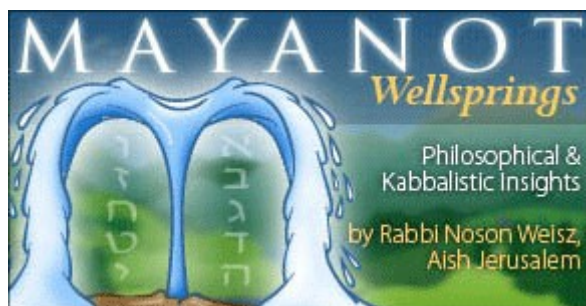


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Growing Pains

We Jews subscribe to the belief that the world is run by Divine Providence. God obligated Himself under the terms of the Covenant that He signed with us, the Jewish people, at Mt. Sinai, to treat us as *the most beloved treasure of all peoples* (Exodus 19:5). The very undertaking to provide Jews with special treatment assumes a world subject to Divine direction. Since it is quite unthinkable to suspect God of deliberately violating His agreements, we are forced to conclude that the events of Jewish history constitute an exact demonstration of God's interpretation of this obligation to treat us as His most beloved treasure. Needless to say, in light of the horrors that the Jewish people have endured over the centuries, especially the most recent horror of the Holocaust, the perception of our 'treasured' status is

problematic to say the least.

A SENSIBLE WORLD

But whatever the solution to the conundrum of Jewish history might be, Jewish tradition is adamantly clear about the fact that we live in a sensible world managed by Divine Providence. In such a world there are no random events. Whatever is allowed to take place is designed to move the world along towards the achievement of God's master plan for the human race. Besides, it is elementary that the benevolent God described by Jewish theology would never engage in the infliction of pointless pain. In light of these fundamental Jewish axioms, Judaism has always regarded it as a public duty to study the current problems of the Jewish people with an eye to attempting to unravel the workings of Providence.

With an eye to discharging this Jewish civic obligation, this essay focuses on the current conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. We are totally demoralized by daily acts of senseless terror perpetrated by people who enthusiastically sacrifice their lives to create havoc and murder against innocent civilians. No matter what solution we attempt, we seem quite helpless to stop the carnage. To add to our national frustration, a large part of the 'civilized' world regards us Jews as the perpetrators of the very violence of which we are the victims. Why is this happening to us? Why can't we reach a peaceful accommodation with our Palestinian neighbors no matter what concessions we offer?

ISRAEL'S DELICATE PALATE

This week seems like an especially appropriate week to examine the problematic areas of our relationship to the land of Israel. It is in our Parsha that the Torah points out the special dangers of living in Israel.

Do not become contaminated through any of these; for through all these the nations that I expel before you became contaminated. The land became contaminated and I recalled its iniquity upon it; and the land disgorged its inhabitants. But you shall safeguard My decrees and My judgments, and not commit any of these abominations.... Let not the land disgorge you for having contaminated it, as it disgorged the nation that was before you. (Vayikra 18:25-27)

You shall observe all My decrees and all My ordinances and perform them; then the land to which I bring you to dwell will not disgorge you. Do not follow the traditions of the nation that I expel from before you, for they did all these and I was disgusted with them. (Vayikra 20:22-23)

It is this special quality of the land of Israel and the spiritual demands that it makes on its inhabitants that lies at the source of our current troubles. It is this special quality that we propose to explore.

The Midrash informs us that God gave us, the Jewish people, three presents which

were also desired by the nations, and which can only be acquired through suffering; Torah, the land of Israel, and the World to Come. (Sifri, Devarim, 32)

This essay is about the acquisition of the land of Israel, and not about Torah or the World to Come. Nevertheless, the fact that the land of Israel is linked to these clearly spiritual items indicates that spirituality is the common denominator that unites them all.

CAN COUNTRIES BE USER-FRIENDLY?

Israel is not just another country, qualitatively much like the United States or Canada except considerably smaller. Such countries do not need to be acquired through suffering; their spiritual aspect is not their predominant feature. They were designed to provide a suitable habitat for natural man, possessed of the spiritual reach programmed into all human beings by God at the instant of creation. These countries fit the user, man, perfectly, and there is no need to grow into them.

But Israel was not designed to be user friendly to natural man. Just as the World to Come is only open to the spiritually deserving, the Land of Israel was designated as the earthly habitat of the ideal man, man as he can and should become by perfecting himself spiritually and reaching out to God. Man as he was created cannot live there. Let us try to bring the concept of a spiritual country down to earth.

SPIRITUALITY IN A COUNTRY?

Man is unique because he is a mixture of the physical and the spiritual. He has a body, which is similar to that of all other life forms, but he also has a soul. Body and soul jointly participate in most human activities. When man eats, for example, the taste of the food, the setting, the cutlery, and the background ambience are almost as important as the nutrition value of the meal. Nevertheless, it is the need of the body for nourishment that provides the impetus for the meal.

Mitzvot are different. While many Mitzvot involve this duality of body and soul as well: eating Matzah, wearing Tefillin, blowing a Ahofar, etc; in the case of Mitzvot, it is needs of the soul that provide the impetus for engaging in the activity rather than the drives of the body.

To appreciate the subtle flavor of Mitzvot, one must consult human activities that are purely spiritual. Deep meditation, a familiar phenomenon, is an attempt to leave the confines of the body and express oneself as a pure soul. Because the impetus for Mitzvot is always spiritual, their performance is existentially always equivalent to such pure spiritual experiences even when the body also participates in their performance.

LIVING IN ISRAEL IS A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

But man is not pure soul. The body gets in our way when we attempt to engage in

"pure soul" activities. Removing the obstacle of the body necessarily involves tearing away and discarding a piece of ourselves, a process that cannot help but be painful.

Israel is a spiritual country; living in Israel has all the distinguishing marks of a spiritual experience. The process of divesting one's physicality is a necessary step in its successful settlement. You can only get a grip on Israel as a soul; the body has no need of it. We have only to look at the history of Israel to be convinced of the truth of this.

There is no other piece of territory on earth over which so much human blood has been shed through history. Secular theory attributes all this historic strife to the accident of geography. This tiny patch of land happens to be located at the junction of the trade routes connecting the lands of the north and east with Egypt. But an examination of the historic conflicts over Israel indicates that Israel is strategically important as a different sort of junction. Israel is desirable because it is the Holy land. It is the land located at the cross roads between the physical and the spiritual; it is the only place on earth where the territory of the mundane intersects the dimension of the holy.

It is in Israel that Cain and Able offered the sacrifice to God that served as the background to civilization's very first violent homicide. It is here that Noah presented his thanksgiving offering when he emerged from the Ark. Israel is the locale where Abraham was tested and ordered to

sacrifice Isaac. Christians identify it as the locale of Jesus' resurrection. Islamic tradition teaches that it is the place where the prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven. Jacob's ladder was planted on its soil on the site where the Holy Temple later stood.

THE DRIVE TO POSSESS THE GATEWAY TO HEAVEN

The turmoil over Israel through human history was related to its holy aspect rather than to its physical strategic importance. The Christians and Moslems fought bitterly over its possession as a holy resource in the Crusades, and today the Arabs are fighting the Jews over it for much the same reason.

The terrorist acts from which we currently suffer are the work of suicide bombers and gunmen who believe they are earning eternal reward by sacrificing their lives in a religious Crusade to drive the infidel out of the Holy land. They should not be confused with Japanese Kamikazes dying for the glory of their country and their emperor. Only the secular West regards the present struggle between the Jews and the Palestinians as a conflict over territory that can be permanently resolved through some sort of compromise.

The secular modern mind may find it difficult to comprehend how a portion of earth that seems no different from any other can be designated as the habitat of the soul. But it is impossible to explain how Israel could have engendered so much

conflict through history - or become the major focus of world media and the United Nations - without relating to it as a spiritual rather than a physical place.

All the monotheistic religions are based on the Old Testament and they all necessarily regard Israel as holy ground. This automatically means that a major portion of mankind will always be totally fascinated by who is in possession of this tiny piece of land. Israel is not Yugoslavia. In the imagination of monotheists, the land of Israel stands at the entrance to Heaven. Whoever holds it is already partially through the gate.

THE PAIN OF CONQUEST

Spiritual countries must be acquired through suffering. Physical countries only have to be cleared and tamed; there is no need for anyone to exert any effort on the perfection of his character as a step to their successful settlement. All the labor involved in their conquest is focused on the outside environment. For spiritual countries this is not enough. Besides taming the soil, whoever wants to settle them must also do some heavy work on his soul. To be able to live in a spiritual land, you have to grow into a spiritual person.

All spiritual growth is painful. King Solomon put it thus: *for with much wisdom comes much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases pain.* (Kohelet 1:18) The person who must grow spiritually must necessarily undergo a period of suffering. The pain of such spiritual growth is the suffering associated with the acquisition of

Israel. The land punishes anyone who plans to settle Israel as you would inhabit any other country.

THE IRONY OF ZIONISM

It's extremely ironic. The early Zionists, who organized the return of the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland, did so with the intention of creating a modern secular state on this ancient soil. They were going to solve the problem of anti-Semitism once and for all by establishing a modern Western homeland for the Jewish people. They felt that when the Jews lived in their own land and were indistinguishable from Canadians or Americans and Englishmen, the Jewish problem would finally disappear.

Had they known that Israel is a spiritual land that can only be successfully reclaimed by people who are willing to make the transition from regarding themselves as bodies to understanding themselves as primarily souls, they never would have returned here in the first place. Now, because of the success that crowned the resettlement efforts of these primarily secular Jews, here we all are, over five million of us, the majority irreligious, with no place else to go, stuck in a land that demands us to behave as souls in order to acquire it. For the Jewish people, such a vision of our self inevitably requires a return to the traditional Judaism practiced by our forefathers, the diametric opposite of the vision of the Zionist founders of modern Israel. It is enough to make the secular Zionist pioneers turn over in their graves.

The suffering associated with spiritual

growth is the key to understanding the Middle-East conflict. To see this clearly, let us look at the consequences the successful actualization of the Zionist scenario would have brought about. If the Jewish people could have managed to build a modern secular welfare state in the land of Israel and reach a peaceful accommodation with their Arab neighbors, this would have effectively brought the history of the Jewish people to a secular end.

GOD CANNOT ALLOW THE ACTUALIZATION OF ZIONISM

No doubt there would always be a tiny remnant of Jews who would cling to the strict observance of Torah Judaism indefinitely, but as a people with a historic mission we Jews would have reached our culmination by constructing a secular state in the Holy land.

Is there any wonder that Divine Providence cannot allow Jewish history to end this way? For over two thousand years of exile, we Jews have clung to a Messianic historic vision with astonishing stubbornness. We shed rivers of blood and sacrificed the ambition of providing our children with decent lives in our determination to establish our vision of uniting humanity under the banner of God's rule. Is it reasonable to suppose that this two thousand year long bloody struggle could be allowed to terminate with the establishment of a modern secular state whose intelligentsia does not even believe in God's existence?

Imagine to yourself for a minute that there is a God. Do you honestly believe that He could allow the loyalty and self-sacrifice of several thousand years to just fade away without a whimper?

THE RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE ON MID-EAST CONFLICT

Let us look at the Middle East conflict from a religious angle. God is demonstrating to the Jewish people that you cannot live in Israel as you would in New York. If you want to live here you must prepare to devote your life to Judaism. After all, this is the land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who were promised it as an inheritance so that they could worship God on the holiest place on earth.

True, the Jewish people aren't holding there at present, but this is through no fault of their own. The endless years of oppression and exile culminating in the horrors of the Holocaust have eroded the national dedication to the centrality of our Messianic vision. So God has chosen to stimulate us to think about the meaning of being Jewish.

How has He accomplished this? By allowing Jews to be shot at, blown up and terrorized until they reach the stage of hopelessness; until it seems that no possible compromise or concession will ever suffice to appease the Arab world.

After a while, this intense pressure compels us all to begin asking some very pointed questions. "What is going on here? Why are we Jews so different than other people?

What value is being defended here that makes it worthwhile to give up one's life? Is our national striving to make a copy of New York in the Middle East where people speak Hebrew instead of English worth all this blood and sacrifice?"

When the individual Jew reaches this point in his soul-searching, he will either attempt to leave Israel, or will begin to discover the meaning of Judaism, and will find answers in the Torah. And then, the Mideast problem will immediately begin to improve.

God is not out to destroy the remnant of the Jewish people or to drive us out of our ancestral home after allowing us to miraculously regain it following a two thousand year hiatus. God is applying pressure. He is teaching us that it is impossible to live in His Holy land without thinking about the meaning and significance of being Jewish. He is leading us back to Sinai.

SUITABLE OPPONENTS

He even selected our opponents with great care. They are our perfect existential opposites. Whereas we are steeped in Western culture and totally literate, they are violently opposed to the West and everything it stands for and are largely uncultured by Western standards. Where we are secular they are extremely religious. Where we are apologetic and riddled with self-doubt, [sometimes self-hatred] they are chock full of brazen self-confidence based on nothing at all. Where the Jewish claim to this land is backed up by 4,000 years of recorded history, our neighbors' religion

was only founded 2,000 years after we arrived.

In fact, the greatest weapon in the Arab arsenal is the will to sacrifice their lives for their beliefs. The focal point of Jewish vulnerability is that we no longer believe in any higher power and can only rely on the might of our hands. We have fully absorbed the skepticism of Western secularism. Torah values and promises are no longer useful to many of us as a foundation to justify the occupation of our own ancestral homeland. For many modern Jews, their highest moral value is social justice, and we are seriously weakened by the fact that many of these Jews question the justice of our cause.

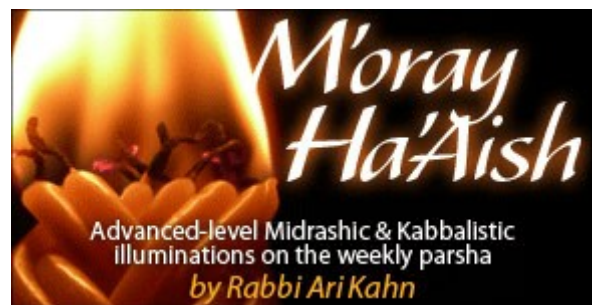
Our immense military power has not led to a speedy resolution. No matter what solution we attempt, we seem quite helpless to stop the carnage. Our national frustration and pain is aggravated by the fact that a large part of the civilized world regards us Jews as the perpetrators of the violence from which we suffer instead of perceiving us as its victims.

It is essential to have a stubborn belief in the justice of our cause to arm ourselves with the stamina we need to face the long haul.

Yet many of us come up empty.

What is the solution? For the Jewish people to succeed in our quest of reacquiring this junction between heaven and earth, we must learn from our enemies. We need to regain our faith and the belief in our cause. We must recognize our current suffering as

spiritual growing pains. Because in the end, the Land of Israel -- our most precious earthly possession -- will only be acquired through meeting the great challenge we face with spiritual growth.



What's Love Got To Do With It?

This week's Torah reading contains one of the central teachings of Judaism, the command to "Love one's neighbor." This command impacts many other specific relationships which the Torah mandates. One of these is arguably the commandment to marry. An analysis of the relationship between "loving one's neighbor" and marriage will yield a deeper understanding of one of the most popular, yet perhaps evasive commandments.

There is a question debated among early authorities, quoted by the Tiferet Yisrael in his introduction to "Nashim," regarding the status of marriage. Is marriage considered a positive commandment, or is marriage merely seen as a preparation for the performance of other *mitzvot*?

Maimonides opines that marriage is indeed one of the commandments. On the other hand the Rosh is of the opinion that

marriage in and of itself is not a commandment, rather procreation is a commandment, and marriage gives license to procreation in a "kosher" manner.

In other areas of Jewish law, the court had the ability to exercise force in order to "encourage" negligent individuals to comply.

...when a man is told, "make a sukkah" and he does not make it ... [or, "perform the commandment of the] lulav" and he does not perform it, he is flogged until his soul departs. (Talmud - Kethuboth 86a-b)

Nonetheless, Maimonides states that a court cannot force a person to marry, on the other hand the Rosh says that a court can use force in order to have person fulfill his obligation of procreation.

A CONTRADICTION?

Tiferet Yisrael felt that the positions regarding force should have been reversed. Maimonides (who felt marriage is a commandment) should have advocated force, while the Rosh (who felt marriage per se is not the fulfillment of a commandment, rather merely allows a commandment to be fulfilled) should not have allowed force.

The Tiferet Yisrael proceeds to resolve this "contradiction."

Rav Yisrael Zev Gustman Zatzal cites this passage in his "Kuntisay Shiurim Kiddushin" at the end of the first chapter. Rav Gustman offers a novel approach to explain the Maimonides's position.

Maimonides certainly felt that there are times that force may be used as is evident from the Maimonides's discussion of divorce.

He who according to the law must divorce his wife but he does not wish to comply and divorce her, a Jewish court in any place in any time may strike him until he says I wish [to divorce her]. (Maimonides Laws of Divorce 2:20)

On the other hand in his discussion of marriage the Maimonides does not cite a similar ruling, Rav Gustman explains that when it comes to marriage, the Talmud teaches:

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: "A man may not betroth a woman before he sees her, lest he [subsequently] see something repulsive in her, and she become loathsome to him, whereas the All-Merciful said, *You shall love thy neighbor as thyself.*" (Kiddushin 41a)

Love and marriage are inseparable, when a man despises his wife, divorce is the prescription:

When a man has taken a wife, and married her, and it comes to pass that she finds no favor in his eyes...then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. (Deut. 24:1)

Consequently, force is unthinkable as a method of creating marriage, since love is an integral part of the institution. Law can

force a man to lift and shake a lulav, but law cannot force two people into a loveless relationship, which would surely result in enmity and divorce, in clear violation of "loving your neighbor as yourself."

FAR-REACHING IMPLICATIONS

The introduction of love of one's neighbor in the discussion of marriage may have even further reaching implications. It is well known that the verse - *You shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord* - is considered one of the prominent teachings of Judaism. This idea has been articulated in various ways by different authorities. Rabbi Akiva called it "the greatest principle of the Torah."

Ben Azzai said: "*This is the book of the descendants of Adam is a great principle of the Torah.*"

Rabbi Akiva said: "*But you shall love your neighbor as yourself is even a greater principle. Hence you must not say, 'Since I have been put to shame, let my neighbor be put to shame.'*"

Rabbi Tanhuma said: "If you do so, know whom you put to shame, [for] in the likeness of God made He him." (Midrash Rabbah - Genesis 24:7)

Hillel in a celebrated teaching paraphrased the verse:

On another occasion it happened that a certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him, "Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one

foot." Thereupon, he repulsed him with the builder's cubit which was in his hand. When he [the heathen] went before Hillel, he said to him, "What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it." (Shabbat 31a)

Both authorities are stressing the centrality of love of neighbor in the Jewish religion, however a question arises despite the obvious importance of interpersonal relationships, how does loving one's neighbor, impact upon one's relationship with God? Surely, belief in God and the performance of the myriad of man/God commandments are also central to Judaism.

GOD AS BEST FRIEND

Rashi in a cryptic comment on the Talmudic passage cited, addresses this question.

Your own friend, and your father's friend forsake not (Proverbs 27:10).

"Friend" this is the Holy One, blessed be He, do not ignore His words for it is detestable when your friend ignores your words. (Rashi Shabbat 31a)

Rashi's explanation is based on the Midrash, and is echoed in the Zohar:

Rabbi Hezekiah interpreted the verse: *A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.* (Proverbs. 17:17), as follows: "A friend" is the Holy One, of whom it is written, *Your*

own friend and your father's friend, forsake not (Ibid. 27:10)... Indeed, you must not forsake your Friend, you must worship Him, cleave to Him, keep His commandments ... The true worship of the Holy One, blessed be He, consists in loving Him above all and in all, as it is written: *You shall love the Lord your God* (Deut. VI, 5). (Zohar, Exodus, Section 2, 55b)

The Hebrew word *re'ya* which we routinely translate as neighbor, is taken as our only true neighbor - God. With this insight, the teachings of Hillel and Rabbi Akiva are deciphered.

The true love which the Torah speaks of is to be directed toward God. However, if this is the case, then why not suffice to teach the verse cited in the Zohar: *You shall love the Lord your God?* Why is man mandated to love his fellow man as well, if the true objective is love of God?

PARALLEL TEACHING

A parallel teaching can be discerned with regards to "Honor your father and mother." It is a common teaching that the first five commandments are between man and God while the second five are between man and his fellow man. (See Nachmanides on Exodus 20:12.) This teaching indicates the dual focus of Judaism, the only problem is the fifth commandment - Honor thy Father and Mother; how is this directed toward God?

Honoring one's parents is perhaps the most rational of all the commandments; this may

be the reason that the paradigmatic examples of the performance are non-Jews, from Esau to Damah ben Nethinah (see Kidushin 31a). Why should we honor our parents? The answer is simple. They conceived us, nurtured us, clothed us and provided us with shelter. However, ultimately, who created us? Who nurtures us? Who clothes, feeds, and shelters us? God!

Thus when man manifests his appreciation of his parents appropriately, he has completed a lesson in honor of God as well. We may say that the goal of honoring parents is the honor of God, therefore it is listed in the first five commandments.

Perhaps a similar relationship exists with regard to the commandment of loving our fellow man. Maimonides, in the "Laws of Teshuva" discusses the ideas of "fear of God" and "love of God" respectively. Maimonides states that fear of God is more basic and accessible, but that few sages reach the sublime level of "love of God." He writes:

What is the proper type of love? One should love God with a great, superior, bold love, until one's soul is bound with love of God, whereby it consumes completely - as if one was lovesick, whereby his mind is never free from thoughts of a particular woman, he always thinks of her, when sitting or standing, whether he be eating or drinking. More than this should the love of God be for those who love Him, as it says: *With all your heart and all your*

soul... and all of Song of Songs is a parable dedicated toward this idea. (Maimonides, Laws of Teshuva 10:3)

When Maimonides seeks an appropriate example for love of God, he draws upon the paradigm of love between a man and a woman. Based on this example one may posit, that if a person lacks in this area, he will be unable to properly love God. Love of man is designed to serve as an impetus for love of God.

LOVE OF GOD

This lesson may be drawn from the story of Jacob when he found himself reunited with Joseph, the son whom he had mourned for all these years:

And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself to him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. (Genesis 46:29)

The text informs us that Joseph was crying. However the Torah does not tell us what Jacob was doing. Rashi explains that Jacob was saying the *Sh'ma*.

This seems strange: Jacob has not seen his beloved son in all these years. Why is this the proper time to say the *Sh'ma*?

The answer is that Jacob felt such a profound sense of love at that moment that he wished to direct his feeling toward heaven. The *Sh'ma* contains the phrase: *Love God with all your heart and all your soul and all your possessions.* Jacob knew

how to draw from the emotional feelings in his personal relationships and utilize them in his relationship with God.

Now we may understand the teaching of Maimonides. The most intense love which people ever experience is the love of a spouse - a "soul-mate." People who never find their soul mate will likely be lacking in their relationships with other people and in their relationship with God. The benchmark described by Maimonides, of an obsessive love, will undoubtedly be foreign to that individual. The metaphor of Song of Songs will be meaningless for that person.

THE DIFFICULTY OF LOVING ONE'S NEIGHBOR

While loving one's neighbor is one of the major principles in Judaism, fulfillment of this commandment is elusive. How many people succeed in loving their neighbors? How many people love their neighbors as themselves?

This lofty commandment often seems like a pleasant daydream, unfortunately beyond reality, beyond the grasp of man. (See Nachmanides on the verse in Leviticus, and Tosfot Sanhedrin 45a "Bror lo Mita yafa.")

Rav Chaim Vital, in a discussion on the importance of marriage, writes:

By virtue of having a wife a man may accomplish all the *mitzvot*, life in this world and the next ... for [when a man marries] all his sins are forgiven, and he saves himself from [additional] sin ... man lives by virtue of taking a

wife, furthermore, should he have children, and circumcise them, and redeem them. Teach them Torah and service of God ... Furthermore ... he will thus fulfill all the *mitzvot*. For if he loves her as himself, he will fulfill the *mitzva* of loving his neighbor as himself, which includes all the *mitzvot* as is indicated in the Talmud...if he keeps this *mitzva* it is seen as if he has fulfilled the entire Torah. (Likutai Torah Parshat Ekev)

While most commentaries see this commandment as being central, Rav Chaim understands the fulfillment of this *mitzva* as being tantamount to observing the entire Torah. If the level of loving another as oneself is achieved with even one person, one is considered as having kept the entire Torah!

LOVING ONE'S SPOUSE

This explains the difficulty which so many commentaries had expressed regarding the fulfillment of this commandment. Perhaps I cannot love all people as myself, but to love even one person completely is a spiritual revolution. It indicates a breaking of the walls of egotism, self-centeredness and narcissism. Only such a person may be able to approach God.

The self-made man often worships his own "maker" and not God. Only the person who realizes that he is incomplete can reach out to God. The person, who feels love for his spouse and appreciates all she does for him, is prepared to love God as well.

This idea, that marriage is an expression in

finding a neighbor to love, is expressed in the blessings said under the *chupa*.

May You make the loved companions greatly to rejoice, as of old You gladdened Your creation in the Garden of Eden. Blessed art You, O Lord, who makes bridegroom and bride rejoice. (Ketuvot 8a)

The term in Hebrew for "loved companions" is *re'im ahuvim*, and it is obviously reminiscent of *v'ahavta l'rayacha*, "love your neighbor." Rashi explains that "the groom and bride are neighbors who love one another." (Rashi Ketuvot 8a, this connection is pointed out by Rav Zuriel in Bet Yihezkal p. 30.)

COMPLETING THE CIRCLE

We now see that this aspect of love between husband and wife is not merely an integral aspect of marriage. This loving relationship forms the basis of the entire spiritual personality, and becomes a vehicle through which a person can reach the highest level of religious accomplishment.

The blessing, by referring to "your creation in the Garden of Eden," gives us even further insight.

In Eden, Adam and Eve were created as one being. The separation which followed was temporary; man achieves unity when he reunites with his mate. Similarly, the soul of man had its origin in the breath of God, and spiritual wholeness results when man reunites with his maker, just as he reunites with his spouse.

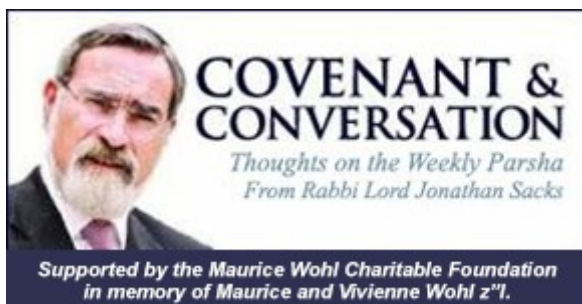
Passionate love of God is the closest we

can get in this world to that total unity. Marriage, then, is both the paradigm and the vehicle for man's relationship with God. The relationships between man and wife and between man and God become intertwined, and each relationship effects and is effected by the other.

Neither of these relationships are complete without the other.

Rabbi Akiva expounded: "When husband and wife are worthy, the *Shechinah* abides with them; when they are not worthy fire consumes them." (Sotah 17a)

May God place our portion among the lovers of both the Jewish People and God, for it says (Zohar) "The Jewish people and God are one." (Minchat Chinuch commenting on the command to Love your Neighbor, Mitzvah 243:2).



Of Love and Hate

At the center of the Torah is Vayikra. At the center of Vayikra is the "holiness code" (chapter 19) with its momentous call: "You shall be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy." And at the centre of chapter 19 is a brief paragraph which, by its positioning,

is the apex, the high point, of the Torah:

Do not hate your brother in your heart. You must surely admonish your neighbour and not bear sin because of him. Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. Love your neighbour as yourself. I am God. (19:17-18)

I want, in this study, to examine the second of these provisions: "You must surely admonish your neighbour and not bear sin because of him."

Rambam and Ramban agree in seeing two quite different levels of meaning in this sentence. This is how Rambam puts it:

When one person sins against another, the latter should not hate him and remain silent. As it is said about the wicked: "And Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor evil, although Absalom hated Amnon." Rather, he is commanded to speak to him and to say to him, "Why did you do such-and-such to me? Why did you sin against me in such-and-such a matter?" As it is said, "You must surely admonish your neighbour." If he repents and requests forgiveness from him, he must forgive and not be cruel, as it is said, "And Abraham prayed to God ..."

If someone sees his fellow committing a sin or embarking on a path that is not good, it is a commandment to make him return to the good and to make known to him that he is sinning against himself by his evil actions, as it is said, "You must surely admonish

your neighbor... "

Likewise, Ramban:

"You shall surely remonstrate with your neighbor" - this is a separate command, namely that we must teach him the reproof of instruction. "And not bear sin because of him" - for you will bear sin because of his transgression if you do not rebuke him ... However, it seems to me that the correct interpretation is that the expression "you shall surely remonstrate" is to be understood in the same way as "And Abraham remonstrated with Avimelekh". The verse is thus saying: "Do not hate your brother in your heart when he does something to you against your will, but instead you should remonstrate with him, saying, 'Why did you do this to me?' and you will not bear sin because of him by covering up your hatred in your heart and not telling him, for when you remonstrate with him, he will justify himself before you or he will regret his action and admit his sin, and you will forgive him."

The difference between the two interpretations is that one is social, the other interpersonal. On Rambam's second and Ramban's first reading, the command is about collective responsibility. When we see a fellow Jew about to commit a sin, we must try to persuade him not to do so. We are not allowed to say, "That is a private matter between him and God." "All Israel," said the sages, "are sureties for one

another." We are each responsible, not only for our own conduct, but for the behaviour of others. That is a major chapter in Jewish law and thought.

However, both Rambam and Ramban are aware that this is not the plain sense of the text. Taken in context, what we have before us is a subtle account of the psychology of interpersonal relations.

Judaism has sometimes been accused by Christianity of being about justice rather than love ("You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"). This is entirely untrue. There is a wonderful teaching in Avot deRabbi Natan: "Who is the greatest hero? One who turns an enemy into a friend." What sets the Torah apart is its understanding of the psychology of hatred.

If someone has done us harm, it is natural to feel aggrieved. What then are we to do in order to fulfil the command, "Do not hate your brother in your heart"? The Torah's answer is: Speak. Converse. Challenge. Remonstrate. It may be that the other person had a good reason for doing what he did. Or it may be that he was acting out of malice, in which case our remonstrations will give him, if he so chooses, the opportunity to apologise, and we should then forgive him. In either case, talking it through is the best way of restoring a broken relationship. Once again we encounter here one of the leitmotifs of Judaism: the power of speech to create, sustain and mend relationships.

Maimonides cites a key proof-text. The story is told (2 Samuel 13) of how Amnon, one of King David's children, raped his half-sister Tamar. When Absalom, Tamar's brother, hears about the episode, his reaction seems on the face of it irenic, serene:

Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet, now my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart." And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house, a desolate woman. When King David heard all this, he was furious. Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad..."

Appearances, however, deceive. Absalom is anything but forgiving. He waits for two years, and then invites Amnon to a festive meal at sheep-shearing time. He gives instructions to his men: "Listen! When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine and I say to you, 'Strike Amnon down,' then kill him." And so it happened. Absalom's silence was not the silence of forgiveness but of hate - the hate of which Pierre de LaClos spoke in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* when he wrote the famous line: "Revenge is a dish best served cold."

There is another equally powerful example in Bereishith:

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age, and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and

could not speak a kind word to him (*velo yachlu dabro leshalom*, literally, "they could not speak with him to peace").

On this, R. Jonathan Eybeschutz (c. 1690-1764) comments: "Had they been able to sit together as a group, they would have spoken to one another and remonstrated with each other, and would eventually have made their peace with one another. The tragedy of conflict is that it prevents people from talking together and listening to one another." A failure to communicate is often the prelude to revenge.

The inner logic of the two verses in our Torah portion is therefore this: "Love your neighbor as yourself. But not all neighbors are loveable. There are those who, out of envy or malice, have done you harm. I do not therefore command you to live as if you were angels, without any of the emotions natural to human beings. I do however forbid you to hate. That is why, when someone does you wrong, you must confront the wrongdoer. You must tell him of your feelings of hurt and distress. It may be that you completely misunderstood his intentions. Or it may be that he genuinely meant to do you harm, but now, faced with the reality of the injury he has done you, he may sincerely repent of what he did. If, however, you fail to talk it through, there is a real possibility that you will bear a grudge and in the fullness of time, come to take revenge - as did Absalom."

What is so impressive about the Torah is that it both articulates the highest of high ideals, and at the same time speaks to us as human beings. If we were angels it

would be easy to love one another. But we are not. An ethic that commands us to love our enemies, without any hint as to how we are to achieve this, is simply unliveable. Instead, the Torah sets out a realistic programme. By being honest with one another, talking things through, we may be able to achieve reconciliation - not always, to be sure, but often. How much distress and even bloodshed might be spared if humanity heeded this simple command.



Revenge: It's Not Worth It

The Torah commands us not to take revenge or bear a grudge. There are a number of explanations for this Mitzva. We will focus on that of the Rambam: The Rambam writes that one should not take revenge or bear a grudge because this-worldly matters are not important enough to merit taking revenge or bearing a grudge.¹ Thus, the reason for the Mitzva is that a person should be able to control his character traits because such matters are not worthy of being ascribed importance.

It is interesting to note that there are a few exceptions where it is permitted to take revenge. One is when a person carelessly kills his fellow, it is permitted for a relative of the victim to take revenge on the accidental

murderer until he reaches the City of Refuge.² Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, Rosh Yeshiva of Aish HaTorah, posits, based on the Rambam's reasoning, that the death of a loved one is something that is worth getting upset about.

The other exception is that a Torah sage is allowed and even obligated to take revenge or bear a grudge when a person insults him in public because it is an insult to the honor of the Torah and that is also something worth taking revenge for.

It is interesting to note that the example of taking revenge and bearing a grudge given in the Gemara is in the realm of property. Indeed, many commentators hold that the prohibitions to take revenge or bear a grudge only apply in the monetary realm, as opposed to the personal realm. For example, they forbid not lending someone an item because he did not lend it, but they permit answering an insult with an insult. Some authorities do hold it applies in all realms, but regardless it is evident that the yetser hara (negative inclination) to take revenge with regard to money and property comes from an attachment to materialism that is inconsonant with Torah values. By having a Torah approach to materialism, a person will find it far easier to fulfil the words of the Rambam and realize that money and property are transient and insignificant.

The Steipler Gaon, Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, and his recently deceased son, Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, among their numerous qualities, were totally divorced from materialism and money. The following

story, told over by Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, about his father, demonstrates their attitude to money.

The accepted custom is that nobody is called up for the Aliyah of the terrible curses in the Torah Portion of Ki Tavo because of the negative content, rather the person reading from the Torah receives the Aliyah because he is reading from the Torah anyway. One *avreich* (someone in full-time Torah learning) decided that there was no reason not to receive the Aliyah and proceeded to take that Aliyah. Not long after, he received news that a relative in America had died and left him a massive inheritance that he had to tend to. He travelled there and spent a great deal of time dealing with the inheritance. Ultimately, he became very wealthy and had to devote most of his time to his wealth. When the Steipler Gaon heard this story, he commented that he wondered if the *avreich* would receive a punishment for going against an accepted custom but he didn't realize that it would be such a great punishment! In the Steipler's eyes, the fact that he became wealthy was totally overshadowed by the fact that he could no longer learn.

A person hearing this story, may be a bit more conflicted in his reaction than the Steipler – he may feel it is a shame that the person stopped learning as much, but it is also a good thing that he was now wealthy, and he could surely do a lot of good with the money. But to the Steipler and his son, it was crystal clear that this was a terrible occurrence – money pails into

insignificance in comparison with Torah learning. In this vein, throughout his life, Rabbi Chaim never accepted a paid position and when he did receive money for his books, he gave most of it away.

Needless to say, most of us are more involved in the physical world than these exalted Sages, but each person on his level, can learn that monetary issues are not worth getting upset about or taking too seriously.

1. Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh, 206.
2. Makkot, 12a.

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