

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR PART 3

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

Previously, we discussed how the commandment of 'love thy neighbor' requires us to want the best for others and to avoid causing him any harm. One also fulfills this commandment by doing acts of kindness for people. From time to time we all need help from our friends, and we are very grateful when they are willing to provide it. The Torah says that we should do for others what we would like them to do for us. So for example, if you see a person struggling along carrying heavy bags, then offer to lighten his burden - we certainly appreciate it when others do that for us! If we open our eyes we will see myriad ways in which we can help others and they do not necessarily have to involve major self-sacrifice. Even simple acts such as smiling or a pleasant word can light up a person's day. My wife and I were once in a cab with a serious looking driver. My wife gave herself a challenge - to make this man smile! We were in Israel so the driver was not fluent in English, nonetheless when he heard us speaking in English he accordingly spoke to us in his broken English. Seizing the opportunity, my wife commented on how good his English was. His response was to laugh and smile for the rest of the journey! If we would all live with the attitude that is fostered by 'love thy neighbor' then the world would be a far more pleasant place to live in.

Love thy neighbor is a form of kindness based on thinking about the feelings of others. There is another commandment that focuses on a different aspect of doing kindness; This is called, "to walk in the ways of G-d." This means that we should strive to emulate Hashem's character traits - He is all-giving, so we too should strive to be giving, He is merciful, so we too should be merciful. There are many specific examples in the Torah where Hashem performs kindnesses - these are there to teach us how we too can do kindness. For example, when Abraham was unwell, Hashem visited him. We learn from here that we too should visit sick people. Moreover, we learn the specific intricacies of how to help them by how Hashem acted when He visited Abraham - He never actually said anything to Abraham, He just 'stayed there' so to speak. This teaches us that when we visit somebody who is unwell, the most important thing is not necessarily what we say to them but the fact that we are there sharing in their pain. This commandment is similar to 'Love Thy Neighbor' in that it leads to acts of kindness, but there is a significant difference between the two. Whereas Love 'Thy Neighbor' focuses on the other person, 'walking in G-d's ways' requires a focus on improving our own character traits - I want to be a better, kinder person. By observing these two commandments a person will become truly G-d like.

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