

FROM THE INSIDE OUT

by Rabbi Dovid Green

You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am G-d. (Vayikra 19:18)

Why are these concepts packaged together? Why is the famous "golden rule" and all its loving implication to be found amongst such rugged company as the instinct to revenge and bear a grudge?

A Russian peasant farmer who never left the small and parochial surroundings of his town had occasion to come the big city of Moscow. He arrived at the elegant hotel with mud on his boots and overalls looking completely inappropriate. The man at the desk assigned him to a room on the top floor and treated him as any other paying customer.

With key in hand and a few possessions he started the long climb to the hotel room. On the first landing there was a full-length mirror. The man who had never seen himself before was suddenly startled and frightened by the imposing image before him. He growled and barked to scare him away only to find that the image in the mirror was willing to threaten and shout the same.

He ran to the next floor and confronted the fearsome giant again exchanging harsh looks and even almost coming to blows. On the third floor they stood nose to nose and exchanged simultaneous insults as a deepening war-like attitude was taking root in "both of the them".

Realizing that there was no where to escape this ugly beast-like fellow who was aggressively stalking him in the hotel he ran quickly back to the lobby and the front desk to file a complaint. After having given a detailed description of the perpetrator the man at the desk understood that the he had met the enemy and it was the man in the mirror. So as to save the face of his guest and to disengage the hostility he offered simple advice.

He said, "The fellow who you confronted is here to protect people. He is really quite harmless. Trust me. If you will show him a harsh and angry countenance he will do the same. However if when you see him you just smile pleasantly and continue on your way he will nod and smile at you as well. Enjoy the rest of your stay." That's what he did and remarkably that's what happened.

King Solomon, the wisest of all men, tells us in Parables': "Like the reflection of a face in water so is the heart of one man to another." The Torah seems to be giving us similar council in our relationships with people. To break the cycle of anger and resentment requires someone to be proactively in

pursuit of friendship and in principle seeking good will.

Rabbi Segal ztl, The Manchester Rav, was an extremely loving and pious individual. One of his grandchildren showed him a picture from a family simcha (happy occasion) and looking intently he asked, "Who is this righteous looking fellow?" They chuckled softly and told him, "Zeidy-grandfather, it's you!"

He didn't know what he looked like in that piece of glass called a mirror. However, for decades he had actively projected his loving and noble visage and saw in the eyes of others his own beauty continuously shining back at him.

Act! Don't react! Seems to be the creed. We are bidden to take responsibility for the quality of our relationships by acting as if they were already ideal. Then some relationships just may begin to improve from the inside out.

Good Shabbos!

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