



The Pardes Parsha Discussion by Rabbi Alex Israel

Acharei-Mot/Kedoshim: How to Turn Hate into Love

This week's parsha contains one of the Torah's most famous sayings: "Love your neighbor as yourself." It seems a great aspiration but an impossible law to fulfill; after all, how does a person love another person as much as we love ourselves? How do we override ego and competition or jealousy towards another individual?

We shall address this verse in its context to discover a new perspective. Let's look at the context:

Do not hate your brother in your heart. Admonish your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. Do not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people; love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord" (19:17-18)

In these verses we may discern five different phrases, five distinct mitzvot:

1. Not to hate your fellow Jew
2. Rebuke your neighbour
3. Not to take vengeance
4. Not to bear a grudge
5. Love your neighbour as yourself

Many read these verses as a continuum, an interconnected series. Here is Rashbam:

Do not hate your brother in your heart: If he has treated you badly, do not make out as if you are his friend, "he speaks peaceably, but in his heart he lies in wait" (Jer 9:8); that is not good!

Don't hate him in your heart but rather, **admonish your neighbor** regarding that which he did to you, and this way there will be peace and **you will not bear sin** [because of the hatred] in your heart.

Do not take vengeance: to repay him for the harm he did

Nor bear a grudge: even internally;

Rather, suppress those impulses and **love your neighbour as yourself.**

This reading explains why the instruction proscribing hatred is “in your heart.” We are dealing with a person who feels hurt by another or resentment towards him or her. That sort of bitterness can seethe and emerge in dangerous ways, resentment can lead a person to harm their perceived abuser as in the verse the Rashbam quotes from Jeremiah, or alternatively the hatred harbored in the heart may seriously harm a person’s emotional wellbeing.

The Torah’s solution is to talk things out with the person who has wronged you, voicing our hurt and allowing a resolution. Grudges and vengeance are outlawed. Only by airing things might we open a road to loving our fellow as ourselves, explained by many commentaries, “treat him as you would hope to be treated by him” (Bechor Shor).

This contextual reading helps us understand how to read this famous verse. It is a more minimalistic reading. The background is a situation in which we feel wronged. The method is to talk. The desired end is a more harmonious social environment. These verses offer wisdom as how not to get stuck in unnecessary discord with others.

To Discuss:

- Have you ever “hated” another person “in your heart”
- What happened to make you feel like that?
- Do you think it would be productive or counter-productive to approach another person, present why you have been offended, and discuss it? Does it help to air things out?
- Or maybe a better question is: What sort of conversations might work, and which type would be automatic failures?
- Have you ever managed to transform a situation of hostility and antagonism into one of mutual understanding and even camaraderie? How?

Shabbat Shalom!