

ROLE OF SPOUSE IN LOVING ONE'S NEIGHBOR

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 370, Deserts -- Do They Require a Brocha? Good Shabbos!

The Role of the Spouse in Loving One's Neighbor

This week's parsha contains the famous pasuk [verse], "You shall not take revenge, and you shall not bear a grudge against the sons of your nation, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am Hashem." [Vayikra 19:18] The mitzvah of loving one's neighbor is the "great principle of the Torah" [Jerusalem Talmud Nedarim 9:4].

The Rambam writes, in his definition of this mitzvah, that "we are commanded to love one another like we love ourselves." However, according to the Ramba"n, the Torah is not necessarily asking us to develop an emotion of love. Rather, the demand is that we treat people in a manner as if we loved them. According to either opinion, this mitzvah requires us to worry about people, be concerned about them, show them warmth and comfort, and provide them what they need -- be it financial help, spiritual help, physical help, or emotional help.

A very basic question can be asked. How does a man fulfill the mitzvah of "loving his neighbor" with a woman? Half of all people are members of the "opposite sex." A woman is certainly considered "one's neighbor" in regards to this mitzvah. So very simply, one should ask, how are men able to fulfill this mitzvah of loving our "female neighbors," if there are obvious problems in providing the amount of concern and care and comfort one is supposed to provide in fulfilling this mitzvah, to a member of the opposite sex? The same question can of course be asked regarding how women can fulfill this mitzvah with regard to their male "neighbors."

Rav Shimon Schwab presents a novel insight, which I believe is very true. Rav Schwab suggests that the only way that a person can safely fulfill the mitzvah of loving one's neighbor with members of the opposite sex is through one's spouse.

We are all obligated to fulfill the 613 mitzvos. However, I, as a member of one of the non-Priestly Tribes, can obviously not offer sacrifices in the Bais HaMikdash [Temple]. As a non-Levi, I cannot

accept Ma'aser [Tithes]. There is a concept in Judaism that we as a nation are a unit. Some of the mitzvos are fulfilled through Kohanim, descendants of the High Priest Aharon. Some are fulfilled through Levites, and so forth.

Rav Schwab wants to extend this concept. He argues that the mitzvah of "loving one's neighbor" as it applies to the universe of Jews can only be fulfilled as a husband-wife unit. The husband must serve in the role of "Avraham drew near to him the men" and the wife must serve in the role of "Sarah drew near to her the women."

Rav Schwab quotes a Zohar, which refers to the fact that "man without a wife is like half a body." This means that a person cannot reach full spiritual fulfillment in this world without a spouse. Part of the reason for this, Rav Schwab argues, is because the mitzvah of "loving one's neighbor like oneself" cannot be fully fulfilled without a spouse. This is a mitzvah that is assigned to the "couple." The man fulfills his part with other men, and the woman fulfills her part with other women.

By way of homiletics, Rav Schwab interprets the Gemara which forbids a person from becoming engaged to a woman until he sees her at least once 'lest he finds her to be unappealing' [Kiddushin 41a]. The Gemara concludes this prohibition with the words "and the Torah states 'You should love your neighbor as yourself.'" Why, Rav Schwab asks, does the Gemara add this postscript to the prohibition? Rav Schwab says that this alludes to the fact that if she is found unappealing and he divorces her -- then he will never be able to properly fulfill the mitzvah of "Loving one's neighbor."

I mention this idea every once in a while because in American society -- especially today in the secular world -- there are absolutely no boundaries between the mingling of the sexes. People are in offices, in jobs, in social situations where they constantly have to mingle. There is absolutely no thought given to the time-honored Jewish value that the sexes should be separated. Unfortunately, many problems -- which I do not have to elaborate upon -- come about when there is too much intermingling between members of the opposite sex. Countless people have paid the price because they have not been judicious and careful in this area.

People assume that they are just being 'normal'. But biology and human nature being what they are, the Torah warns us that we have to build boundaries and fences for ourselves. If not physical boundaries and fences, there must at least be a certain "distance" and limitation -- all within the context of civility and politeness -- which allows us to constantly be on guard for the inherent dangers in socialization and the establishment of relationships between members of the opposite sex.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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