

life

LESSONS

GOOD NEIGHBORS IV

My family and I once lived on a block with only one other Jewish family. We weren't overly visible. If our children left a toy out, it didn't make a difference. If we forgot to mow the lawn or left the garbage bins out after pickup, the neighbors barely noticed. But as more *frum* families moved in, it wasn't just one family. *Frum* parents may be too preoccupied to tidy up outdoors, but for typical American suburban families, keeping the street presentable is a priority, and our neighbors came to resent the eyesore.

No single drop of rain believes it is to blame for the flood. And a flood of *chillul Hashem* is often the cumulative effect of many people's actions. These actions might have gone unnoticed individually, but combine to create a flood of bad impressions.

When one person litters, parks irresponsibly, or commits another minor infraction, he may be tempted to rationalize. "What's the big deal?" he may reason. "Who cares if I bend the rules? What harm can it do?" But even if that act causes no harm, the potential for *chillul Hashem* is enormous when there are other people doing the same thing. And when one person does it, he must realize he is not the only one.

Once, the *frum* community in America was small. But we have been blessed with an explosion of growth. Now our presence is much more noticeable, and even a tiny drop of *chillul Hashem* can contribute to a flood. One need only look at the crowds filling amusement parks on Chol Hamoed, and the letters about *kiddush* or *chillul Hashem* that often follow.

The way we act no longer goes unnoticed by the society around us. We must be aware of that fact.

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gem

OF THE WEEK

PRIVATE LIFE, PUBLIC LAW

By Rabbi Moshe Pogrow

Maasei Eretz Mitzrayim and *maasei Eretz Canaan* refer to patterns of social behavior, one man toward another, while the phrase "*laleches bechukoseihem*" refers to private conduct in the lives of individuals and families. Social behavior is regulated by legislation; private conduct is governed by norms that have become hallowed by force of custom.

The social relationships between people reflect a nation's attitudes toward, and conceptions of, law and state. As a rule, the rules and principles—whether they are pure and honest, or otherwise—that govern these relationships are transparent. They can be discerned from the conditions they are intended to regulate, and from the purposes they are meant to achieve.

In contrast, the individual aspect of personal and family life, as well as the ethos that characterizes a nation as one entity, are usually shaped by vague notions about the relationship of individuals and nations to supernatural powers. These powers are generally seen as hostile to humanity, and are

continued on reverse side

powerful
PRAYER

SHEMONE ESREI:
FIXED TEFILLAH



Before the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah authored the *siddur*, people still davened. There were no special times, no set text, and no minimum—they could daven whenever and as often as they wanted, from once a day to numerous times. The idea of davening at specific times was originated by the Avos—we find in the Torah that Avraham davened Shacharis, Yitzchak davened Mincha, and the nighttime *tefillah* was begun by Yaakov. Nevertheless, this was voluntary until the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah fixed it into law. The three daily *tefillos* they mandated correspond to the korbanos brought in the Beis Hamikdash.

Adapted from Emunah in the Classroom

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A LOVE DESERVED

By Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, Dean, Ani Maamin Foundation

The Gemara tells of a gentile who disrespectfully approached Shammai and asked to be converted by learning the whole Torah while standing on one foot. Shammai showed him the door.

The gentile then came to Hillel with the same request. Hillel obliged: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your friend. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is explanation. Now go and learn.” Eventually this fellow became a proper *ger tzedek*.

What could Hillel have meant? Is this the whole Torah? Rashi offers two explanations. The first is that the “friend” Hillel was referring to is Hashem. When one does endless favors for another, he expects reciprocation. If the recipient refused, it would cause distaste. So too must we treat Hashem, Who asks nothing from us but to fulfill His mitzvos for our own sake.

The second explanation is that the commandment to love your friend as yourself is a summary of all the mitzvos *bein adam lachaveiro*.

On the pasuk *Ve’ahavta lere’acha kamocha*, Rabbi Akiva comments, “This is a great *klal* in the Torah.” Of course, he did not mean that this rule is more important than others—to us, all the Torah’s rules are of equal importance. Furthermore, the Midrash goes on to relate that Ben Azzai says “We have an even greater rule than this: *zeh sefer toldos adam, b’tzelem Elokim bara osam.*” Can there be big rules and bigger rules?

The very essence of the *mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro* is simply to actually care, to refrain from causing harm, and to perform acts of assistance—because you love the other person. Therefore, *Ve’ahavta lere’acha kamocha* is the general rule under which all the other *mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro* fall.

But to Ben Azzai, it is part of an even greater overarching rule: love, respect, and help your friend because he was created *b’tzelem Elokim*. The *neshama* is holier than the *malachim*, and every human being carries one. *Ve’ahavta lere’acha kamocha* is not just a nice thing to do, it’s what each individual deserves.

thought to interfere with his endeavors. The people try to obtain the grace and assistance of these powers, or to at least ensure that they do not interfere in the lives of humans. Toward this end, the people introduce rules and customs regulating the conduct of individual and nation. Through these customs they seek to honor the gods, in order to seek their grace.

The patterns of social behavior are the *mishpatim* of the nations, while the norms of personal and family behavior are their *chukos*. The *mishpatim* of Eretz Mitzrayim undermined human dignity and freedom; the *chukos* of Eretz Canaan sanctified moral breaches that descended to the lowest depths of depravation.

Even as *chamas* and *hashchasas derech*, in the period before the flood, were intertwined; and even as the people of Sodom and the surrounding cities were *ra’im* and *chata’im* at the same time, so always do *mishpatim* and *chukim* affect each other.

Moral corruption and social oppression always go hand in hand. Only a family life of moral purity can produce a people that will champion justice and righteousness; and only a people that practices lovingkindness and justice can produce people who are morally pure.

For this reason, the Torah’s introduction to the laws of private life and the building of families makes reference to the corruption of Egypt and Canaan. It tells us: Let Egypt and Canaan have no effect on your morality. Not from Egypt and Canaan are you to learn *mishpatim* and *chukim*; rather, it is My *mishpatim* that you shall keep, and My *chukim* that you shall guard.

Based on the commentary of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch zt”l on Chumash, with permission from the publisher.



wonder WORLD

TO LIFE!



Why is clean water so important?

In Parshas Acharei Mos, water plays a central role in the *kohen gadol*’s process of *taharah*. Why is clean water so important today? Water is essential for life, but it can also carry bacteria and parasites that make people sick. Cleaning the body with fresh, clean water helps remove dirt, sweat, and harmful microbes from the skin. Water also protects us inside the body. Hydration helps the blood flow, supports organs, and allows the body to remove waste. Even a small lack of clean water can lead to illness. Filtration, boiling, and chemical treatment can all make water safe. But the basic idea is simple: clean water helps keep people healthy. The Torah is compared to water, because it is not just refreshing—it is one of the most important tools for protecting life.

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