

# REFLECTED IN THE WATER

*by Rabbi Yaakov Menken*

*"If you see the donkey of someone you hate struggling under its burden, shall you refrain from helping to unload it? You shall certainly unload it with him." [23:5]*

The Tosfos, a major commentary on the Talmud, discusses this verse. The authors ask a simple question: why does this mitzvah focus upon someone you hate? The obvious, simple answer is that this applies *even* to someone you hate. But the Tosfos provides us with a far more profound reason for highlighting this particular case.

Obviously, this does not refer to someone whom you dislike as an individual. To hate your brother or sister is prohibited by the Torah, and without question any mitzvah to help would apply to any such person without being specified. What the Torah is discussing here, then, is a person whom you know engages in deliberate, evil behavior. In this case, you have an obligation to hate the evil actions, and to even demonstrate hatred towards the person doing them -- to distance yourself from evil.

The problem is that over the course of time, *mitzvah* hatred can easily transform itself into *personal* hatred. Instead of distancing myself from evil, I end up participating in the evil of gratuitous hatred.

If I demonstrate hatred because of the person's evil actions, he or she will begin to hate me as well. "Like a face reflected in the water, so is the heart of a person towards another" -- the way another person feels towards you is a reflection of the way you behave towards that person. And even if the hatred is because I have this mitzvah to hate evil, that person's hatred towards me is no mitzvah at all, but simply personal. What happens then? Even my hatred towards that person becomes personal as well. No longer a mitzvah, my behavior becomes the very opposite of what the Torah desires.

Therefore, says the Torah, we must extend ourselves to help that person when he or she is in distress. There is a limit, a boundary, to what is called a mitzvah of hatred. A vital undercurrent of love must remain!

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