

# BASIC RECOGNITION

*by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch*

## Parshios Acharei Mos & Kedoshim

### Basic Recognition

**by Rabbi Elly Broch**

The Torah teaches us one of mankind's most basic tenets, "And you should love your friend as your self." (Vayikra/Leviticus 19:18) The Talmud (Tractate Shabbos 21a) relates an incident when the renowned sage Hillel was approached by a prospective proselyte who wished to learn the entirety of Jewish law in the time that he would be able to stand on one foot. Hillel replied, "Do not do to your friend that which you do not wish to be done to you; this is the entire Torah, and all else is the commentary which you should learn".

Rabbi Avigdor Miller (1) questions why Hillel changed the commandment from a positive statement ("Love your friend...") to a negative statement ("Do not do to your friend..."). Further, the logic of Hillel's answer is unclear: the laws of tefillin, mezuzah, kosher and many others are commandments between a Jew and his Creator, with no apparent connection with the fundamental interpersonal mitzvah (Divine command) to love one's friend as oneself.

Rabbi Miller explains that Hillel is qualifying the law of loving one's fellow as oneself. The Talmud (Tractate Bava Metzia 62a) elucidates that a person in the desert with his companion who possesses one vessel of water that suffices to keep only one of them alive must keep the water for himself in order to survive until reaching a place of water, even though the friend will expire from thirst. How does this reconcile with the verse "You should love your friend as yourself"? Hillel is expounding that this commandment does not require one to give up one's life for another, as one may have thought from the phrase "Love your friend as yourself". The proper understanding is, as Hillel declared, "Do not do to your friend that which you do not wish to be done to you": just as you do not desire to be ignored when you need aid, so shall you be sensitive to the needs of others. Thus, it also would not require a wealthy landowner to divide his estate among the landless poor, for property is a gift from G-d and is the sacred right of the owner. But it does obligate the owner to give charity and fulfill the needs of the destitute. It also obligates people to honor their fellow men as they would wish to be

honored.

Rabbi Miller also clarifies how Hillel suggested that this commandment encompasses the entire Torah. The term "your friend" refers not only to a human being; it also refers to G-d. If a friend gave you a house for free and requested that you put a sign on the doorpost acknowledging his gift, refusal of such a simple request would demonstrate an extreme lack of appreciation. Our Creator provides us with our livelihood and, in turn, our abode. All we are asked to do is to put a mezuzah on the doorpost. We have been granted a head with a fabulous and miraculous brain inside which manages all the multifunctional systems of our entire body and processes all the stimuli from the environment. All we have been asked to do is to affix tefillin to acknowledge Him and show gratitude. We have been given a tongue with an array of taste buds and an extremely efficient digestive system. We are only asked to master our appetites and control our consumption to recognize G-d's grace. Had we bestowed these gifts upon another human, we would consider him rude and insulting would he refuse to acknowledge them. Thus, the entire Torah, with all the commandments is as Hillel declared "Do not do to your friend that which you would not wish to be done to you".

Have a Good Shabbos!

*(1) 1908-2001; a prolific author and popular speaker who specialized in mussar (introspective Jewish self-improvement) and Jewish history, Rabbi Miller commanded a worldwide following through his books and tapes: of the tens of thousands of Torah lectures he delivered, more than 2,000 were preserved on cassettes*

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