

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt”l

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Parashas Kedoshim

“AND YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR FELLOW MAN AS YOURSELF.”
(VAYIKRA 19:18)

**Soon you will find it easy
to love everyone**

IN THE TEACHINGS OF OUR SAGES we find a wonderful technique to instill this love in our hearts: “What is the correct path that a person should cling to? R’ Yehoshua said, ‘A good friend.’ R’ Yossi said, ‘A good neighbor.’” (Avos 2:9) Rabbeinu Yonah explains: R’ Yehoshua and R’ Yossi are suggesting first steps to a larger goal. Be a good friend, advocates R’ Yehoshua, to a person that your heart desires, and accustom yourself to act in a way that he will be pleased with you. In this way you will come to love all your fellow men. Be a good neighbor to a few people who live near you, R’ Yossi advises, and soon you will find it easy to love everyone. In this manner you will find yourself enriched with the entire spectrum of fine character traits.

**There are two different
ways to love a friend**

How can R’ Yehoshua and R’ Yossi suggest that being a good friend and neighbor to a few people will cause us to love everyone? Don’t we see in everyday life that many people love their close friends and neighbors and yet have no love for anyone beyond this immediate circle?

We must conclude that there are two different ways to love a friend, neighbor or even a family member. One type of love is caused by the perception that one’s family and friends are an extension of one’s self. I love myself; therefore I love my relatives, friends and neighbors. To varying degrees, I view them as part of me, and I love them because I love myself. The second approach is to love others for a more loftier and pure reason – because the Torah states, “You shall love your fellow man as yourself.” Of course, those who are closer to me deserve a greater degree of love, as the Chovos HaLevavos explains, (Shaar HaBitachon 4), but it all stems from this Torah source. Now we can understand the Mishna in Pirkei Avos quoted above.

Whom do we really love?

Those who love a friend for selfish reasons, because they see him as an extension of themselves, will never come to love anyone outside their egocentric world. They have never trained themselves to care for **others** in the true sense of the word. This explains why so many people can be good friends to those close to them and yet act improperly towards outsiders. If, on the other hand, one loves his family, friends and neighbors unselfishly – through the genuine love prescribed by the Torah – he is developing and cultivating the ability to truly love **others**. This “exercise” of his heart muscle towards those close to him will inevitably expand his capacity to love, and it will spill over to ever-increasing circles of humanity. Our sages recognized that even this altruistic love is more easily felt towards friends and neighbors, and urged us to use this beginning step as a springboard to greater heights of love for others.

Let us reexamine our own feelings towards our family, friends and neighbors. Whom do we really love? Is it merely the extended “I,” or is it a Torah-based, unselfish concern for others? When helping others requires some sacrifice of honor, pride, effort or money, do we forgo our own desires, or do we find that our “love” has reached its limit? If we view our fellow man as inherently worthy of Hashem’s love and ours, we will find new strength to care for others, and genuinely love our fellow man, “as ourselves.”