

Our *Parashah* begins, "Speak to the entire assembly of *Bnei Yisrael*." *Rashi z"l* explains that this *Parashah* was taught to the nation in a full assembly "because most of the fundamental teachings of the Torah are dependent on it."

One of the best known and most fundamental of these teachings is (19:18), "You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your fellow as yourself--I am *Hashem*" (see *Shabbat* 31a). *R' Nosson Yehuda Leib Mintzberg z"l* (1943-2018; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) writes: At first glance, one might think that the prohibition on taking revenge or bearing a grudge exists because those are inherently bad *Middot* / character traits. However, the juxtaposition of the two parts of our verse teaches otherwise: Why shall you not take revenge or bear a grudge against the members of your people? Because, the verse teaches, you are obligated to love your fellow as yourself. The feeling of brotherhood between us should be so strong that it leads us to forgive all wrongs, overpowering any desire for revenge or even a grudge.

R' Mintzberg continues: The conclusion of the verse, "I am *Hashem*," is not the reason why we should love each other. We are not called upon to love each other because we serve the same *Hashem*; rather, because we are brothers and sisters. The phrase, "I am *Hashem*" (which appears many times in our *Parashah*) is saying: I recognize that what I am asking of you calls upon you to rise above your nature. Nevertheless, I expect you to rise to that higher level, to be a people among whom I, *Hashem*, dwell. (*Ben Melech Al ha'Torah*)

Shabbat

"Speak to the entire assembly of *Bnei Yisrael* and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I, *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, am holy.'" (19:2)

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*) writes that a person could observe every law of the Torah--eating only kosher food, etc.--and still be a "Naval / degenerate within the bounds of Torah law." Therefore, our verse calls upon us to "sanctify ourselves with that which is permitted to us"--i.e., to enjoy life's pleasures in moderation. (*Commentary on the Torah*)

R' Eliyahu E. Dessler shlita (*Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak; not to be confused with his cousin and namesake, the *Michtav M'Eliyahu*) writes: We are taught that a person should take from this world only what he needs for his physical and mental health, for the more one pursues physical pleasures, the more he distances himself from the true good. Yet, asks *R' Dessler*, it seems that we are enjoined to do exactly the opposite on *Shabbat*! For *Shabbat*, one is supposed to buy or prepare delicacies without giving a thought to the cost. Indeed, the *Tanna* / Sage of the *Mishnah* *Rabbi Eliezer* told his son that he should always shop for *Shabbat* when he is hungry, so that he will be motivated to spend more! How, asks *R' Dessler*, can these two injunctions be reconciled?

R' Dessler explains: If one looks closely at the relevant sources, he will find that shopping and preparing food for *Shabbat* are not part of the *Mitzvah* of "Oneg *Shabbat*" / "delighting in the Sabbath"; rather, they belong to the *Mitzvah* of "K'vod *Shabbat*" / "honoring the Sabbath." It follows that we are not being instructed to eat with abandon on *Shabbat*--only to prepare many dishes and delicacies to honor the day, and to taste each one in moderation. There is no commandment to stuff oneself on *Shabbat*. Indeed, doing so is discouraged, as overeating causes a person to sleep away the entire day instead of engaging in Torah study.

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Pirkei Avot

He [Rabban Gamliel, the son of Rabbi Yehuda Ha'Nasi] used to say, "Treat His will as if it were your own will, so that He will treat your will as if it is His will. Nullify your will before His will, so that He will nullify the will of others before your will." (2:4)

R' Eliezer Zvi Safran z"l (1830-1898; *Komarno Rebbe*) writes: The *Gemara* (*Rosh Hashanah* 4a) teaches, "If one says, 'I give this coin to *Tzedakah* so that my son shall live [i.e., be cured from illness],' he is a perfect *Tzaddik*." This is what our *Mishnah* means by treating G-d's will as if it is one's own will. You are permitted, says the *Mishnah*, to do G-d's will even "so that He will treat your will as if it is His will."

However, there is one condition--i.e., that one not question or complain if G-d does not fulfill your desire. Ultimately, says the *Mishnah*, you must be prepared to "nullify your will before His will." Perhaps one is not worthy of what he is praying for or, perhaps, *Hashem* knows that what the person is praying for is not what is best for him. If you adopt this outlook, you can be certain that "He will nullify the will of others before your will"--i.e., you may not get everything you want, but at least no other human being will be able to hurt you. (Z'kan Beto 2:4 - 20th Interpretation)



He [Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai] said to them [his students], "Go out and discern which is the good way to which a person should cling." . . . Rabbi Yehoshua says, "A good friend." (2:13)

R' Yitzchak Al-Achdab z"l (Spain and Sicily; late 14th - early 15th centuries) notes that Rabbi Yehoshua cannot be referring to having a good friend, for that cannot be called the "good way to which a person should cling." Rather, he means being a good friend, someone who is always looking out for the interests of others. (*Roshei Avot*)

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R' Dessler quotes R' Yosef Shaul Nathanson z"l (1808-1875; rabbi of L'vov, Galicia and a leading *Halachic* authority) who explains with a parable: If one goes to a fancy wedding, he will see an amazing spread of delicacies and deserts, which the guests are busy enjoying. But how can one recognize who is the *Ba'al Simcha* / the parent of the bride or groom? The *Ba'al Simcha* is the one who is so busy enjoying the occasion and the guests that he barely touches the food! Similarly, one who truly delights in the *Shabbat* is focused more on the special occasion and the distinguished guest (i.e., *Shabbat*) and less on the food.

(*Sha'arei Ha'zemanim: Shabbat Kodesh* p.35)

"When you [plural] reap the harvest of your land, you [singular] shall not complete your reaping to the corner of your field, and the gleanings of your harvest you [singular] shall not take." (19:9)

Why does the verse begin with the plural form and end with the singular form? R' Baruch Ha'levi Epstein z"l (1860-1941; best known for his *Chumash* commentary, *Torah Temimah*) explains: The harvest was a time of joy, as we read (*Yeshayah* 9:2), "They rejoiced before You like the joy of the harvest time." As such, the crop was harvested in the presence of a multitude of people, all sharing in celebrating the bountiful produce. Thus, the plural form is used when referring to the harvest.

In contrast, the *Mitzvot* that must be performed in connection with the harvest are the personal obligation of the field's owner. Thus, the singular form is used when referring to those *Mitzvot*. (*Tosefet Berachah*)

"You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your fellow as yourself--I am Hashem." (19:18)

Rabbeinu Asher z"l (1250-1327; Germany and Spain; one of the three "pillars" of *Halachah* on whose works the *Shulchan Aruch* is based) writes in his *Mishnah* commentary (*Pe'ah* 1:1): "*Hashem* desires those *Mitzvot* that involve a person fulfilling the will of another person more than He desires the *Mitzvot* between man and G-d." [Note that this is meant as ethical guidance, as explained below, not as a license to choose the performance of one *Mitzvah* over another in disregard of *Halachic* principles.]

R' Avraham Brandwein z"l (1945-2013; *Strettiner Rebbe* in the Old City of Yerushalayim) explains that *Mitzvot* between man and his fellow man can develop and refine a person faster than can *Mitzvot* between man and G-d. This is true for a number of reasons:

- Interpersonal *Mitzvot* are not fixed, in that their application changes with societal needs. Every day, new challenges present themselves and must be overcome; therefore, these *Mitzvot* cannot be performed automatically or by rote. (In contrast, a *Mitzvah* like putting on *Tefilin* is the same every day.)
- Interpersonal *Mitzvot* enable a person to constantly evaluate his own progress toward serving *Hashem* with pure intentions. He can ask himself, for example: How do I react when a person is not grateful for a kindness I did for him? How do I react when the community does not honor me for my contributions?
- Performing interpersonal *Mitzvot* enhances one's love for others, which is a prerequisite for being able to love *Hashem*.
- Performing interpersonal *Mitzvot* helps one to negate his own will, which enables him to emulate *Hashem*--the ultimate Giver.

(*Mavo Le'Mahut Ha'dat U'mataratah* p.42)