation in the drug culture, in excessive drinking, and in an overactive sexual libido.

Labor and religious ideals complement each other, and together form our motto of **Torah Va'Avodah.**

#### **4. Sees the future of the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael**

Ever since the dispersion 2000 years ago, the Jews have been wanderers over the face of the earth. This situation has given rise to many evils, and chiefly to anti-Semitism, which found its expression in dislike, intolerance, exploitation, and persecution of the Jews. This in turn has given rise to assimilation and to a rejection of Judaism on the part of many Jews. On the other side of the coin, emancipation and full human rights, multiculturalism, and a separation between church and state (along with a general weakening of religious practice) has opened the doors for Jews, beckoning them to join general society. Although this has stymied blatant anti-Semitism and persecution, it is now apparent that the Jewish people are losing more kids to intermarriage than to any other physical persecution. Indeed, the future of the Jewish people is in question, while Jewish continuity has become the main flag raised in America by most Jewish organizations.

In the long term, the only answer to these evils, and for insuring our future, is to create a national home and a spiritual center for the Jewish people. This can only succeed in Eretz Yisrael, our historic homeland. There, was the cradle of our civilization, our glorious past, where kings and prophets walked, and only there can they again walk in the future. Innumerable proud memories of valor, charity and worship can revitalize and invigorate our spirit. Only in Eretz Yisrael can the totality of Torah find its full expression, giving rise to an authentic Jewish culture. It was during the one thousand years of life in Israel that Jewish civilization flourished, enriching both Judaism and the general civilization.

It is incumbent on the chaver/a to learn about Mitzvat Yishuv Ha'Aretz, the mitzva of settling in Israel. This mitzva has been (understandably) underestimated and not dealt with, during the long galut.

The galut (exile) is an historical abnormality. Bnei Akiva seeks to build a Jewish homeland in the full sense of the word, in the only place possible from a religious and historical perspective – in **ERETZ YISRAEL**.

#### **5. Is kind and courteous to all**

Our Rabbis advise us: "Who ever wants to be a chassid (righteous person) should learn Pirkei Avot (Ethics of our Forefathers). There, we have a collection of sayings that pave the way for human relationships, based on Jewish morality and ethics. It's common knowledge that Moshe Rabbeinu descended Mt. Sinai holding two tablets in his hands. On one side were the commandments between man and G-d, and on the other were the commandments between man and his fellow man. Together, they make up the one Torah.

**"Kind"** – includes being helpful, sympathetic, and understanding, without any thought of reward or for any ulterior motive.

**"Courteous"** – includes respect and gentleness to all, even those that we disagree with. Within the Tnua, this must be the guiding principle of the relationships between the chaverim.

Even in the course of a passionate argument; even in a situation of rebuke; even in a debate for an official position in the movement; we must remember our code of ethics. All the more so when dealing with newcomers to the movement, who are strangers to our ideology and don't fully understand our religious way of life, it is imperative to act in kindness and courteously.

#### **6. Acts as a brother/sister to chaverim and is prepared to assist them at all times**

Chazal teach us that friendship, which is not based on any selfish motivation, will be a lasting one. (I.e. David and Yonatan )

Similarities in our views, aims and ideals, should draw all chaverim together. Our common goals and joint activities in attaining those goals forge friendships that last a lifetime, and involves empathy in times of happiness, and le'havdil, in times of sorrow.

The equality of members, regardless of age or rank transcends these friendships, and the relationships between chaverim should be one of friendliness and cooperation, prompted by the desire to help, rather than the advancement of personal interests. This is called "ezra hadadit" or mutual cooperation.

We are always but a few, yet by working together our objectives may be obtained. Our influence in the Jewish community is far more impressive than our numbers. This caring way of life prepares us for a successful life of giving in Eretz Yisrael.

## **7. Obeys his/her parents, teachers and leaders**

"Kaved et avicha ve'et imecha," the mitzva to honor, respect, and obey our parents is one of the Ten Commandments, and one of the cornerstones of the Torah. We must obey them with love and respect, trying to please and help them even when sacrifice is involved.

Harmony in the family contributes to health, well being and long life of family members. Self respect, confidence, trust, thoughtfulness, and more are all learned in a healthy familial environment.

Jewish families are the building blocks of the Jewish nation, and strong familial ties strengthen the unity of Am Yisrael.

The Rabbis learn by "kal va'chomer" that if we are obliged to honor our parents who bring us into this world, all the more so we must honor our teachers who bring us into the World to Come. "He who has been taught something by his friend, be it a perek, a halacha, a pasuk, a phrase, or even a letter, must show him respect."

Madrichim, who devote time and effort to their chanichim in teaching them values and ideals, also have a claim to this respect

## **8. Is pure in thought and action**

Our deeds and actions are fruits, which are resultants of our thoughts. If our minds do not entertain any reproachful thought, than our actions will be beyond reproach. We therefor are forbidden to bear a grudge, or vengeful attitudes; feelings such as hate and lustful yearnings are also forbidden. We are definitely commanded to love our fellow neighbor, to love and fear Hashem, to have compassion for the orphan, the widow and the poor. These feelings, thoughts and beliefs must also manifest themselves in action.

Bad thoughts inevitably will lead to bad actions; pure thoughts will lead to positive actions. Even man's innermost chambers are open before G-D and good deeds alone are not enough.

Emotional and mental stability are directly connected to the compatibility and consistency of one's thoughts words and deeds.

This compatibility is not easily attained. Our Rabbis teach us that in the days of Rabban Gamliel, , only people who were able to completely internalize the Torah were allowed to enter the Beit Hamedrash to further their studies. This caused the Beit Medresh to be quite empty. We see from this that by Torah study alone one cannot internalize Torah, but rather one must live Torah, in thought and deed, in order to further ones Torah study.

## **9. Is truthful**

" Emet ," truth, is one of the thirteen attributes of Hashem. The Rabbis further teach us that G-D's Signature, or "calling card," is not Good, or Merciful, but rather Truth. We are commanded to emulate Him and His attributes, and therefor we must adopt for ourselves the attribute of truth.

This truthfulness in our daily lives is not easy. Sometimes the truth hurts, and is difficult to bear.

Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi in his work the Kuzari writes "the truth is often burdensome, therefor so few are willing top carry it." The truth can be unpopular, and often it's easier to tell only a half-truth, than to tell the whole truth. When we speak uncompromisingly of our goal- The People of Israel in the Land of Israel by the Torah of Israel- we risk being called fanatics, archaic, and

parochial. Yet this is our truth, and if others have different truths let them speak of them with pride. But this is our truth.

The Rabbis teach "The letters Shin Kuf Resh which make up the word Sheker (lie) are written without any basis at the bottom of the letters. So too lies have no basis. Not so the truth, which is everlasting, and eventually will be acknowledged and accepted by all.

## 10. Loves nature

We believe that Hashem created the universe and everything within it. All of His creations are manifestation of his goodness. Although man too is one of His creations we believe that everything was created for him and for his use - therefore man was created last of all. "...the world was created for man's use. In truth, man is the center of a great balance. For if he is pulled after the world and is drawn further from his Creator, he is damaged and he damages the world with him. And if he rules over himself and unites himself with his Creator and uses the world only to aid him in the service of his Creator he is uplifted and the world is uplifted with him." (Messilat Yesharim 1).

Our Rabbis teach us ( Medrash Kohellet Rabba 7 ) that after creation, Hashem took Adam around the Garden of Eden and said to him "Look at my works of creation- how nice and beautiful they are! Everything you see here now- is for you. But take heed and be careful not to ruin and destroy my world!"

To love nature is to appreciate G-D who in His Goodness created it. On the other hand, unnecessary destruction of nature is a sin – "Bal Tashchit." In Sefer Hachinuch it's written (Mitzva 529 )"the ultimate purpose of the commandment is ...to teach us to love the good and the useful, and to cleave to it , and thereby goodness will cleave to us and we will thereby remove ourselves from every evil thing and distance ourselves from destructiveness... the way of the pious... will not cause even a small mustard seed to be destroyed; they grieve over every loss and destruction that they see."

The Chaver loves G-D's world –especially His Chosen Land. When we see Israel barren and desolate, we must plant trees and make even the desert bloom. When we see the destroyed cities of old, we must go and rebuild them. When we see scorched soil and polluted rivers, we must reclaim them. This is the way of **Torah Va'avodah**

## 11. Is always cheerful and pleasant

True trust in Hashem and sincere belief that G-d in His Glory rules over all in Justice causes us to look at reality with optimism. Therefore the true believer is cheerful and pleasant in his thoughts, speech and actions. "The wise man's words when said with repose are listened to, more so than the shouting of a ruler..." (Kohelet 9,17 )

Throughout our history many calamities have befallen us, causing us to mourn and grieve over the destruction of the Temple, the Exile and the continuous decimation of the Jewish people throughout the Crusades, Inquisition, pogroms and the Holocaust. The serious threat of assimilation through intermarriage and the growing lack of commitment and identification by many of the youth causes us deep concern and many shudder at the question mark hanging over Jewish continuity.

On the other hand we draw on our faith in Netzach Yisrael, which gives us a glimmer of hope even in the darkest of hours. We learn from our namesake Rabbi Akiva (Makot 23:) who laughed at the sight of foxes roaming about the area that formerly was known as the Holy of Holies, now desolate in it's destruction. While the other Rabbis with him were wrought with despair, they asked him "How can you laugh at beholding such a sight?" He replied "now that the prophecy of the destruction has come to be, so to will the prophecy of the redemption come to pass." This optimism is rooted in deep belief, and bears cheerfulness – even in the direst of circumstances.

Let us remember our revered Rabbi Akiva, who even in the situation of oncoming death at the hands of the Romans happily sanctified G-d's name with Shema, the ultimate unification of G-d's name.

**May we, Bnei Akiva, merit to see in happiness the prophesied redemption, in our days.**

## **12. Is thrifty**

This is one of the more difficult principles to explain. Most of our Ikarim, or principles, are objective and quite absolute. Loyalty to Torah, Eretz Yisrael and Am Yisrael (#1) is self explanatory; setting aside time for Torah study (#2) is quite finite; being courteous (#5) pure (#8) and truthful (#9) are all good measures generally accepted by people for moral and ethical living. But thriftiness? Why is this one of the 13 principles? It's quite a relative matter, seemingly a subjective issue, because in reality, people's needs are different. One person's luxury is another's necessity. Therefore this is one of the more difficult principles to master. The key is self-discipline. Although everyone's needs are different, each person knows himself, and can differentiate between necessity and luxury, legitimate wants or obscene obsessions. Purity of thought (#8), and truth (#9), are decisive in this differentiation. Happiness (#11) is the key to real wealth. Our Rabbis have taught "Who is strong? One that vanquishes his desires! Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his lot!"

This thriftiness is so difficult in our age where the consumer is king. The newer, bigger, better faster and cheaper supplants the old, rendering it obsolete and useless. Thriftiness makes us find the balance between the past and old core-values, which are not to be discarded, while progressing to the new and modern.

Spending only for what are needs is responsible living, and reflects on self-discipline and personal independence.

## **13. Looks after his/her health**

Man was created "b'tzelem Elokim," in G-D's image, and therefore we are commanded to take care of our physical well being, "ushmartem me'od le'nafshotechem". Physical fitness and good health are a blessing from Hashem and should be appreciated as such. The Rambam explains that the corporeal body is the vessel which houses the soul, and therefore proper attention should be given to maintain the body, so as not to hamper the spiritual soul contained within (Sh'moneh P'rakim 5). It is also forbidden to put oneself in danger or to do anything harmful to oneself. Partaking in excess of things that are permitted (eating, drinking, partying), are potentially dangerous, eventually taking their toll. And it goes without saying that substance abuse (drugs) which is illegal, is also forbidden.

The popular adage that "Cleanliness is next to G-Dliness" is based on a Talmudic saying which is brought as a halacha by the Rambam (Tum'at Ochlim 10,12). Proper sanitary conditions and cleanliness in the chaver's house, and orderliness in dress, (and in our maon and machanot,) are important for his physical wellbeing as well as for its spiritual merits.