

## Is it Possible to Love Another as We Love Ourselves?

### Levit., Chapter 19

1. And the L-rd spoke to Moses, saying,  
2. Speak to the entire congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them, You shall be holy, for I, the L-rd, your G-d, am holy...

17. You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your fellow, but you shall not bear a sin on his account.

18. You shall neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the L-rd.

*Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: You shall be holy... (Leviticus 19:2)*

### Rashi and Midrash

Rabbi Chiyta taught: This section was spoken in the presence of a gathering of the whole community, because most of the essential principles of the Torah are appended to it.

*Rebuke, rebuke your fellow (19:17)*

### Talmud, Yevamot 65b

Said Rabbi Ilaah in the name of Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon: Just as it is a mitzvah for a person to say what will be accepted, it is a mitzvah to refrain from saying things that will not be accepted.

*You shall not bear a sin on his account (19:17)*

### Rashi

I.e., [in the course of your rebuking your fellow,] do not embarrass him in public.

*You shall neither take revenge (19:18)*

### Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 9:4

How does one avoid acting vengefully? One should think: If a person were cutting meat and the knife cut his hand, would that hand cut the first hand in return?

*Love your fellow as yourself (19:18)*

### Midrash Rabbah

Rabbi Akiva said: This is a cardinal principle of the Torah.

### Shabbos 31a

Hillel said, "What is hateful to you, do not do to others."

### Ramban

The Torah does not demand that we love others as we love ourselves. If someone is in danger, his life comes first. Rather, G-d demands that we want others to have the same degree of success and prosperity that we want for ourselves and that we treat others with the utmost respect and consideration.

### HaKsav V'HaKabbalah

Realistic examples of how to fulfill this commandment: a) Your affection for others should be real, not feigned. b) Treat others with respect. c) Seek the best for them. d) Join in their pain. e) Greet them with friendliness. f) Give the benefit of the doubt. g) Assist others, physically or monetarily. h) Don't consider yourself better than others.

### Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov

To love a fellow is to love G-d. For "You are children unto the L-rd your G-d" (Deuteronomy 14:1); one

פרק יט.

א. וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר:

ב. דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל

ואמרת אליהם קדשים תהיו כי קדוש

אני ה' אלקיכם: יז. לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך הוכם

תוכיח את עמיתך ולא תשא עליו חטא: יח. לא תקם

ולא תטר את בני עמך ואהבת לרעך כמוך אני ה':



who loves a father loves his children. When one loves one's fellow one loves G-d, for one's fellow contains within himself a "part of G-d above" (Job 31:2). By loving one's fellow, the innermost part of him, one loves G-d.

## **Talmud, Shabbat 31a**

A gentile came before Shammai and said to him, "I wish to convert to Judaism, on the condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot." Shammai drove him away with the builder's cubit which was in his hand. When he came before Hillel, Hillel said to him: "What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor. This is the entire Torah; the rest is the commentary--go and learn it."

## **Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi**

Why did Hillel say that this is "the entire Torah"? Granted that it is the essence of all mitzvot governing our behavior "between man and man"; but the Torah also includes many mitzvot that are in the realm of "between man and G-d." In what way is the mitzvah to "Love your fellow as yourself" the essence of mitzvot such as praying, or ceasing work on Shabbat? The explanation can be found in the answer to another question: How is it possible to love another "as yourself"? Are not self and fellow two distinct entities, so that however closely they may be bound, the other will always be other, and never wholly as the self? As physical beings, one's self and one's fellow are indeed two distinct entities. As spiritual beings, however, they are ultimately one, for all souls are of a single essence, united in their source in G-d. As long as one regards the physical self as the true "I" and the soul as something this I "has", one will never truly love the other "as oneself." But if the soul is the "I" and the body but its tool and extension, one can come to recognize that "self" and "fellow" are but two expressions of a singular essence, so that all that one desires for oneself, one equally desires for one's fellow.

## **The Lubavitcher Rebbe**

We must learn to care enough for our fellow man not to indulge his errors and accommodate his failings. This might be the easiest and most socially comfortable way to behave, but, rather than tolerance, it bespeaks an indifference toward his or her welfare. On the other hand, we must never allow our commitment to his betterment to lessen in the slightest our respect and esteem toward him, no matter how misguided and unresponsive he might be. If this seems paradoxical, it is. But the ability to embrace this paradox is at the very heart of the Torah's commandment to "Love your fellow as yourself." For in regard to ourselves, it is a paradox with which we are quite comfortable -- every psychologically healthy person loves himself unconditionally and, at the same time, incessantly strives to improve himself. This paradox we must also cultivate in our relationship with others.

## SUMMARY

- On a simple practical level, loving another means treating them with the respect and love that you would want others to treat you.
- The Baal Shem Tov's love was not the refusal to see the deficiencies of a fellow, but an unequivocal love regardless of their spiritual state. He loved the most iniquitous transgressor with the same boundless love with which he loved the greatest tzaddik; he loved them as G-d loves them, as a father loves his children, regardless of who and what they are.
- The endeavor to love your fellow as yourself is to cultivate your perspective so that you see the soul and spirit as the true and ultimate reality, and the body and the material as extraneous and subservient to it.
- We must not compromise our efforts to improve our fellow man; on the other hand, we must never allow these efforts to compromise our love and respect for him.

