

Pekudai 5779

BS"D Parashat Pekudai 5779

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Vayikra 19,18:

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת-אֶחָיו כָּמוֹךָ, כִּי אֲנִי ה'.

Love thy Jewish brother as yourself, I am HaShem.

HaShem's demand that we orient ourselves to love our fellow Jew as we love ourselves is an extreme demand. How can one bring himself to this sublime degree of altruism?

And why does this mitzva end with the words "I am HaShem", when they do not appear in most other mitzvot?

HaShem's Love for the Jewish People

Three times in parashat Vayakhel, HaShem expresses His infinite love, admiration and respect for Am Yisrael. As with all else regarding the omnipotent Creator which is beyond our understanding, HaShem's intimate relationship with mere mortals, as great as we are, ranks among the most irrational issues within our spiritual world. However, it is what it is and we are the Creator's chosen people – indeed His only people.

1- The parasha opens with the mitzva of observing the Shabbat through refraining to perform any of the 39 positive activities or their compliments, and then proceeds to return

to the subject of constructing the Mishkan (Tabernacle). Rashi explains that the proximity of the Shabbat and Mishkan verses comes to inform the Jewish nation that as central as the Tabernacle and Bet Hamikdash are to the HaShem-Yisrael relationship, the Shabbat takes precedence over their construction, and the work must cease until the end of Shabbat.

Imagine the situation at the time the Jews were informed of this principle: Six hundred thousand men, with an equal number of women and vast numbers of children stand eager and ready to begin construction of the “umbilical cord” that will connect and nurture the future relationship between the upper spiritual realms of HaShem and His material-spiritual creations. Moshe gave the signal to refrain from all work the moment the Friday clouds of glory above the Israelite camp turn to night clouds of fire to signal the advent of night. Suddenly a little girl falls and loses consciousness. Moshe orders that she be taken to a doctor by any means, even if it requires desecrating the Shabbat. The message is: Shabbat supersedes the Bet Hamikdash but not the life of even a young Jewish child in danger; for the love HaShem bears for every Jew.

2- This idea appears again in the parasha when Moshe is informed that HaShem has endowed Betzalel ben Uri, from the prestigious tribe of Yehuda together with Oholiav ben Achisamach, from the far less prestigious tribe of Dan, with God-given talents to artistically craft gold and silver and whatever else is necessary for construction of the Mishkan. Rashi explains that HaShem endowed these two individuals of the tribes of Yehuda and Dan with super talents to express the principle that in HaShem’s eyes all Jews are equally loved by him, regardless of tribal affiliation.

3- The third time we are shown HaShem’s love for Am Yisrael appears when Moshe calls for donations of copper for the large Kiyor (laver) of the Mishkan. The women possessed large

quantities of copper in the form of mirrors which they used to enhance their appearance. Moshe rejected these mirrors because they functioned to serve the yetzer hara's physical purpose rather than a spiritual one. HaShem tells Moshe that He values these mirrors above all other contributions! HaShem explains that in Egypt husbands would come home at night totally deprived of energy, and only wanted to sleep. The women knew that the nation's future depended on children to carry on Judaism into the future. So, they would bring their copper mirrors to display their feminine beauty before their husbands' apparent ugly appearance. This would arouse sensual feelings in the men, resulting in millions of Jewish children being born.

The Answer is...

There is no more profound friendship than the bonds which tie soldiers in special units where they experience together the dangers in perilous missions. Their mutual love and admiration stems from their being chosen by the powers that be to fulfill the national ideals.

To return to the dilemma, how one can love his fellow Jew as himself, and why does the verse contain the words "I am HaShem"?

I submit that the verse is meant to be read as follows: "Love thy Jewish counterpart as you love yourself. And if one should ask: how can I reach such an altruistic level? The answer is: "I am HaShem"; meaning the very fact that I, HaShem, has chosen your fellow Jew to be a member of My chosen people is reason enough for you to love him.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

