



From the desk of
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TORAT

Parashat Kedoshim

HAMELECH

From the Sources

One of the most well-known *mitsvot* is “*Ve’ahavta lereicha kamocho*”. Let us examine this *mitsvah* from the sources and come out with a deeper understanding and more meaningful fulfillment.

A non-Jew once approached Shamai and asked to be converted to Judaism on condition that he be taught the entire Torah while standing upon one leg. Shamai did not appreciate this approach. He sent him away.

The man then came to Hillel who agreed to the condition. Hillel told him, “What you do not appreciate, do not do to others. That is the entire Torah. The rest is its explanation. Go and learn.”

Hillel’s greatest disciple, Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel, thus explained our verse in this week’s *parashah*.

Why did they stress the negative instead of the positive?

Good-Hearted

Hillel’s least significant disciple was the leader of the next generation. His name was Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai. He, in turn, had five outstanding students. He asked each to pinpoint one certain realm of conduct which would bring a person to proper service of Hashem. Rabbi Elazar ben Arach said, “Have a good heart.” Rabbi Yochanan complimented him, “Your answer is the best. It is all-inclusive.”

What does it mean: to have a good heart?

Love or Beloved

It is important to understand this *mitsvah* of “*Veahavta lereicha*”. What does it mean? If we just say, “love thy neighbor” or “love thy friend,” people will get the wrong idea. In today’s vernacular, “love” is very self-centered. When people speak of how they “love” a certain food or activity, they mean to say that they derive pleasure from eating that food or performing that activity. What they are really saying is that they love themselves and they seek methods of giving themselves more and more pleasure.

True love is dedication and devotion to another. This can often be found in a healthy marriage. Thus, in *sheva berachot*, we find the two marriage partners referred to as “*rei'im ha'ahuvim*” – “beloved friends”. The fact that one person claims to “love” another does not always tell us if this “love” is genuine. When one person is “beloved” to another that is usually more indicative of the former’s dedication and devotion.

Therefore, when the Torah says, “*Veahavta lereicha*,” our Sages felt it necessary to explain it using the negative. Just to say “love your neighbor” may lead people to do all sorts of polite gestures, simultaneously stepping on their neighbor’s “toes”, so to speak, or speaking derogatively about them behind their backs, waking or keeping them up all hours of the night, or doing countless other things which annoy or



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upset them. They may outwardly profess “love” while harboring animosity on the inside.

Therefore, our Sages teach us how to fulfill this *mitsvah* properly. Do you want to truly love your neighbor? Do your utmost to avoid causing him or her any inconvenience or distress whatsoever. If you can accomplish that, then you are fulfilling the Torah’s directive.

The Half-Full Cup of Water

Rabbi Akiva is famous for teaching that “*veahavta lereiyacha kamocha*” is a “great principle in the Torah.” On the other hand, we find an interesting dispute revolving around a flask of water. Two Jews were travelling together in the desert. Alas, it was hot, very hot, and all they had left was one flask of water. Their calculations revealed that if one person were to drink it all, he would survive long enough to reach civilization. If each would drink only half, both would perish. What shall be done? Ben Petura says: Better both drink and die, and not have one see the other one die. Rabbi Akiva says: Your own life comes first. Do not share your water if that translates into giving up your life.

Ramban states that Rabbi Akiva’s stand on this matter is not inconsistent with his dictum of putting *veahavta lereiyacha* on the forefront of one’s agenda. According to Ramban, one does not have to actually love his neighbor like he loves himself. That is why the Torah does not say, “*Veahavta et reiyacha kamocha,*” only “*Veahavta lereiyacha kamocha.*” This means to say that a person should want his fellow Jew to receive all

forms of goodness. This does not preclude that when it comes to choosing between his life and mine, a person is to first see to it that he himself stays alive. [A person is not allowed to kill another in order to stay alive. He may only drink his water, although by doing so, his friend will perish. There is a great distinction between active murder and passively allowing another to perish if that is the only way to remain alive.]

Two Solid Foundations

Kli Yakar addresses a different issue. What is the most important *mitsvah*? We find Rabbi Akiva stressing “*Veahavta lereiyacha.*” Yet we find (Makot 23b) Rabbi Simlai teaching that *emunah* – belief in Hashem – is the most important principle.

This is not very difficult to reconcile. Explains the Kli Yakar: *Emunah* is the basis for *mitsvot* between man and Hashem, while “*Veahavta lereiyacha*” is the foundation of *mitsvot* between man and his fellow.

“I Am Hashem”

Let us not forget the end of the *pasuk*, “Love your friend like yourself; I am Hashem.” We know all about Hashem. Why does He re-introduce Himself specifically at this juncture?

The fact of the matter is that these two foundations merge into one. Why is it that so many people have difficulty living up to the demands of “*Ahavat Rei'im*”? It usually stems from a lack in *emunah*!

We experience a loss and immediately blame so-and-so. We view others as competition. “If not



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for him or her, I would have gotten... [fill in the blank].

If we strengthen ourselves in *emunah*, in "Ani Hashem," and realize that all we have is predestined, nothing to do with others, then we will have a much easier time doing "Veahavta lereiacha kamocho!" It is not him or her; it is all from the One and Only, our Loving Father in Heaven!

In the Creator's "Footsteps"

On a deeper level, this *mitsvah* of "Veahavta" is a branch of the *mitsvah* of following in the ways of Hashem!

Says the Rambam: Hashem commanded us to be as similar to Him as we can! He said, "And you are to go in His ways." This *mitsvah* is repeated numerous times. Just as Hashem is called "Compassionate," so too, you, be compassionate. Just as Hashem is called, "Gracious," so too you, be gracious. Just as Hashem is called "Righteous," so too you, be righteous. Just as Hashem is called "Pious," so too you, be pious.

Rambam reiterates this in Mishneh Torah Hilchot Dei'ot 1:10. When discussing the mitzvah of "Veahavta lereiacha kamocho" (ibid. 6:3) he says: It is a *mitsvah* for each Jew to love every other Jew like he loves himself etc. Therefore, he must speak highly of others and be careful with their possessions, like a person is careful with his own possessions and is sensitive to his own dignity. One who takes honor for himself at the expense of another's disgrace has no portion in the world to come.

The Road to Greatness

How can we get there? How can we achieve the lofty level of loving others as ourselves?

Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenus teaches us how. In Avot (2:10), he says: Let the honor of your friend be as dear to you as your own. How? Do not anger easily. Sometimes others do things that annoy us. Being slow to anger is the key. But how can we accomplish even this?

So Rabbi Eliezer adds: Repent one day before your last. One never knows when his last day is, so he must always repent! Living each day as if it could possibly be the last, is a great way to behave oneself! Sometimes people take liberties and let themselves indulge or step on other people's toes... only because they are sure that the opportunity will arise to make amends. As the saying goes, "Steal today, pay tomorrow." But if tomorrow is the afterlife, the fine is much too great. So think that today may be your last day, and you will have a much easier time tolerating when others insult or annoy you. If today is one day before the end, what difference does it make anyway?

Now a person may come to think: If this is how wise men live their lives, I guess that it is not so bad if I insult them or annoy them because they will not take it to heart. So the *tanna* continues: Be careful not to get wise Torah scholars upset because their bite is the bite of a fox (which is excruciating due to his twisted teeth) and their sting is the sting of a scorpion (which is fatal) and their hiss is the hiss of a fiery serpent (one breath



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of whom can wreak havoc) and all of their words are like fiery coals!

Sefirat HaOmer

Here we are, in the days of *Sefirat Haomer*, preparing for *Kabbalat Hatorah*. A prerequisite for *Kabbalat Hatorah* was the unparalleled *achdut* in *Klal Yisroel*. Each year anew, we are to work towards *achdut*, as we approach *Chag HaShavuot*. Each year anew is another *Kabbalat Hatorah*.

On Pesach we said, "Had Hashem brought us near *Har Sinai* and not given us the Torah, it would have been enough." Oh, really?! What exactly was accomplished by getting close to the mountain if not to receive the Torah?!

Well, the *achdut* we achieved as we encamped next to *Har Sinai*, that was something to behold. It was indeed an accomplishment on its own, worthy of distinction, worth thinking and thanking about.

Each year, at this time, we conduct ourselves as mourners, to a certain extent. We place a damper on our joy, as we recall the death of Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 students. We remember that this plague was due to a lack of respect for a colleague, and we rededicate ourselves to fulfilling "*Veahavta lereiyacha kamocho*" to the fullest extent of our ability!

Taken for a Ride

How careful must we be not to hurt someone else's feelings! And if, by mistake, we did, let us appease them as soon as possible!

Rabbi Dovid Bachar (author of *Divrei Emet*) hired a wagon driver to bring himself and his family to his son's wedding. The ride was quite slow and Rabbi Dovid wanted to get there faster. From time to time, Rabbi Dovid asked the driver to hurry up a bit, but to no avail. Finally, exasperated, Rabbi Dovid lost his cool and yelled, "Shlumiel! Are you deaf?! We are so late!"

At that, the driver sped up. They arrived at the wedding and immediately the *chuppah* was held. After the *chuppah*, Reb Dovid looked for the wagon-driver. He was told, "We paid him and he left."

Reb Dovid felt bad at having spoken to him in that manner. He proceeded to find a different wagon-driver who would take him to catch up to the first driver. Indeed he caught up to him and began begging for forgiveness for having screamed at him hurtful words.

The driver shrugged his shoulders. He was not going to forgive so fast. He had really been insulted. Reb Dovid explained, "I'm so sorry, I was under pressure. I had to get to this wedding. I'm sorry. Please forgive me. You see, I left my own son's wedding just to come here to apologize."

It still didn't work. Reb Dovid offered financial compensation. He offered all his money. The man would not say, "I forgive you."

"So what can I do to get your forgiveness?" begged Reb Dovid.

"Only if you promise to give me half of your *Olam Haba!*" the driver declared.



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Reb Dovid sat down and wrote up a *shtar* (document) to validate the agreement. Only once it was signed did the driver grant forgiveness.

Be Nice

So let us do our utmost to be careful not to do to others what we would not appreciate having done to us. Let us not say things to others which we ourselves would not appreciate being told. But it is more than that. Sometimes, there are things which we do not mind, but they disturb others. So we cannot always use our own tolerance level as the barometer. We must step out of ourselves and understand what type of speech and actions annoy others and attempt to communicate in a positive fashion only.

If we have annoyed another, or even if someone got insulted only due to his sensitivities, let us try to explain that we meant no harm, and try to achieve forgiveness as soon as possible.

Why Marry?

Rav Chayim Vital, the primary *talmid* of the Arizal, says that one of the main reasons to get married is to fulfill the mitzvah of *ve'ahavta lereiacha kamocha* in the best way possible! It is not so easy to love every Jew like yourself; but with your spouse – you have a chance at really getting there! Start at home and it can spread, to some degree, for others.

All One

The Yerushalmi (Nedarim 9:4) tries to discourage taking revenge. It describes a scene in which a

person held a knife in his right hand, about to cut something, and accidentally cut his very own left hand. Does the left hand have any thoughts to pick up the knife and deliver a counter-attack?! Certainly not! It is all one body. It is all in pain. Inflicting any more pain will only bring more suffering to that entity of one body. So too, are we to feel regarding each Jew. But even more so regarding a spouse, about whom it is said, “*Ishto kegufo*” – one’s wife is as his own self.

Think About Someone Else’s Needs

Until a person gets married, he generally focuses on his own needs. Once he gets married, he must realize that there are two opinions in the home, two backgrounds, personalities and mentalities. They have to work together and bridge the gaps. Step One is to follow the advice spelled out by Hillel to the convert: Refrain from doing or saying anything that disturbs your spouse. That is the basis for living a joint life. A person instinctively avoids that which he finds to be unpleasant. If he can extend this avoidance to his partner in life, he has made a major achievement. This is the road to greatness and positive home-building. A family can, *b’ezrat Hashem*, flourish in such an atmosphere.

However, when the two homebuilders each insist on things going *their* way and “compromise” is not part of their program, the home is headed for problems. Too many couples are unhappy simply because they never learned the secret that true happiness is achieved when you do your utmost to make your spouse happy. Not just outwardly



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and with dramatic gestures; but for real. It takes work, but it is well worth the effort.

Adorable Allusions

Gemara Sotah (17a) teaches that when a husband and wife act appropriately, the Shechinah is in their midst. And if not, fire will consume them! The Chid"ra points out that the numerical value of *ahava* is 13 as is that of *echad* – oneness. If there is mutual love – love in both directions, so then there is *ahava* times two which equals 26, the numerical value of Hashem's Special Name. Additionally, 1 man plus 1 woman plus 13 for the *ahava* between them equals 15 which is equivalent to Hashem's Two-Letter Name (the first half of the Four Letter Name).

Top Priority

A prominent Rosh HaYeshiva approached a *shadchan* and informed him that he sought a *shidduch* for his daughter. First and foremost, the *bochur* had to have exemplary *midot*. The Rosh HaYeshiva explained that he had learned the hard way. For his older daughter, he had sought the greatest *matmid*, the one who could sit and learn for hours on end. He paid for him dearly, a *dirah* in Bnei Brak.

After the *chatuna*, his son-in-law kept learning and learning and learning. Things seemed to be going great. Little did he know that his poor daughter was miserable and on the verge of collapse. Until one day, five years into the marriage, with four little ones under toe, she called her father crying and said, "Abba, you sold

me as a *shifchah*! I wanted a husband who would learn. I learned a profession so that I could support the household. But how much can I handle? I have four children, I work nine hours a day! If I would get some support and encouragement from my husband, I would be able to handle it. But he married the Gemara, not me! He forgot that I am a person. A month ago, I opened my mouth for the first time in five years and I asked him to help out a bit in the home and what did he say? 'I understand you, but do you want me to miss out on my evening seder?'"

So, explained the Rosh HaYeshiva, this time I learned my lesson. Top priority is a *baal midot tovo*. He has to be able to care about his wife.

The Right Way

Unfortunately, the above is not a lone scenario. Having dealt with *shalom bayit* issues amongst *Bnei Torah* for many years, I can honestly say that this area requires *tikun*. *Chatanim* in *Yeshivot* must be taught to help in the home, and that this is *lechatchilah*, not *bedieved*. This is the proper way to build a Torah home.

Let us learn from the *parashah* how to lead a successful life. Let us build our home on the foundation of *veahavta lere'acha kamocho*. Let us be *re'im ahuvim* to each other, constantly seeking ways to satisfy and please our spouse. If her pain is my pain, then her pleasure is ours as well, to share forevermore.

Shabbat Shalom
Fondly,
Mordechai Malka