

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

by Rabbi Dovid Green

This week's parshios are replete with moral directives. The Torah does not just involve itself in what we would consider "religious" and ceremonial matters. Indeed it gives us many commandments which govern how we are to live together. From those commandments we have a window into the attitudes which G-d wants us to have.

The Torah states "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). Rabbi Akiva stated "this is a major tenet in the Torah." In a midrash we find the following parable of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. Several people were sailing in a ship. One takes out a drill and begins drilling into the floor of the ship. "What are you doing?" the others ask excitedly. "Why should you care?" was the reply. "Aren't I drilling only under my place?"

This parable illustrates for us how dependent we are on each other. The connection we have is a crucial connection. When one of the ties are broken, and we begin going our own way and doing our own thing - like the man in the ship - we must know that we are not just affecting ourselves.

We are really a singular unit which is referred to as "Klal Yisroel," the composite Jewish people. We are like a tree which is only the sum of all of its parts. We see that there are differing aspects of the tree, roots, leaves, branches, fruits, and seeds, etc., and we know that it depends on all of its parts for its sustenance and ultimate continuity. Any part which is severed becomes a non-entity because it can not survive independently.

Before we received the Torah on Mount Sinai the following is stated: "And Yisroel (the Jewish nation) camped there etc." Hebrew verbs are conjugated in masculine, feminine, singular and plural. The commentaries make note of the fact that the word "and Yisroel _camped_" is written uncharacteristically in the singular conjugation. This is because the Children of Israel had achieved a perfect unity at that time. It was because of that that they merited to receive the Torah.

There are many laws in the Torah governing liability for damages, robbery and theft, etc. G-d intended that the laws we have should preserve unity. Without civil order, unity is compromised.

When G-d gave Moshe and the Children of Israel the directive to build the Tabernacle, He said "Build me a sanctuary and I'll shall dwell among them. "The goal was to manifest His Presence on the Children of Israel as a whole. "I shall dwell among _them_ (as a whole).

This is the meaning behind Rabbi Akiva's statement "Love your fellow as yourself; this is a major tenet in the Torah." It is a major tenet because it underscores the basic premise that its goal is to maintain unity. Unity is the first and prerequisite step to the fulfillment of our destiny as Jews.

G-d gave us a great gift - Torah. The Torah is the only way to achieve real unity. The reason is that it is G-d given. It is completely objective. Where there is subjectivity and self-interest is impossible to achieve unity. This is because there will always be others with a differing subjective approach to life. Unity is possible when everyone agrees that we will submit to a given set of rules. In our societies it is easy to see the need for this approach. We are only a nation through our Torah.

Good Shabbos!

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