

All You Need is Love

V'ahavta L'Reacha Kamocha

And you shall love your neighbor as yourself [Lev 19:18 – Kedoshim]

-Probably the most quoted biblical line

What does it mean?

-Who is my neighbor? Is a Jew in Uzbekistan my neighbor? Is a non-Jew in Uzbekistan my neighbor?

-It says "your neighbor [re'a]" and not "your fellow human beings [ha-briot]". Does that imply that some people are excluded? Who?

-Should I love my enemy?

-If I hate myself, should I hate my neighbor also?

-Torah does not command you to love yourself. Only two commandments to love: God [Deut. 6:5] and neighbor [Lev. 19:18].

-What is love? What about tough love?

-If you rough up somebody for what you think is his own good, does it count as "love"?

-How can you be commanded to "love"? To have certain feelings?

-Is it even possible to truly love another as you love yourself?

-*Lo bashamayim hi* – It [the Torah] is not in heaven [Deut. 30:12]

-Can we realistically ask a mother to love all children as much as she loves her own children?

-“He who loves everybody loves nobody.”

Who is my neighbor?

Are the “neighbors” fellow Jews only or everybody?

1. Why “your neighbor” means only “your fellow Jew”:

-The full verse is:

You shall neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge against your kinsmen [*bnei ammecha*]. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. [Lev. 19:18]

The first part clearly refers only to fellow Jews. So the rest of the verse does also. [Rambam, Yad, De'ot 6:3].

-A little later in the same chapter, we are told:

When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not taunt him. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be as a native from among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord, your God. [Lev. 19:33-4]

Since love of the resident stranger (the 'ger') is enjoined later in the same chapter, it makes sense that the two injunctions should refer to two different categories of people, the first to Jews only, the second to Gentiles only.

-But some say 'Ger' here means 'convert to Judaism', so it not a different injunction. The second merely reinforces the first by saying it does not only apply only to born Jews.

-Talmud restrictions on interaction with "idolaters" complicates applying the commandment of neighborly love to all.

-Even though there is no injunction anywhere to hate idolaters

2. Why "your neighbor" means "all humankind":

-“Re-a” (neighbor) is used elsewhere in the Bible to refer to Gentiles as well.

-Rabbi Akiva: “Love your neighbor as yourself” is a great principle of the Torah [Kelal gadol ba-Torah].” [Sifra 19:45; Talmud Y., Nedarim 9:4]

Ben Azzai retorted: Even greater is “God created man... in His image.” [Gen. 5:1]

-Implication is that two creatures in the likeness of God are bound to love each other, so the second statement implies the first – and applies to all creatures.

[Sifra 19:18]. [Also Genesis Rabbah 24:7]

-If you hate any man, you hate God who made man in His image. [Midrash Tanhuma]

-Does not tell us to love, only not to hate

-Full quote: “Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord”. Why the addition? Ben Azzai implies: Do this because I am the Lord and you are all in My image.

-Gematria: Love (ahava) =13; The Lord (YHVH) = 26.

So Love of self + Love of neighbor = Reaching God. [Maggid of Trisk (1806-1889)]

-Pinchas Peli [Israeli rabbi]: Phrase should be read: Love your neighbor [because he is] like yourself [in the image of God].

-Note: Does not say “as you love yourself” but “as yourself”.

-Hillel: *Ohev et ha-briot* (Love people). [Pirkei Avot 1:12]

-But he adds: *Um-karvan la-Torah* (And being them closer to the Torah). Does this imply Jews only, as full Torah is for Jews only? Or is proselytizing implied?

Hillel also said “What is hateful to you, don't do to others. This is the whole Torah. All else is commentary”. [Shabbat 31a]

-Embraced by other faiths as the “Golden Rule.”

-Rabbi Meir: Whoever engages in Torah study... loves God and loves people [*ohev et ha-briot*]. [Pirkei Avot 6:1]

-Judaism teaches that we must be concerned about the welfare of non-Jews in the interest of peace, “*mi penei darkhei shalom*”

-Rambam: “We bury the dead among the Gentiles, comfort their mourners and visit their sick, because this is the way of peace” [Yad, Avel 14:12].

The implication of expediency does not detract from the commandment: Either we do it or we don't, and we are supposed to do it.

Conclusion: Traditional teaching is that the commandment refers to Jews only [Ahavat Yisrael], but the extension to all mankind is encouraged.

-Nothing wrong with a commandment referring to loving Jews only. Does not imply you should hate everybody else.

-“Honor your father and your mother” does not imply you should be disrespectful towards everybody else.

-It is OK to prioritize affections: Immediate family, extended family, community, co-religionists, co-nationals, people with whom we have some affinity, etc.

Should I love my enemy?

Does loving your neighbor imply loving your enemy?

-First, you may not hate your enemy:

-Do not hate an Edomite, because he is your brother. Do not hate an Egyptian, for you were strangers in his land. [Deut. 23:8].

-Second, you must occasionally help him

-If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, you shall not just pass by him; you shall surely release it with him. [Ex. 23:5]

-If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink [Prov. 25:21]

-Third, you should try to turn him into a friend

- Who is a hero? One who turns an enemy into a friend. [Avot d'Rabbi Natan, 23]
-Fourth, you may have to kill him, if that is the only way to save yourself or others
-If someone comes to kill you, kill him first. [Talmud, Berachot 58a; derived from Ex. 22:1]

What about tough love?

-Rabbi Jose ben Rabbi Hanina said: Reproof leads to love, as it says, "Reprove a wise man, and he will love you..." [Prov. 9:8]. Love not accompanied by reproof is not love. [Genesis Rabbah 54:3]

How can you be commanded to love?

-You can't, really. But you can be commanded to act in ways someone who loves would act, and the hope is that it will lead to genuine love.

-The 19th century opus *HaK'tav v'HaKabbalah* [The written and Oral Tradition] suggests:

- Do not fake affection for others
- Treat them with respect
- Seek the best for them
- Join them in their pain
- Greet them with friendliness
- Give them the benefit of the doubt
- Assist them physically
- Give them small loans and gifts
- Do not consider yourself better than them

[HaK'tav v'HaKabbalah, reproduced in Stone Chumash, p 662)]

-Rambam, on love of God: If we just looked into nature and contemplated his wondrous creation, we would be filled with love of God.

-Can the same be applied to people?

Is it even possible to truly love another as you love yourself?

-Torah does not say: "V'ahavta et reacha kamocha", but "V'ahavta l'reacha kamocha".

-“V'ahavta et reacha kamocha” means: “Feel the same love for others as you feel for yourself,” which is impossible.

-But “V'ahavta l'reacha kamocha” means “Love that which pertains to your neighbor as if it pertained to you”, meaning his well-being and happiness. [Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in 19th century Germany]

-Ramban [13th cent]: We should wish our neighbors the same well-being we enjoy ourselves.

-Deep, emotional love is expressed differently in the Tanach: "Jonathan loved [David] as his own soul (*ke-nafsho*)". [1Sam 18:1, 20:17]

-Commandment is just an *upper limit* on love:

- Do not love your neighbor MORE than yourself.

- You don't have to give him more than you have yourself.

- You don't have to die to save his life. [Soncino commentary]

 - Rabbi Akiva himself ruled that "Your life takes precedence over another's life." [Bava Metzia 62a]

-Some say "Your neighbor" means "those physically closest to you". Because we interact with them, they are harder to love. Easier to love someone far away, as a theoretical abstraction.

- Torah only tells us to do what we would not normally do.

-The Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760), founder of Hassidism, said:

- One must love the lowliest of men as much as the greatest Torah scholar.

-Later Hassidic view:

- All souls are of a single essence, united in their source in God. [Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi]

-Last word to the Baal Shem Tov:

When a person gets up in the morning and looks at himself in the mirror he thinks, "I am basically a good person. I have my faults and foibles; I am not perfect. But I am more good than bad." This is how we must evaluate our neighbor: He is basically good; I will overlook his faults.