

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



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Parashot Acharei Mot-Kedoshim
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פרשת אחרי מות-קדושים
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Torah Reading: *Vayikra* (Leviticus) 16:1-20:27

In these *parashot*, Hashem instructs Moshe regarding the procedures for *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement); Hashem then tells Moshe to give the people a series of ethical and ritual laws instructing them how to be holy.

One verse of this series states (19:18): “**לֹא-תִקֹּם וְלֹא-תִטּוֹר אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ, וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ; אֲנִי, ה'**”
לֹא-תִקֹּם וְלֹא-תִטּוֹר אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ, וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ; אֲנִי, ה' – Do not take revenge and do not bear a grudge against the children of your nation; love your neighbor as yourself; I am Hashem.”

One of the most well-known incarnations of the phrase “love your neighbor as yourself” is the so-called “Golden Rule”: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” This is not the Jewish version of the Golden Rule. Rather, this version of the Golden Rule was given by Jesus of Nazareth, who used it to summarize the Torah: “Do to others what you want them to do to you. This is the meaning of the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets,” (Matthew 7:12).

The Jewish Golden Rule is phrased in the negative, as articulated in the Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 31a: “When [a non-Jew looking to convert to Judaism] went before Hillel [to ask him to teach him the whole Torah while he was standing on one foot], he said to him, ‘**דַּע לֹךְ סְנִי לַחֲבֵרְךָ לֹא תַעֲבִיד...'**” – 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.”

The principle of the Golden Rule makes more sense when phrased in the negative. I may want someone to buy me a Lamborghini, but they are under no obligation to do so, nor can I expect them to. But I can certainly expect everyone to refrain from doing to me what is hateful to them.

Hence the beginning of the verse in this *parasha*: “לא-תקם וְלֹא-תטור – do not take revenge and do not bear a grudge.” What is the difference between revenge and a grudge? It is spelled out in Tractate Yoma 23a: “What is revenge and what is bearing a grudge? If one said to his fellow: 'Lend me your sickle', and he replied 'No,' and the next day the second comes [to the first] and says: 'Lend me your axe!' and he replies: 'I will not lend it to you, just as you would not lend me your sickle' – that is revenge. And what is bearing a grudge? If one says to his fellow: 'Lend me your axe, he replies 'No,' and the next day the second asks: 'Lend me your garment,' and he answers: 'Here it is. I am not like you who would not lend me [what I asked for]' – that is bearing a grudge.”

The verse immediately preceding this verse in the Torah says, “לֹא-תשנא אֶת- , בְּלִבְךָ אָחִיךָ – Do not hate your fellow person in your heart.” These three prohibitions: hating in one's heart, taking revenge, and bearing a grudge, are probably three of the most difficult injunctions to follow. Which of us has not at some time or other experienced *schadenfreude* (satisfaction or pleasure felt at someone else's misfortune), or taken great pleasure in “getting even” with someone?

These two verses tell us that the only way to accomplish loving one's neighbor is to raise our own behavior – external and internal – to unimpeachable standards.

The verses end with the phrase, “I am Hashem.” This seems to indicate that the ultimate goal of treating others well is to get closer to God. Refraining from taking revenge and bearing a grudge is a good start to getting closer to other humans and ultimately to the Divine.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Think of your own examples of how someone might take revenge or bear a grudge against you.
- If this has ever happened to you, how did it make you feel? How might it make someone else feel?
- What does it mean to “hate your fellow person in your heart”? How can you avoid doing that?