

LOVING YOUR FELLOW JEW

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

1. The Importance of Loving Your Fellow

The Torah states that one is not permitted to take revenge against his fellow Jew nor should he harbor ill feelings in his heart towards his fellow. As the Torah states, "You shall love your fellow Jew as you love yourself - I am Hashem." This Dictate follows many other Commandments, which are enumerated in the Torah relating to one's obligation to his fellow Jew. The Torah lists many Negative Commandments prior to stating this Positive Commandment such as: not hating one's fellow, not tale bearing, not putting a stumbling block, etc. In essence the basis of all shortcomings between a Jew and his fellow is rooted in not observing the Commandment - "You shall love your fellow Jew as you love yourself..."

If one truly loved his fellow as he loved himself he would not cheat, slander, steal from, or harbor ill feelings towards his fellow Jew. Every failing in the obligations between man and man stem from a failing in not loving one's fellow as he loves himself. The Gemara states that Sinas Cheenam (Baseless Hatred) is the cause of Lashon Harah (Evil Speech). If one truly loved his fellow Jew as he loved himself there would consequently be no Sinas Cheenam nor would there be Lashon Harah.

Rabbi Akiva states that the Commandment, "You shall love your fellow Jew as you love yourself..." is a Commandment that encompasses the Torah in its entirety because if one adheres to this principle then he will not violate any of the other Commandments. It is understandable that if one observes: "You shall love your fellow Jew as you love yourself..." properly, then he will not transgress any of the principles that govern the interaction between man and his fellow man. However there are many Commandments in the Torah that deal with man's relationship with G-d. For example, dietary laws, observing Shabbos, etc. are all Commandments that govern our obligations to Hashem and not to a fellow Jew. Nevertheless Rabbi Akiva says that the Mitzvah- "You shall love your fellow Jew as you love yourself..." encompasses all of the Commandments. How do we understand this?

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that a non-Jew asked Hillel to teach him all of the Torah while standing on one foot (in a single concept). Hillel responded to the non-Jew, "Whatever you despise do not do to your fellow." This is the all-encompassing principle of the Torah and the rest is commentary. Once again we see that the principle of loving one's fellow as he loves himself encompasses to the entire Torah. However it remains difficult to understand how the obligations between man and G-d are encompassed in this principle. When one transgresses against G-d how

does he affect any other person beside himself?

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos says that if a person eats without first reciting a blessing it is as if "he stole from G-d and the Jewish people." Rashi explains that in life everything is determined by merit. If one is worthy then Hashem provides endless blessings for man to partake of it; however, if one does not acknowledge G-d through a blessing (e.g. the Jew who does not recite the blessing before eating) then Hashem will withhold His blessing from the Jewish people.

One's worthiness to receive blessing is determined by the degree that one fulfills his obligation as a Jew towards G-d. Based on this principle we can now understand that even the obligations between man and G-d affect the existence of the Jewish people as a whole. If a Jew observes the laws of Shabbos and dietary laws then he brings Hashem's blessing upon the Jewish people; however, if he does not then all existence is negatively impacted. Thus, "You shall love your fellow Jew as you love yourself..." is a Commandment that encompasses the Torah in its entirety because if one loves his fellow as he loves himself he will not even transgress the Laws of the Torah that pertain to man's obligation to Hashem nor his fellow.

Often when we say Tehillim (Psalms) on behalf of our brethren in Israel who are experiencing grave difficulties, we do not necessarily say the Tehillim with proper concentration. If one's relative were ill, G-d forbid, would one not recite the Psalms with more fervor? If so why do we differentiate? The answer is that we need to strengthen this aspect of our Judaism to love our fellow Jew as we love ourselves.

2. The Value of a person is his Spiritual Function

The Torah tells us that there are particular laws that pertain to the Kohen Gadol (The High Priest) that do not pertain to an ordinary Kohen (Priest). For example, a Kohen is not permitted to contaminate himself with the dead; however, an ordinary Kohen is permitted to contaminate himself with his seven closest relatives (wife, children, parents, etc.). The Kohen Gadol, by contrast, is not permitted to contaminate himself even with his closest relatives. The only circumstance in which the Kohen Gadol is obligated to contaminate himself is if he comes upon a corpse of a Jew whose burial needs were left neglected (Meis Mitzvah). We find a similar prohibition regarding the Nazir (The Nazirite is not permitted to drink wine, cut his hair, or become contaminated with the dead). The Nazir's restrictions regarding his contamination of the dead is identical to the Kohen Gadol: he is not permitted to contaminate himself with the dead even with his closest relatives.

The Torah states that if the wife of the High Priest passes away, he is not permitted to contaminate himself with her remains. The same is true if, G-d forbid, his children pass away. According to one opinion in the Mishna in Tractate Sanhedrin, the Kohen Gadol is not even permitted to walk on the same street with the coffin containing his relative's remains because there is a concern that he may contaminate himself with them. King Solomon tells us, "Deracheha darkchei noam... (the ways of the Torah are pleasant)" - meaning that the laws of the Torah are not harsh or painful. If this is the case,

how do we understand the Torah denying the Kohen Gadol to grieve over those who are closest to him in the same manner as other Jews? It would seem that these laws are not in sync with the principle stated by King Solomon.

The link that a Jew has with Hashem is through the Kohen Gadol. The Kohen Gadol is the representative of the Jewish people who enters into the location of the Shechina (The Divine Presence) (The Holy of Holies) to beseech Hashem on our behalf. The Gemara tells us that each of the vestments of the Kohen Gadol atoned for the various sins of the Jewish people. There is an ongoing atonement process on behalf of the Jewish people that can only come about because of the spiritual dimension of the Kohen Gadol. If the Kohen Gadol should be disqualified from his service- through the contamination of the dead or for any reason, the ongoing process of atonement and link to Hashem through him is disrupted.

It is not that the Torah wishes to deny the Kohen Gadol the same privileges of the ordinary Kohen regarding contact with his closest relatives; but rather, it is because of the dimension of function and value of the Kohen Gadol vis-à-vis the Jewish people that he is prohibited to contaminate himself. Since the Kohen Gadol acts as the representative of the entire Jewish people, his value is immeasurable; he therefore cannot be permitted to become contaminated. It would be an act of unlimited insensitivity and even cruelty to the Jewish people if the Kohen Gadol were permitted to contaminate himself.

It is understandable that the Torah prohibits the Kohen Gadol from contaminating himself with the dead because of his special role in Klal Yisroel; however, why is the Nazir (The Nazirite) prohibited from contaminating himself even with the death of his closest relatives? The Nazir is a Jew who wishes to become closer to Hashem by denying himself certain things such as drinking wine, cutting his hair, and coming in contact with the dead.

The Torah says that at the conclusion of the Nazir's state of Naziritehood he is required to bring a sin offering. The Ramban asks - if the Torah refers to him as a "kaddosh (holy person)" why at the conclusion of his Naziritehood must he bring a sin offering? The Ramban answers that a Nazir when he enters into the state of Naziritehood enters and achieves a special level of spirituality. When he concludes this period of holiness, he leaves this special level and reverts back to his ordinary level. The reason why he must bring the sin offering is because he is no longer at that special level. The special person who became a Nazir has a dimension of spirituality and holiness that is valuable to the Jewish people and the world as a whole. When that person ceases to be the Nazir and returns to being ordinary he no longer provides that special value.

The tzaddik (righteous person) who denies himself even those things that are permitted to him has immeasurable value to the Jewish people. The Gemara in Tractate Succah states that the entire world stands on the merit of the "36 hidden Tzaddikim" because of their merit. The status of the Nazir, when he is in his state of Sanctity, brings about special merit to the Jewish people. Allowing

him to be contaminated even with his closest relatives would deny the Jewish people of that merit- which is a loss that is incalculable. We see from the Kohen Gadol, the Nazir, and the special tzaddik that a person's true value vis-à-vis Klal Yisroel is based on his spiritual function.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos states that the world exists because of tzedakah (charity). Even the wealthiest individual needs charity to exist. If it were not for the Tzedakah of Hashem the world would not exist. The question is why does the world merit Hashem's Tzedakah? The answer is- it is through the merit of the tzaddikim, the Kohen Gadol, and the special holy person (the Nazir) that Hashem sustains the world. Therefore it is crucial to the existence of the world for these special people to maintain their state of purity.

When one is able to understand the value of tzaddikim and their spirituality one will then comprehend that if there is a problem in the physical realm it is only because there is a problem in the spiritual realm. Unfortunately we see from the current situation, with this seemingly irresolvable state of affairs, that we are truly in need of spiritual rehabilitation.

3. Hashem Favors the Pursued

The Torah tells us that the ox, the sheep, and the goat are the species that qualify to be brought as offerings to bring about atonement. The Yalkut (Midrash) explains the reason why the Torah chose only these species to be brought as sacrifices is because of a principle that is stated by Shlomo Ha'Melech (King Solomon), "Elokeem Yevakeish HaNirdof, (G-d) favors the pursued." The Midrash explains that regardless of the status of the pursued party, Hashem will favor that person because he is pursued. For example, even if a tzaddik (righteous person) is pursuing a rashah (evil person), Hashem will favor the rashah because the rashah is the pursued.

The Midrash provides many examples of the application of this concept from the beginning of time. For example, Abel was pursued by Cain and Hashem favored Abel (He received his offering). Noach was pursued by people of his generation and Hashem favored Noach. Avraham was pursued by Nimrod (The King who decreed that Avraham should be cast into the fire) and Hashem loved Avraham. Yitzchak was pursued by the Philistines, Yaakov was pursued by Esav, Yosef was pursued by his brothers, Moshe was pursued by Pharaoh, and the Jewish people are pursued by the nations of the world. In all these cases Hashem favors the pursued over the pursuer. Therefore since the ox is pursued by the lion and the sheep is pursued by the wolf and the goat is pursued by the mountain lion, Hashem favors these species over other species and therefore only they qualify to be brought as offerings.

The question is- is King Solomon telling us that Hashem's Mercy is so great that although the pursued is undeserving he is nevertheless favored by Hashem? Does Hashem value the pursued only because he is the "underdog"? Were Abel, Noach, Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Yosef, Moshe, and Klal Yisroel special only because they were pursued?

The state of being pursued is a state of realizing that a person has nowhere to turn to escape the

advances of his pursuer. When a person finds himself in this situation, he will realize that his only salvation can come through the Mercy of G-d. If the pursuer fully comprehends his helplessness, he will then introspect, do teshuvah (atone for his sins), and turn to Hashem. It is not that Hashem simply favors the pursued; but rather, the pursued (because of his situation) draws himself closer to Hashem.

The Midrash tells us that Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous. The Matriarchs were barren only so that they should pray to Hashem for children. Their desire for progeny caused the Matriarchs and the Patriarchs to pray to Hashem at a level that under normal circumstances they would not have done.

Spiritual rehabilitation and atonement can only come about if a person understands that he is totally dependent on the Mercy of Hashem. When one brings a sacrifice for atonement, he must realize that in truth that because of his spiritual failing he should have been killed and his remains burnt. However, it is only through the Mercy of Hashem that He is willing to take a sacrifice in his stead. Therefore the species that most identify with this necessary mindset for atonement are only the pursued species.

4. Understanding the Atonement Process

The Torah tells us that the ox, sheep, and the goat are the only species that qualify to be sacrificed as offerings to bring about atonement. The Midrash explains that the reason why these species are considered so special is because each of them represents and corresponds to each of the Patriarchs - Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. In order for one to be able to have atonement for his sins he needs to rely on merit; therefore, because these species identify with the Patriarchs (who have great merit), they bring about the necessary atonement.

The Midrash states that the ox corresponds to the merit of Avraham and can bring about atonement because when the angels came to Avraham the Torah tells us that he "ran to the cattle" (he ran to slaughter the ox to feed his guests). The sheep corresponds to the merit of Yitzchak because at the Akeida (The binding of Yitzhak) the Torah tells us that he "saw the ram (same species as sheep) caught in the thicket" and it was subsequently sacrificed in his place. The goat has relevance to the merit of Yaakov because his mother Rifkah told him to "bring two goats from the flock to prepare delicacies for his father Yitzchak (before receiving the blessings)." When each of these animals is sacrificed as an offering, Hashem recalls the merit of each of the Patriarchs that is associated with that particular species. Consequently the person is able to attain spiritual rehabilitation in the merit of the Patriarchs.

We read in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers), "The world stands on three principles: Torah, Avodah (Service to Hashem), and Gemilas Chassadim (acts of loving kindness)." Rabbi Chaim of Volozin zt'l comments that each of these principles correspond to a specific Patriarch. Avraham is associated with Acts of loving-kindness because he was continuously engaged in chesed (kindness). Our

Patriarch Yitzchak is associated with Avodah (Service to Hashem) because he was "the unblemished offering" at the time of the Akeidah. Yaakov represents Torah study because the Torah refers to him as, "The man of the tent (tent of Torah)."

Rabbi Chaim of Volozin zt'l explains that the person is comprised of three parts: the life source (Nefesh), soul (Nishama), and spirit (Ruach). Nefesh represents physical movement and is the same life source that mankind shares with the animal. The Nishama is the soul that man possesses which causes him to be an intellectual being. Ruach (spirit - which means wind) is the spirit that gives man the power of speech (the ability of expression). Rabbi Chaim explains that just as each person is comprised of these three elements, Klal Yisroel (the Jewish people) as a single entity also possess these three components.

He explains that Avraham, our Patriarch corresponds to the Nefesh (life source) of Klal Yisroel because his most prominent characteristic was doing acts of chesed, which requires physical movement. Therefore, Avraham established the Nefesh of Klal Yisroel through his acts of chesed. Yitzchak was the "unblemished offering" and just as the Kohen needed to be pure in thought -not to disqualify the offering- so too was Yitzchak pure in thought when he was brought as an offering. He therefore corresponds to the Nishama of Klal Yisroel. Yaakov, our Patriarch who was continuously engaged in Torah study, corresponds to the Ruach (power of speech) of Klal Yisroel because Torah is studied through articulation.

Rabbeinu Bachya states at the beginning of his commentary on the Portion of Vayikra that when a person brings an offering to be sacrificed; he needs to first make a verbal confession for his sin, then he must lean on the head of the animal with both of his hands (smicha), and finally he must burn the innards of the animal which include the kidneys. Rabbeinu Bachya explains that each aspects of bringing a sacrifice atones for a specific element of one's sin. The verbal confession atones for the stage before one commits a sin when he expresses his intent to transgress (corresponding to Ruach). Leaning (Smicha) on the animal atones for the person's act of transgression (corresponding to Nefesh). The burning of the kidneys (which is connected to one's intellect) atones for the thoughts that went into planning and executing the transgression. The burning of the kidneys rehabilitates the person's Nishama (soul/intellectual capacity).

The atonement process touches upon and rehabilitates every aspect of a person's existence - his Nefesh, Nishama, and Ruach. We now have a deeper understanding why the Torah selected specifically the ox, the sheep, and the goat as the species to be brought as offerings. These species correspond to each aspect represented by the Patriarchs. Consequently, these species represent and rehabilitate every aspect of the human make-up.

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