

KEDOSHIM: VEAHAVTA LEREACHA KAMOCHA

- Nisson Shulman.

A study of "Thou shalt not hate thy neighbor" compared to "Love your neighbor". Human nature makes this a very difficult commandment.

Sermon: Kedoshim: Ve'ahavta L'reacha Kamocha

There are two verses in the Torah which regulate exactly opposite emotions. One is "Thou shalt not hate your neighbor in your heart". The other, more familiar verse, famous the world over amongst all who have learned the words from our Torah, is "Love your neighbor" as yourself. Rabbi Akiva declared that this is one of the primary rules of Torah - zu kelal gadol baTorah. A Gentile came to Hillel once, demanding that he teach him the whole Torah on one foot. It sounds silly, but it really is not silly at all. He wasn't playing childish games, to see how much he could absorb while standing on one foot. He really demanded that Hillel give him one principle of Torah on which to base all the rest; the one foot, the basis, the pedestal, on which all of Torah can be placed. It was a serious question. Hillel gave it serious consideration. He answered the obverse of "Love your neighbor", "'That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor', that is the basis of all the Torah. The rest is commentary. Now go and learn the commentary."

The commentary is vast, even the commentary to this verse alone.

We can fulfill this commandment at every single moment of the day. We fulfill it when we do a favor or kindness for someone. But this commandment is special. For unlike other commandments it can also be fulfilled through thought and emotion. When you are happy at another's good fortune, it is an act of love. If you have joy, for instance, in the birth of a child to another family, you fulfill this command. If you feel sad because of someone's misfortune or suffering, you fulfill this command.

It sounds easy, but there are a great many tendencies of human nature that prevent us from loving our neighbors. The main impediment to this commandment is jealousy. And of course, there is the internal strife of groups within our people.

Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshutz posed the following problem: "When someone comes to a Rabbi with a question concerning whether or not an animal is kosher, he will accept a reply that it is not kosher in good spirits, even though it may result in a considerable loss. But if the same person comes to a Rabbi for a Halakhik decision in a dispute with another person, he will be very angry with the Rabbi for deciding against him, even when his financial loss is very small. Why the difference?"

The answer is: When someone is told that his meat is not kosher, although he suffers a loss, he is willing to accept it graciously because no one else gains. But in a financial dispute, his loss is the other person's gain, and as a result he is consumed with jealousy (Tzintzenes Hamon, p. 127).

The Baal Shem Tov used to say: "Love your fellow man as yourself. You know that you have

many faults, nevertheless you still love yourself. That is how you should feel towards your fellow man. Despite his faults, love him." (Likutei Avraham, p.221).

A Gentile preacher once said, "It is very easy to love the lovable people. The Almighty has to issue this special command so that we should also love those who are not so lovable".

There are many ways we fulfill this command without even knowing it! We do so when we visit the sick, when we comfort the mourner, when we help someone marry, and when you help them rejoice at the wedding. We do so when we are hospitable to guests, and when we greet others with a friendly attitude. In this connection, a Synagogue as a group has the same obligation of the individual. When a guest comes into the Synagogue, we must express love of our neighbor by making them welcome, including them in our Kiddush celebrations afterwards, and introducing them to our friends.

You fulfill the command when you lend money to someone who needs it, when you pray for their refuah or well being, or business success, when you give a gift, when you give them good news, when you cheer them up, when you give good advice, when you write relatives letters or call them so that they should not worry about you, when you forgive others wrongs they have done to you.

The Vilna Gaon wrote in a letter that "A great part of the Torah is concerned with a person's bringing happiness to others", and you fulfill this command when you teach another Torah.

In a lighter spirit, they tell of a great Rabbi who was approached by a Meshulach for help. The beggar claimed he was sick, so was his wife, so were his children. The Rabbi gave him a large sum of money, and wished him and his family a speedy recovery.

When the man left, someone told the Rabbi that the man had lied; that he and his family were not really ill. Baruch Hashem! exclaimed the Rabbi. Thank Hashem that they are all well!

And of course, bringing peace and harmony between people is one of the most important ways this commandment is fulfilled. More than anything else, that spirit will help to bring the geulah shelemah. At this time of crisis in Israel, where our people are on opposite sides of a great policy divide, we badly need this spirit. May He who makes peace in the highest heavens, help us continue to keep shalom and shalva, Ahva Vereut, aleynu veal kol Yisrael. Then we will have the strength, not only of a mighty army, but the ultimate strength Hashem gives, Hashem oz leamo yiten, Hashem yevarech et amo bashalom.