

the heart. That part of the heart which only wishes to help the person, to heal the ailment and put the ailing individual back on his/her feet.

TO LIKE THE PEOPLE YOU LOVE

It can be very easy to say, "I love all Jews and all people unconditionally, even the ones whom I have never met!"

It can be much more of a challenge to say, "I like all those who I encounter in my day to day life, even the ones I know well." While we seem to feel that we know the ins and outs of these peoples' daily struggles, we can and must become masters of the art of "giving the benefit of the doubt." Cutting no corners is a great virtue when it comes to disciplining ourselves, but can be quite the contrary when dealing with others.

To assume that the reason for our own individual suffering or misfortune is due to our misconduct or even sinning is a commendable characteristic. To assume that about others' misfortune is the epitome of evil, the absence of compassion and love. To give the benefit of the doubt to all people unconditionally

is to set aside our preconceived notions, as well as our surface-deep understanding of the situation and assume that there is a driving force behind his/her misconduct which we cannot conceive, and all we can do is put in every effort to relieve him/her of their suffering – physical or spiritual. To love a fellow Jew is to set aside our own wellbeing, be it our physical, spiritual or social wellbeing, and put all of our passion in the wellbeing and growth of our fellow man.

Despise the sin, embrace the sinner.

RABBI SHAI TAUB is a rabbi and teacher. He is the author of *G-d of Our Understanding: Jewish Spirituality and Recovery from Addiction* and the director of Conscious Contact, a prayer center for recovering addicts in Pittsburgh.



ALEPH INSTITUTE
No One Alone,
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5804 BEACON STREET, PITTSBURGH, PA 15217
ON THE WEB AT WWW.ALEPH.US • 412.427.1111

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LOVE YOUR FELLOW AS YOURSELF

BY RABBI SHAI TAUB

When the Talmudic sage Shamai was by a prospective convert to capture the entire Torah in "the amount of time which I can stand on one foot," the Talmud relates that the sage chased the man away¹. The man then approached Shamai's contemporary, Hillel, and posed the same request. "Give me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot." Hillel, widely known for his patience and grace, responded in kind, "What is hateful to you do not do unto others. That is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary. Now, go and learn."

In a similar vein, the verse states, "Love your fellow as yourself."² The great sage Rabbi Akiva, widely known for his great achievement in Torah learning after not having begun his studies until the age of forty, quotes this verse and comments, "This is a great principle in the Torah."



1. "He chased him off with the measuring stick which was in his hand." (Tractate Shabbat, 31a)
2. Leviticus, 19:18

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SELF HATRED?

The Kaballah teaches us that within every Jew lies a spark of Godliness, really a piece of God Almighty Himself. Knowing that all Jews contain this Godly spark tells us that all Jews are in fact part of one single greater being. We can compare it to the limbs or the human body. While each limb looks vastly different from the other and serves a function very unique to itself, we cannot deny the fact that they are all nevertheless part of a single body. The same is said about the Jewish nation. While Jews come in all different shapes and sizes, from all different races and backgrounds, there remains the unifying factor – the piece of One God within each individual - that makes all Jews undeniably part of a single greater being.

With that thought in mind lets think about the times when part or parts of our bodies are dysfunctional or ailing. How silly a thought would it be to be angry or to hate that limb for its suffering – even if it were something that may have been self-inflicted or could have been avoided? How unthinkable it is for us to harbor hard feelings towards the injured finger or toe for hindering the use of our hands or feet? Rather, we treat the ailment. We give special care that nothing more happen to the limb in hopes of helping it heal that much faster.

When our fellow Jew is failing in life, be it his religious life, social life or even his life as part of a society, no doubt it is an impediment to our growth and accomplishment as a nation, as a people and society. Nevertheless, however grave

the sin is, or the social unacceptability, we may never stoop to fighting evil with evil. The founder of the Hassidic movement, the Baal Shem Tov, taught his followers to hate the sin, not the sinner. Rather, we feel compassion towards the ailing limb of our greater “body,” we treat the ailment. We try giving special care that nothing more happen to the limb in hopes of helping it heal that much faster, and once again be whole in its service to God, in its contribution to society, in its function as part of our very own selves.

“WHAT IS
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→ TALKING

A DECLARATION OF LOVE

In the times of the Holy Temples, in Jerusalem, a time when people were more in tuned with the realities of spiritual phenomena, it was common for physical and spiritual realities to come together. A good example of this is the case of the leper. The book of Leviticus (Ch. 13) tells us the laws of one who becomes impure due to an outbreak of leprosy on his or her skin. The cause for this outbreak, we are taught, was the physical body's “allergic reaction” to the evils of speaking badly about a fellow person. The torah goes on to spell out the exclusion of the leper from the rest of the people and laborious process through which he would be able to regain his status of purity. However, the only way that a Jew was indeed “convicted” for speaking badly about others, and the only way he would be

deemed impure was through the judgment and declaration made by a kohen, the priestly family from the tribe of Levi. The reason is, we are told, the kohen is known for being exceptionally kind hearted by nature. “The priest is a man of kindness.” It was for this very reason that the kohen was selected to be at the helm of the Godly service in the Holy Temples, and it is for this reason that the kohen alone - to the exclusion of everyone else, even the greatest scholars and Halachic authorities - was given the right to deem someone impure due to his actions. When a person is reprimanded for his/her actions and certainly if he or she is put through a great ordeal on order to rectify them, the only way to guarantee positive outcome and a wholehearted return to the path of truth and justice, is if the criticism and the reprimanding comes from deep inside



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