

The second of the two *Parashot* read this week contains the famous *Mitzvah* (19:18), "You shall love your fellow as yourself." In the *Midrash Sifra*, Rabbi Akiva refers to this *Mitzvah* as a "great principle of the Torah." In the same *Midrash*, Rabbi Akiva's student, Shimon ben Azzai, is quoted as saying that the verse (*Bereishit* 5:1), "This is the account of the descendants of Adam" is a great principle of the Torah.

Is Ben Azzai arguing with his teacher, Rabbi Akiva? What does Ben Azzai's teaching even mean? R' Chaim Druckman *z"l* (1932-2022; rabbi, *Rosh Yeshiva*, and Knesset member) explains:

From the verse that Rabbi Akiva identifies as a "great principle," one could understand that a person's love of himself is the only measure of the love one must have for others. If a person does not love himself, he need not love others. Or, more practically, if a particular behavior does not bother a given person, that person need not care whether it bothers others.

Comes along Ben Azzai to say that what does or does not bother you is not the measure for how you must treat others. "This is the account of the descendants of Adam," says the verse, and it concludes, "on the day that *Elokim* created Man, He made him in the likeness of *Elokim*." Every person is a *Tzelem Elokim*, he is made in the "image" of G-d, and one must treat others accordingly, no matter how one wants to be treated himself.

Does Rabbi Akiva disagree? R' Druckman asks. He does not, R' Druckman says, for the verse that Rabbi Akiva cites also ends with the words, "I am *Hashem*." The two sages' disagreement is only about which verse teaches more clearly how a person should relate to others. (*Hakdamah L'Shir Ha'shirim* p.98)

Shabbat

R' Uri Weisblum *shlita* (*Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshivat Nachalat Ha'levi'im in Haifa, Israel) writes: We are used to viewing the week as having two parts--the six workdays, corresponding--as a unit--to the Six Days of Creation, and then *Shabbat*, the day when *Hashem* rested after He finished creating the world. Seen this way, there is no difference between each of the six workdays; they are just the days leading to *Shabbat*.

However, R' Weisblum writes, R' Shlomo ibn Aderet *z"l* (*Rashba*; Barcelona, Spain; 1235-1310) proves from the *Gemara* (*Ta'anit* 27b) that this is not the case. The *Gemara* teaches that, in the time of the *Bet Hamikdash*, there was a custom for designated people to fast on Monday for the protection of seafarers; on Tuesday, for the protection of desert travelers; on Wednesday, that children should be protected from childhood diseases; and on Thursday, for the protection of pregnant and nursing women. The *Gemara* connects each of these fasts with something that was created on the corresponding day of the week. For example, dry land was created on the third day, so people would fast for desert travelers. (See the *Gemara* for the other derivations.) We see that our Sages did not view the Six Days of Creation as a unit that contrasts with *Shabbat*. Rather, each day had--and, therefore, continues to have--a unique, innate character.

Rashba continues: This is the idea behind the teaching that a person receives a *Neshamah Yeteirah* (literally, "extra soul") on *Erev Shabbat*, for that is when the first man received his *Neshamah*. On that *Erev Shabbat*, *Hashem* gave Adam the ability to find *Shleimut* / fulfillment and *Oneg* / delight with the arrival of *Shabbat*. This means, elaborates R' Weisblum, that when a person has had a difficult week, when he has experienced many challenges and he is feeling down, he should know that he literally receives a fresh soul every *Erev Shabbat*, with the same ability to find *Shleimut* and *Oneg* as Adam had that first *Erev Shabbat*.

(*He'arat Ha'tefilah: Shabbat* p.18)

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Pirkei Avot

“Akavya ben Mahalalel says, ‘Consider three things and you will not come into the grip of sin: Know from where you came, where you are going, and before Whom you will give a justification and accounting. From where you came . . . Where you are going . . . Before Whom you will give a justification and accounting . . .’” (3:1)

R’ Shmuel de Uzeda z”l (1545-1604; Tzefat, *Eretz Yisrael*) asks: The *Mishnah* seems to be redundant, as it first lists the three things that a person should consider, then it lists them again and elaborates upon them. Why is the second listing necessary?

He explains: The *Mishnah* is not repeating itself. Rather, the first part of the *Mishnah* is referring to three lofty things that a person should consider: From where your soul came--under G-d’s Throne; where you are going--back to G-d’s Presence, from which you came; and before Whom your soul will give a justification and accounting. Considering the loftiness of your soul will help you not perform deeds that are beneath it. Alternatively, if a person cannot focus on these lofty concepts, says the second part of the *Mishnah*, then remember the lowliness of the physical body--where it comes from, where it is going, etc.--and thereby subdue his heart. (Midrash Shmuel)

“Rabbi Yaakov says, ‘One who walks on the road while reviewing a Torah lesson but interrupts his review and exclaims, “How beautiful is that tree! How beautiful is that plowed field!”--the Torah considers it as if he is liable for his soul.’” (3:9)

This requires explanation. A person is making a point of using his time well, reviewing his studies as he travels, and he takes a moment to admire the beauty of G-d’s Creation--for that he deserves condemnation?!

R’ Zvi Yehuda Kook z”l (1891-1982; *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav in Yerushalayim) explains that that is not at all what the *Mishnah* is teaching. Rather, everything in Creation has value--the earth, the sky, the plants, the animals, etc. However, that value can be appreciated properly only through the lens of Torah. This is the meaning of the *Gemara*’s teaching (*Shabbat* 88a), “*Hashem* made a condition with Creation: ‘If the Jewish People accept the Torah, you will continue to exist. If not, I will return the world to nothingness.’”

Our *Mishnah* is teaching: If a person interrupts his Torah study *i.e.*, he looks at a tree or at a plowed field as something having value separate from its place in the Torah, he is deserving of condemnation. However, if a person admires the world’s beauty as a reflection of the Torah’s beauty, for the Torah was G-d’s blueprint for Creation, the *Mishnah* is not referring to that person at all. (Le’netivot Yisrael II #50)

“My Sabbaths you shall observe--I am *Hashem* . . .” (19:3)

“In the presence of an old person you shall rise . . . I am *Hashem*.” (19:32)

Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z”l (1210-1263; Spain) writes: Know that one who reveres G-d’s words will take a “light” *Mitzvah* as seriously as a “strict” *Mitzvah*, for he will not look at the weight of the *Mitzvah*, but at the greatness of the One Who commanded it. This important principle is taught in the Torah, which uses the same expression, “I am *Hashem*,” in connection with the “easy” *Mitzvah* of standing up for an elder and the “hard” *Mitzvah* of keeping *Shabbat*. (*Sha’arei Teshuvah* 3:23)

“You shall not steal, you shall not deny falsely, and you shall not lie to one another.” (19:11)

R’ Yaakov Moshe Charlap z”l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim’s Sha’arei Chessed neighborhood and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav) comments: How low has man fallen following Adam’s sin, how ashamed should he be, that he must be commanded not to steal or lie!

(*Mei Marom* II p.13)

“You shall love your fellow as yourself--I am *Hashem*.” (19:18)

The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 31a) relates that a gentile approached the Sages Shammai and Hillel, respectively, and asked to convert to Judaism on the condition that they teach him the entire Torah while he stood on one foot. Shammai sent the man on his way, but Hillel agreed, telling the convert, “What is hateful to you do not do to others. That is the whole Torah, and the rest is commentary. Go learn it!” [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R’ Meir Chodosh z”l (1898-1989; *Mashgiach Ruchani* in the Chevron Yeshiva) observes that Hillel’s statement requires explanation. Specifically, how does not doing to others what is hateful you encompass the *Mitzvot* between man and G-d? R’ Chodosh explains that it was probably because of this question that *Rashi* z”l comments on the *Gemara* by citing the verse (*Mishlei* 27:10), “Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father.” *Rashi* writes: “Your friend and the friend of your father” refers to *Hashem*. Do not transgress His words just as you do not want your friend to transgress your words.

R’ Chodosh continues: This *Gemara* and *Rashi*’s explanation teach us about *Gadlut Ha’adam*/ man’s inherent greatness, and his obligation to recognize that greatness and live up to it. *Rashi* is stating that we can know *Hashem*’s Will by examining a human’s will--specifically, that just as humans do not like when others transgress their will, so *Hashem* does not like when people transgress His Will. This is man’s greatness: his true innermost desires are similar to G-d’s because they derive from his *Tzelem Elokim*, the fact that he is created in G-d’s image. (Quoted in *Shema Bni*, Vol I, p.6)