

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Chanah Ilanah Chayah *bas* Yechezkel *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Love Your Neighbor... as Yourself?

PARSHAS KEDOSHIM 5776

We are all familiar with the overarching directive appearing in this week’s *parshah*: “*V’ahavta l’rei’acha kamocho* – You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (*Vayikra 19:18*). And, as we know, it is most central to our overall Torah fulfillment; as the Medrash relates in the name of R’ Akiva: וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֵךְ כְּמוֹךְ - זֶה כָּלֵל גְּדוֹל בְּתוֹרָה – “*V’ahavta l’rei’acha kamocho*’ is a primary principle of the Torah” (*Bereishis Rabbah 24:7*).

And yet, with all of that – when we really contemplate the matter – do we know what it really means and entails? Are we truly bidden to love our neighbor *in the same measure as we love ourselves*? Is it even possible to cultivate such a level of love? In his comments on the verse, the Ramban seems to imply otherwise, as he states: “The heart of man cannot deign to love his fellow in the manner in which he loves himself.”

So what does this fundamental directive truly entail? The truth is that an exhaustive treatment of this question and this topic is well beyond the scope of this particular forum. What follows, then, is really just some preliminary examination – a mere sampling of the true depth contained in this grand principle.

On the “Negative” Side

Reflecting, perhaps, the difficulty to which the Ramban alluded to above, many commentators explain this mitzvah as relating to “restraint.” That is, they explain it more in terms of what one must *avoid* in order to preserve his neighbor’s welfare, rather than specific, positive actions or sentiments in his direction. This, of course, is based largely on the classic statement uttered by Hillel to the potential convert who desired to be taught the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel answered: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. This is the essence of the entire Torah – the rest is its commentary. Go and learn it” (*Shabbos 31a*).

Indeed, the Mishnah in Avos (2:10,12) reflects a similar idea, exhorting us to treat the honor and possessions of our neighbors with great care:

יְהִי כְבוֹד חֲבֵרְךָ חֲבִיב עֲלֶיךָ כְּשֻׁלְךָ... יְהִי מִמּוֹן חֲבֵרְךָ חֲבִיב עֲלֶיךָ כְּשֻׁלְךָ.

“The honor of your friend should be as dear to you as your own... The possessions of your friend should be as dear to you as your own.”

And, in fact, this is how the Rambam characterizes this mitzvah, as he writes: “It is a commandment incumbent on every person to love each member of Yisrael as himself, as it states: ‘*V’ahavta l’rei’acha kamocho*.’ Therefore, one must... be as careful... as he is with his own possessions and honor” (*Hilchos Dei’os 6:3*).

According to the above, then, the term “*kamocho*” does not necessarily require one to literally bear the same measure of love for another as he does for himself; rather, it is to be understood in the negative, as Hillel said: Do not do to others as you would not have them do to you.

In fact, there are those who explain that the word “*kamocho*” is not referring in any way to the “amount” of love one must bear toward his fellow. The *Sefer Yerei'im* (§224) asserts that it is coming to qualify the *subject* of this love, to the exclusion of a *rasha* (wicked individual). The Torah’s intent is merely to state that one need only love “your neighbor” when he is “*kamocho* – like you” in terms of subservience to Torah and *mitzvos*.

R’ Nachum’ke of Horodna, the *rebbe* of the Chofetz Chaim, goes one step further in interpreting the verse. The natural inclination of a person is to resent a potential competitor; as Rashi states (*Bereishis* 3:5): כָּל אֹמֵן שׂוֹנֵא אֶת בְּנֵי אֹמְנוֹתָו – “Any tradesman despises a member of the same trade.” When R’ Nachum’ke saw that matters were getting quite out of hand in this fashion amongst the merchants of Horodna, he reminded the people of the directive to love one’s fellow. And he explained the *passuk* thusly: “*V’ahavta l’rei’acha*”: One must love his fellow – even if he is “*kamocho* – like you,” i.e., of the same trade (*Peninim Mishulchan Gavohah*).

Face to Face

There are others, however, who do take the more literal approach; that is, they understand the *passuk* as conveying that a person could – and should – love his fellow literally like himself.

How, indeed, is such a feat possible? R’ Chaim Volozhiner gives some insight into the issue based on the words of a well-known *passuk*. Shlomo Hamelech states in *Mishlei* (27:19): כַּמִּים הַפְּנִים לַפְּנִים כֵּן לִב־הָאָדָם לְאָדָם – “As a face is reflected in water, so stands the heart of one man opposite the other.” To a large extent, this *passuk* contains the key toward summoning sufficient love toward one’s fellow man.

R’ Chaim explains: When one person stands opposite another, his left hand is opposite the right hand of his counterpart, and his right hand is opposite the left. The right, of course, is the stronger, while the left is the weaker. This signifies the natural tendency of a person in viewing his fellow. That is, when considering his fellow’s “right” – that is, his strengths and positive qualities, he tends to look with his own “left” – in other words, he looks weakly, playing down his friend’s inherent value. He then looks at his fellow’s “left” – i.e., his weaknesses, with his own “right” – concentrating intently on his friend’s failings and magnifying them. With this attitude, of course, he will not emerge so favorably inclined toward his fellow.

The key, then, is to view his fellow as if he was looking at his own reflection. When he sees himself in the water or a mirror, his “right” faces the right hand and his left faces the left hand. Thus, he should adjust his “view” of his fellow in the same way. He should look with his “right” upon his friend’s “right” – focusing on his fellow’s strengths; and he should view his fellow’s “left” with his own “left” – playing down and overlooking his friend’s shortcomings. In this way, he will be much more favorably disposed toward his fellow man.

After all, isn’t this the same way he views himself – “*k’mayim hapanim l’panim*” (cf. *Middos V’hanhagos*, R’ Yechiel Michel Stern)?