

Shabbat Shalom,

Today's parasha is replete with commandments regarding *ben adam lechavero*, which are the rules governing how people should behave towards one another.

One of the most famous commandments is "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18).

Rabbi Akiva said that this is a major tenet in the torah. There is a famous story, in *masechet Shabbat daf lamed alef amud alef*, (tractate of Shabbat, 31a), about a person who asked Shamai and Hillel to teach him the whole Torah while standing on one foot. Shamai had no patience for such nonsense, and shooed that person away. Hillel on the other hand said, sure, I'll teach you the whole Torah while you stand on one foot. All you need to know is "what is hateful unto you, do not do to another". This is the essence of the whole torah. The rest of the Torah, is an elaboration of this commandment.

So, if one loves his neighbor as himself, one would not slander, one would not steal, one would not withhold rightful pay, one would not deal dishonestly or do anything that one would not want done to himself.

While the importance of this commandment is clear, and it can be shown that most of the commandments of man to man conduct can be derivatives of this single commandment, one may wonder how this commandment encompasses the relationship of man to g-d? After all, Hillel said that the *whole* Torah was essentially contained in this single commandment.

Before answering this question, let's ask the same question with a slightly different slant. In Pirke Avot it states "who is the person that finds grace in the eyes of g-d? The person who is well liked by others".

The question that one can ask here is that while it's certainly important to have good human

relationships, why is this the definitive quality to find grace in g-d's eyes? Does this mean that if a person has an excellent record in the performance of mitsvot of *ben adam lechavero*, but does not do well in the man to g-d department, (like keeping keep shabbat, kashrut, tefillin, etc. etc.), that he will still find grace in the eyes of g-d?

Perhaps a possible answer is that while the mitsvot are very important, they are external actions, designed to cultivate our soul, develop internal attitudes and personal traits (aka. *Midot*), as well as cultivate a closeness to G-d". They are a means to an end and not necessarily an end unto themselves.

This goes along with the well known saying "*derech erez kadma letora*", that respect and proper treatment of another human being precedes Torah.

A corollary to the above statement is a concept in Judaism known as "*naval birshut hatora*", meaning that one can technically be completely within the boundary of Jewish law and still considered a villain if actions are purely external.

So we see that external actions without the proper internal foundation are meaningless.

Now perhaps it may make sense why "love your neighbor as yourself" is an encapsulation of the entire Torah. Not only does it encompass the obvious commandments of *ben adam lechavero*, but in cultivating the awareness that another person is an extension of oneself, one cultivates better attitudes, and grows closer to g-d, which may be the whole purpose of performing mitsvot.

It is also interesting to note that the Torah applies this concept of "love your neighbor as yourself", to non Jews as well, as the parasha continues in (Leviticus 19:34), and says that you should love the stranger as yourself, because you too were a stranger in Egypt. Again we encounter this message, that we should treat another in the same way we want to be treated.

One of the offsprings of *love your neighbor as yourself*, is judging another human being fairly, as it states in Leviticus (19:9).

Give them the benefit of the doubt, even if their actions seem inappropriate and don't automatically jump to the conclusion that they are. Seek an explanation for the action in its context. Perhaps there are reasons we are unaware of.

May we learn the art of giving the benefit of the doubt, and may we always be judged favorably by G-d.

Shabbat Shalom

I'd like to share a story I found in Rabbi Frand's work, which illustrates this point beautifully, and with which I'll conclude this dvar torah.

It once happened that a man went down from the upper Gallilee to the south, and he hired himself out to work for three years. Before Yom Kippur he said to his employer, "give me my pay, and I'll go" take care of my wife and children. The employer replied, "I don't have money." The worker said "then give me produce." Again the reply was "I don't have any." "Then give me land." "I don't have any." "Then give me animals." "I don't have any." "Then give me dry goods." "I don't have any." At that he threw his belongings over his shoulder and he went home dejected. After the holidays of Succos which follow Yom Kippur the employer set out with his employee's pay in hand, together with a load of food, drink, and sweets. They ate and drank together and the employee was paid for his work. Then the employer asked, "What did you think when I told you I had no money." "I thought you must have found a good deal on some merchandise, and you committed your cash to it." "What did you think when I said I had no land?" "I thought perhaps you had leased out your land to sharecroppers." "And when I told you I had no produce?" "I thought they were still untithed, and as yet forbidden to eat." "And when I told you I had no animals what did you think?" "I thought you had rented them out." What did you think when I said I had no dry goods?" I thought you had sanctified all of your possessions to the temple as a donation." The employer said, "this is what really happened. I was angry at my son, and I vowed that no one should benefit from any of my possessions. As a result, I could not give you anything at that time. I had to go and have the vow annulled. Since you did not jump to any conclusions, and you judged me favorably, may G-d judge you favorably."