

# THE SHEPHERD'S SHEPHERDS

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

*And you should love your neighbor as yourself...* (Vayikra 19:18)

How can the Torah obligate an emotion of love?

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero writes in Tomer Devorah, "This is why all Jews are "guarantors one for another" since each individual actually has a portion of everyone else, so that if one damages himself he damages that portion of himself that is in his friend. It follows that his friend is a guarantor for that portion. Therefore it is fitting for a person to desire the best for his fellow, and view his good fortune benevolently and cherish his friend's honor as his own- for they are actually one in the same! For this reason we are commanded to "love your neighbor as yourself" and it is proper that a person should desire the well-being of his fellow and not speak ill of or wish ill for him."

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch ztl. approaches the same point for an etymological approach. The word for "your neighbor"- "rayechah" finds its root in the same word for shepherd as it says in the famous 23rd Psalm "HASHEM royi"- "HASHEM is my shepherd..." Curious that the Torah chose that category of personage to whom we are obligated to demonstrate our love, Rav Hirsch writes, "Everyone is to find and recognize in everybody else his "mireh"- "the pasturage of his life", the furthering of his own well-being, the conditions for his own well-being in life. Nobody may look at the progress of another as a hindrance to his own progress or look at the downfall of another as the means for his own rising and nobody may rejoice in his own progress if it is at the expense of his neighbor's failure...In exactly the same way and from the same consciousness of duty he directs his love to the well-being of his neighbor, loves him as a being equally a creation of G-d, he proclaims his love of G-d by his love of His creatures."

Every person is our shepherd, as HASHEM is our shepherd. We are all equally vulnerable and

inter-dependant economically, socially, spiritually, and emotionally. No man is an island and there are no victimless crimes.

The Tanna D'Bei Yishmael explains why the Jewish People are compared to a sheep. Just as if any single limb of the lamb is smitten all the limbs feel it so it is with all of Israel. He offers the following parable about a group of people traveling on a ship. One passenger takes out a drill and begins to bore a hole beneath his seat. His friends say to him, "Why are you doing this?" He says back to them, "What does it matter to you? I'm only drilling under my seat!" They answer him back, "You are going

to cause the whole ship to sink on us!"

I heard once a story about a fellow that climbed to the peak of some great mountain. There he was, with his timberland boots and backpack, alone and aloof from the world. Like an eagle, the paradigm of arrogance according to the Zohar, he reveled in his achievement. He thought to himself, "Who needs other people!? I'm king of the hill!" Just then, his glasses fell from his face and while feeling around for them he stepped on them and crushed them. He was helpless and visionless without his glasses. Within a short while he was curled up in a fetal position awaiting assistance.

We don't make our own clothing or create our own food from scratch daily. An intricate army called economy provides for most of our daily needs. A cup of coffee is an enormously sophisticated accomplishment when we consider from how far coffee beans come and how water is delivered and heat is produced and milk and sugar are processed and shipped. No wonder we make a Brocho, "Shehakol Nehiah B'dvaro" - "Everything comes about through His speech". That's just a coffee. What about all the other grandiose and subtle brands of goodness that we are the beneficiaries of?! To the extent that we can keep an awareness of these myriads of matters big and small, so will we naturally love the Shepherd's shepherds. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](http://Torah.org).