

Parshiot Acharei Mot - Kedoshim 5775, 2015:

*What does it Mean to Love Your Fellow Jew?*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The phrase "...and you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (*Sefer Vayikra* 19:18) is one of the most-often quoted verses in the Torah. Unfortunately however, its popularity has often confused its meaning. After all, "...*v'ahavta l'reiecha kamocha*" (the original Hebrew phrase of our verse) is not only a *pasuk*; it is part of the *Taryag Mitzvot* (613 Commandments). Thus, like any other mitzvah, it has a definitional structure that dictates the mode in which it can and must be fulfilled. It is not just "a good idea," or thought about a meritorious act. Instead, it must be implemented in a specific fashion with precisely mandated actions.

Rabbi Akiva, one of our greatest sages and heroes, focused upon the overarching significance of "...*v'ahavta l'reiecha kamocha*" in a number of different sources. Thus, he taught us: "'... and you shall love your neighbor as yourself,' this is the all embracing principle of the Torah. One should not say: 'Since I have been embarrassed, let my friend be embarrassed with me, [or] since I have been ruined [perhaps financially], let my friend be ruined with me.'" (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 7:24. Compare *Talmud Yerushalmi, Nedarim* 9:4, and the *Sifra to Parashat Kedoshim* 4:45 for the original statement.) Rabbi Akiva clearly links our *pasuk* to actions, rather than mere thoughts or emotions. The

Ramban (1194-1270), in his commentary on our *pasuk*, follows Rabbi Akiva's lead when he notes that the Torah could not have been referring to commanding the emotion of "love," since the emotional sphere lies outside the scope of that which can be commanded.

The Rambam (1135-1270), in *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deot 6:3*, also focuses upon the practical aspects of this mitzvah. In his determination of the halacha, he urges us to be sensitive to, and respectful of, our fellow Jews, and to be as careful with their money and possessions as we are with our own. Moreover:

Each man is commanded to love each and every one of Israel as himself as [the Torah] states: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Therefore, one should speak the praises of [others] and show concern for their money just as he is concerned with his own money and seeks his own honor. Whoever gains honor through the degradation of a colleague does not have a share in the world to come. (Translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, underlining my own)

The Rambam's final words in this halacha are particularly powerful. By way of illustration, sitting in the succah during Succot and eating matzah on Pesach (Passover) are two other positive commandments. Yet, the Rambam never states that he who fails to fulfill these mitzvot is denied a portion in the World To Come. Failure to *mekayam* (fulfill) these commandments results in a *bitul aseh* (failure to fulfill, based upon an act of omission). While this is a potent impetus to keep these mitzvot, it is a far cry from being denied a portion in the World To Come! Therefore, we can clearly see the singular importance of "...*v'ahavta l'reiecha kamocho*" within the Rambam's system of mitzvot analysis and, by extension, within the Torah's worldview.

The Sefer HaChinuch (13<sup>th</sup> century), in his discussion of our *pasuk*, at first echoes the above-quoted words of the Rambam. He continues, moreover, with Hillel's famous words: "*d'alech sani l'chaverech lo taavid*" ("Do not do that which is hateful to your friend," *Talmud Bavli, Shabbat* 31a). This means that we must scrupulously avoid any and all behaviors that could be harmful to our friends. This, opines the Sefer HaChinuch, is the litmus test for determining the correctness of our behavior toward our fellow Jews. Furthermore, it provides us with a moral compass by which we may chart our course in the fulfillment of "...*v'ahavta l'reiecha kamocha.*" In sum, our actions towards others must reflect how we, ourselves, would like to be treated.

May we be *zocheh* (merit) to grow in our understanding and practice of "...*v'ahavta l'reiecha kamocha.*" In doing so, may we, as individuals and as a nation, help bring *Mashiach Tzidkanu* (the Righteous and True Messiah) speedily and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on "*Tefilah: Haskafah and Analysis,*" may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. They are available here: <http://tinyurl.com/82pgvfn>.

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