

# ON ONE FOOT

*by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner*

This week we read the double parsha of Acharei Mos-Kedoshim. These two parshios combine for a total of seventy-nine mitzvos [commandments]--more than one eighth of the taryag [613] mitzvos. One of the most famous and familiar mitzvos of the entire Torah is: "V'ahavta l'rayacha kamocho, ani Hashem [You shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am Hashem]. [19:18]"

The extent to which this is a fundamental precept of Judaism is illustrated by the following story in the Talmud [Shabbos 31A]. A gentile approached Shammai and said to him: "Convert me but teach me the entire Torah as I stand on one foot." Shammai, feeling that he wasn't serious, chased him away. This gentile then approached Hillel with the same offer/request but was met with a very different reaction--Hillel agreed. The entire Torah on one foot that Hillel taught him was "that which you hate, don't do to others--a paraphrase of the command to love your neighbor. "That is the entire Torah," Hillel told him, "the rest is simply an explanation. Go and learn it!"

The mitzvos [commandments] are comprised of two categories, those between man-and-man and those between man-and-Hashem. We understand Hillel's statement as a basis for all of the man-and-man mitzvos. However, how does Hillel's teaching encompass the mitzvos that are between man-and-Hashem?

The Kli Yakar explains that this gentile was not mocking the Rabbis at all but was, in fact, being very sincere. He, who hadn't studied Torah from a young age, was looking for a single foundation upon which he could base and thereby remember the entire Torah.

Hillel taught him the passuk [verse] of "Love your neighbor like yourself, I am Hashem." This accounted for both categories of mitzvos. Those between man-and-man are based on the first part of the passuk: "Love your neighbor as yourself." The second half of the passuk, "I am Hashem," which teaches that we must have complete belief in Hashem, serves as the basis for all of the man-to-Hashem commandments.

This would seem to answer the question posed above that Hillel's teaching didn't cover the man-to-Hashem mitzvos. However, there is a difficulty that can be raised. According to the Talmud, Hillel didn't actually quote the passuk but rather paraphrased the concept of love your neighbor. If you wouldn't want someone to do it to you then don't do it to someone else. There was no mention of the second part of the passuk--I am Hashem--in Hillel's words.

It therefore seems that "Love your neighbor" alone serves as the foundation for the entire Torah--

including both the mitzvos between man-and-man and those between man-and-Hashem. How can we understand this?

Rav Elchonon Wasserman zt"l explains that every aspect of the Torah is directly connected to the mitzvos between man-and-man.

The Talmud [Kiddushin 46B] teaches: A person should always view himself as if he has an equal amount of merits as he has sins and as if the world is hanging in perfect balance with an equal amount of merits and sins. If he'll perform a mitzvah, fortunate is he who tilted himself and the entire world to the side of merits. If he'll perform a sin, woe to he who tilted himself and the entire world to the side of sin.

He explains that kedusha {holiness} and tum'ah {impurity} are the sources and the causes of the good and the evil that exist in the world. Any flow of good that comes down to this world comes about as a result of a kadosh {holy} act performed by someone in this world.

When a person performs a mitzvah, be it between man-and-man or between man-and-Hashem, he brings kedusha onto himself and onto the entire world. He causes good to come to others. When a person sins, he is causing damage to the entire world.

The Talmud [Taanis 24B] relates: Rabi Yehuda said in the name of Rav: Every day a heavenly voice proclaims: The entire world is being fed for the sake of my son, Chanina (Rabi Chanina ben Dosa), and my son Chanina suffices with a measure of carobs from Friday till Friday.

Rabi Chanina ben Dosa's service to Hashem brought an outpouring of good that was powerful enough to sustain the entire world.

(I always imagined the response of a haughty, rich man when someone would approach him for a donation to help Rabi Chanina's poor family. "I should support that parasite?!?! Let him go out and get a job! What's he doing for this world?!?!" Little does that poor, rich man know who is the real parasite...)

We can now understand Hillel's words in a different and deeper light.

"That which you don't want done to yourself, don't do to others." That includes harm caused directly man-to-man and also difficulties in the world that are initiated by one's sins. You wouldn't want someone to do it to you so don't do it to others.

"That is the entire Torah. The rest--the other six hundred and twelve mitzvos--are simply the explanations." Know what should and should not be done in order to make sure that you are helping and not hurting the world.

Love your neighbor as yourself...

Good Shabbos,

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