

HOLY NATION

by Rabbi Label Lam

You shall not revenge nor bear a grudge against the children of your people and love your neighbor as your-self, I am HASHEM! (Vayikra 19:18)

Rabbi Akiva says, "Love your neighbor as your-self": This is the great-general principle of the Torah! (Talmud)

How is "loving your neighbor" the big idea in the Torah? That may well be so for Mitzvos between man and man but what of the many Mitzvos between man and G-d? How is being a loving neighbor a holy matter? Why is it included in the litany of Mitzvos following the mandate to "be holy"? It seems like a very pragmatic and common sense idea that anyone can easily figure out. Why is the Possuk (verse) punctuated with the statement "I am HASHEM"? What does that add to the mandate to love your neighbor?

A senior colleague in Israel told us that that when he was yet a young man and pursuing his doctorate in philosophy his professor made the following bold declaration; "The Jewish Bible is the source of human rights in the world!" All of the students diligently wrote it down in their notebooks but this curious fellow who was the only Jew in the class, promptly approached the teacher and challenged him, "Where is it written so in the Jewish Bible? Where is that verse that promises human rights?" The professor was a little startled and he asked his student if he in fact agreed with his claim that the Jewish Bible is the source of human rights in the world. The student agreed wholeheartedly with the statement but he was merely curious as to what the source might be. This was a case of the student giving the teacher a homework assignment. And so it was the professor went to work scanning the Bible and looking for that verse that grants human rights, but his search proved fruitless. A week later he came back to class and admitted that he could not find a single verse that supported his statement.

He also confessed how mystified he was because everybody in the history department, and the literature department, and the sociology department agreed with him. How could this be so? So he fed the question back to his student, "Maybe you have the answer!"

This budding young Talmud scholar answered as follows: "Let's take for example one verse that Rabbi Akiva refers to as the "great-general principle in the Torah" and that is "And you should love your neighbor as your-self!" The implication of that statement is that everyone has a right to be

loved. When I walk into a room where you are obligated to love your neighbor, I have a right to be loved! The only difference is that the Torah never came as a "bill of rights" but rather as a "bill of responsibilities". Now imagine how much more love exists in a relationship when both parties know what they owe in love as opposed when each demands that their rights be met. How much more love is in the room when every member of a family knows that they are duty bound to love and happily contribute. How much greater an entire community or a nation can be when it is composed of individuals who live up to this universal notion and categorical imperative to "love your neighbor as your-self"! Compare that to a world of persons seeking only their rights.

Rabbi S. R. Hirsch ztl writes, "...when one 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 to His creatures!"

Where people seek their "human rights" while blind to their obligation of love we can only hope for a barely civil society. However, looking to establish a new world order, HASHEM offered the Torah to the Jewish People on the condition that we would become an example of "a kingdom of priests and a **holy nation**".

DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).