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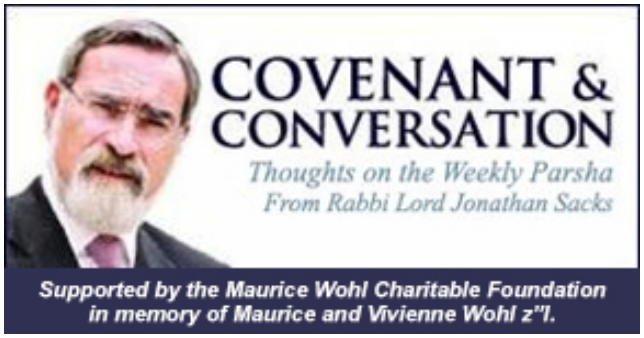

Sprints and Marathons

It was a unique, unrepeatable moment of leadership at its highest height. For forty days Moses had been communing with God, receiving from Him the Law written on tablets of stone. Then God informed him that the people had just made a Golden Calf. He would have to destroy them. It was the worst crisis of the wilderness years, and it called for every one of Moses' gifts as a leader.

First, he prayed to God not to destroy the people. God agreed. Then he went down the mountain and saw the people cavorting around the Calf. Immediately, he smashed the tablets. He burned the Calf, mixed its ashes with water and made the people drink. Then he called for people to join him. The Levites heeded the call and carried out a bloody punishment in which three thousand people died. Then Moses went back up the mountain and prayed for forty days and nights. Then for a further forty days he stayed with God while a new set of tablets was engraved. Finally, he came down the mountain on the tenth of Tishri, carrying the new tablets with him as a visible sign that God's covenant with Israel remained.

This was an extraordinary show of leadership, at times bold and decisive, at others slow and persistent. Moses had to contend with both sides, inducing the Israelites to do *teshuvah* and God to exercise forgiveness. At that moment he was the greatest ever embodiment of the name Israel, meaning one who wrestles with God and with people and prevails.

The good news is: there once was a Moses. Because of him, the people survived. The bad news is: what happens when there is no Moses? The Torah itself says: "No other Prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10). What do you do in the absence of heroic leadership? That is the problem faced by every nation, corporation, community and family. It is easy to think, "What would Moses do?" But Moses did what he did because he was what he was. We are not Moses. That is why every human group that was once touched by greatness faces a problem of continuity. How does it avoid a slow decline?

The answer is given in this week's parsha. The day Moses descended the mountain with the second tablets was to be immortalised when its anniversary became the holiest of days, Yom Kippur. On this day, the drama of *teshuvah* and *kapparah*, repentance and atonement, was to be repeated annually. This time, though, the key figure would not be Moses but Aaron, not the Prophet but the High Priest.

That is how you perpetuate a transformative event: by turning it into a ritual. Max Weber called this the routinisation of charisma.[1] A once-and-never-again moment becomes a once-and-ever-again ceremony. As James MacGregor Burns puts it in his classic work, *Leadership*: "The most lasting tangible act of leadership is the creation of an institution – a nation, a social movement, a political party, a bureaucracy – that continues to exert moral leadership and foster needed social change long after the creative leaders are gone."[2]

There is a remarkable Midrash in which various Sages put forward their idea of *klal gadol ba-Torah*, "the great principle of the Torah." Ben Azzai says it is the verse, "This is the book of the chronicles of man: On the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God" (Gen. 5:1). Ben Zoma says that there is a more embracing principle, "Listen, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." Ben Nannas says there is a yet more embracing principle: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Ben Pazzi says we find a more embracing principle still: "The first sheep shall be offered in the morning, and the second sheep in the afternoon" (Exodus 29:39) – or, as we might say today, Shacharit, Mincha and Maariv. In a word: "routine". The passage concludes: The law follows Ben Pazzi.[3]

The meaning of Ben Pazzi's statement is clear: all the high ideals in the world – the human person as God's image, belief in God's unity, and the love of neighbours – count for little until they are turned into habits of action that become habits of the heart. We can all recall moments of insight or epiphany when we suddenly understood what life is about, what greatness is, and how we would like to live. A day, a week, or at most a year later the inspiration fades and becomes a distant memory and we are left as we were before, unchanged.

Judaism's greatness is that it gave space to both Prophet and Priest, to inspirational figures on the one hand, and on the other, daily routines – the *halachah* – that take exalted visions and turn them into patterns of behaviour that reconfigure the brain and change how we feel and who we are.

One of the most unusual passages I have ever read about Judaism written by a non-Jew occurs in William Rees-Mogg's book on macro-economics, *The Reigning Error.*[4] Rees-Mogg (1928-2012) was a financial journalist who became editor of *The Times*, chairman of the Arts Council and vice-chairman of the BBC. Religiously he was a committed Catholic.

He begins the book with a completely unexpected paean of praise for halachic Judaism. He explains his reason for doing so. Inflation, he says, is a disease of inordinacy, a failure of discipline, in this case in relation to money. What makes Judaism unique, he continues, is its legal system. This has been wrongly criticised by Christians as drily legalistic. In fact, Jewish law was essential for Jewish survival because it "provided a standard by which action could be tested, a law for the regulation of conduct, a focus for loyalty and a boundary for the energy of human nature."

All sources of energy, most notably nuclear energy, need some form of containment. Without this, they become dangerous. Jewish law has always acted as a container for the spiritual and intellectual energy of the Jewish people. That energy "has not merely exploded or been dispersed; it has been harnessed as a continuous power." What Jews have, he argues, modern economies lack: a system of self-control that allows economies to flourish without booms and crashes, inflation and recession.

The same applies to leadership. In *Good to Great*, management theorist Jim Collins argues that what the great companies have in common is a *culture of discipline*. In *Great By Choice,* he uses the phrase "the 20-Mile March" meaning that outstanding organisations plan for the marathon, not the sprint. Confidence, he says, "comes not from motivational speeches, charismatic inspiration, wild pep rallies, unfounded optimism, or blind hope."[5] It comes from doing the deed, day after day, year after year. Great companies use disciplines that are specific, methodical and consistent. They encourage their people to be self-disciplined and responsible. They do not over-react to change, be it for good or bad. They keep their eye on the far horizon. Above all, they do not depend on heroic, charismatic

leaders who at best lift the company for a while but do not provide it with the strength-in-depth they need to flourish in the long run.

The classic instance of the principles articulated by Burns, Rees-Mogg and Collins is the transformation that occurred between Ki Tissa and Acharei Mot, between the first Yom Kippur and the second, between Moses' heroic leadership and the quiet, understated priestly discipline of an annual day of repentance and atonement.

Turning ideals into codes of action that shape habits of the heart is what Judaism and leadership are about. Never lose the inspiration of the Prophets, but never lose, either, the routines that turn ideals into acts and dreams into achieved reality.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. How is Jewish Law a container for the spiritual and intellectual energy of the Jewish people?
2. Are you surprised that Ben Pazzi's principle is viewed as the greatest in the Torah, or does it make sense to you?
3. How can you find inspiration in consistent, daily ritual and routine?

NOTES

1. See Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Oakland, Calif.: University of California Press, 1978), 246ff.
2. James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper, 1978), 454.
3. The passage is cited in the Introduction to the commentary HaKotev to *Ein Yaakov*, the collected aggadic passages of the Talmud. It is also quoted by Maharal in *Netivot Olam, Ahavat Re'a* 1.
4. William Rees-Mogg, *The Reigning Error: The Crisis of World Inflation* (London: Hamilton, 1974), 9–13.
5. Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001); Great by Choice (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 55.

Put a Little Love in Your Heart

Perhaps one of the most famous verses in the Torah is, "Love your neighbor as yourself."(Vayikra 19:18) This is not an isolated instruction; it comes as the concluding statement at the end of a list of commandments, all designed to create harmony, to create a just, functional, perhaps even utopian society.

In his comments on this verse, Rashi notes that Rabbi Akiva stated that this is "a great principle of the Torah," a defining principle - if not the defining principle of Judaism.

Far more often than not, Rashi draws upon rabbinic tradition without citing the author of a particular teaching. In this case, though, not only does Rashi inform us that this is the great principle of the Torah, but he also goes farther than is his usual practice, and quotes Rabbi Akiva as the formulator of this opinion. Certainly, Rabbi Akiva is one of our greatest sages, but why, specifically in this instance, does Rashi feel that the citation must be included?

While Rabbi Akiva himself is generally (universally?) remembered as one of the most saintly, holy, caring individuals in our history, there is an uncomfortable aspect of his biography that gives us pause: the tragic deaths of thousands of his students, deaths which the Talmud attributes to a lack of love, honor and mutual respect among them.

> *Rabbi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of disciples, from Gevat to Antipatris; and all of them died in one period of time, because they did not treat each other with respect. (Talmud Bavli Yevamot 62a)*

While in general it may be unfair to judge parents for the behavior of their child or a teacher for the behavior or accomplishments of his or her students, nonetheless the "disconnect" between this teacher and his students causes us no small degree of wonder, and perhaps a degree of worry. How could such a great teacher formulate such a great principle, yet fail to transmit the message to his students?

We may approach this problem by first examining the reaction of one of Rabbi Akiva's primary students[1] to this principle:

> *'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Rabbi Akiva said, 'This is the great principle of the Torah.' Ben Azzai said,"'This is the book of the generations of man[2] [on the day God created man, He made him in the likeness of God]" (Bereishit 5:1) - this is an even greater principle. (Sifra Kedoshim parasha 2 perek 4:12)[3]*

For Rabbi Shimon Ben Azzai, the larger principle that informs all of Jewish thought is that each and every human being is created in the image of God, and therefore deserving of love, respect, and reverence. In Ben Azzai's view, if we remain cognizant of the image of God inherent in every human being, we will necessarily treat others with love and respect.[4] Thus, in Ben Azzai's opinion, his own principle subsumes that of his teacher and colleague Rabbi Akiva: Loving one's neighbor would be a natural consequence of recognizing the divinity of every other person. Rabbi Akiva's principle becomes redundant if Ben Azzai's principle is scrupulously obeyed.

From Ben Azzai's comment, we begin to understand what at least one of Rabbi Akiva's students thought was an unfortunate limitation of his great teacher's principle: What if a person is an ascetic, and holds himself up to impossible standards of deprivation, self-criticism or harshness? Would he be justified to treat others as he treats himself? To phrase this more cynically, would the principle of loving one's neighbor as oneself give license to the masochist to be a sadist?[5] Ben Azzai's principle circumvents this problem: Rather than using the individual as the benchmark for how others should be treated, Ben Azzai stressed the need for an objective, Divine benchmark for interpersonal relations.

Something had gone terribly wrong; Rabbi Akiva lost 24,000 students, but he did not despair. He started again, but this time he focused on a much smaller group of disciples - five students, to be precise. It is from these students that Torah spread; it is they who transmitted the legacy of Rabbi Akiva.

> *The world remained desolate **until R. Akiva came** to our masters in the south and taught Torah to R. Meir, R. Yehudah, R. Yossi, R. Shimon [bar Yochai] and R. Elazar b. Shammua; and it was they who revived the Torah at that time. (Talmud Bavli Y'vamot 62b)*

The phrase "until R. Akiva came" is used many times in rabbinic literature; in fact, it is used twice as many times in reference to R' Akiva as it is regarding all other sages combined. This is the only instance in which the phrase is descriptive: It is not a general statement, along the lines of "until he came up with the idea;" rather, it describes an actual relocation - he came to the south of Israel and began to teach his new students there. One may theorize that whenever this phrase is used, it refers to a teaching Rabbi Akiva imparted to his new students in the south. These particular teachings were aimed at insuring that his new

students would be emotionally sophisticated, sensitive and kind, and avoid the mistakes that led to the demise of his earlier followers.

> *As it was taught: Shimon HaAmsuni (others state that it was Nehemiah HaAmsuni) interpreted every 'et' in the Torah, but when he came to the verse, "Thou shalt fear [et] the Lord thy God," he desisted. Said his disciples to him, 'Master, what is to happen with all the instances of the word 'et' which you have interpreted?' He replied: "Just as I received reward for interpreting [them], so will I receive reward for desisting." **Until R. Akiva came** and taught: 'Thou shalt fear [et] the Lord thy God:' [the addition of the word 'et' teaches us that this fear] includes (students of) scholars. (Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 57a)*

Rabbi Akiva taught that students of Torah are deserving of respect, and their honor is a part of the awe and fear we have towards God Himself. We can easily read this as an addendum to his glorious teaching that one must love one's neighbor as oneself. Additionally, we may surmise that this may have been Rabbi Akiva's way of anticipating or responding to the critique that his "great principle of Torah" leaves a loophole for the person who mistreats themself to treat their fellow students with disrespect.[6] A second teaching of Rabbi Akiva may address this issue even more directly.

> *Two people are travelling on a journey [far from civilization], and one has a pitcher of water. If both drink, they will [both] die, but if one only drinks, he can reach civilization. Ben P'tura taught: It is better that both should drink and die, rather than that one should behold his companion's death. **Until R. Akiva came** and taught: [The verse] 'That thy brother may live with you' (Vayikra 25:36) teaches us: Your life takes precedence over his life. (Talmud Bavli, Bava Metziah 62a)[7]*

We must care for others, but when push comes to proverbial shove, one's own life must take precedence. This case uses the extreme situation to teach both sides of Rabbi Akiva's underlying principles: We must love others as we love ourselves - care for them and respect them at all times - but in order to do so, we must love ourselves, treat ourselves with dignity and care. The fact that Rabbi Akiva had to stress the idea of self-preservation and self-respect indicates that this was not only a law, but a position his students needed to hear. Rabbi Akiva, who believed passionately in the value of life just as he believed passionately in the value of altruism, could not accept the notion that altruism might cause the death of both travelers in the desert. He had seen enough death in his lifetime, and taught his students that if you can walk out of the desert alive, that becomes your **obligation**.[8]

Did Rabbi Akiva succeed in breaking the vicious cycle and raising a different type of student? Close examination of the words and deeds of his "new students" proves that he most certainly did - but in order to fully appreciate Rabbi Akiva's pedagogic success, we are forced to take a slight detour.

Rabbi Akiva's philosophy regarding interpersonal relationships is perhaps most clearly illustrated in his halachic rulings regarding marriage. As one of the most important and primary relationships in a person's life, Rabbi Akiva was quite concerned that husband and wife live in tranquility, in harmony, in love. For this reason, Rabbi Akiva's rulings regarding divorce were relatively lenient.

The scholars who preceded him were divided on the question of legitimate grounds for divorce: While Beit Shammai understood that

the Torah would only permit divorce in cases of infidelity, Beit Hillel opined that a man may divorce his wife even if she burns his food (and it is my understanding that it is only his food, and not hers or anyone else's, which is ruined, indicating aggression, spite and hatred).[9] We may assume that Beit Hillel's relative leniency is based on an understanding that if this couple is already involved in a contentious relationship, there is no need to wait for the relationship to deteriorate to actual infidelity. And yet, Rabbi Akiva goes one considerable step further, stating that a man may divorce his wife even on the grounds that he has found another woman who is "*na'ah mimenah*"- more beautiful or more pleasant (or perhaps more suitable). While on the one hand it may strike us as outrageous that a wife can be "sent packing" because her lecherous husband has found a newer model with less "mileage," Rabbi Akiva seems exceptionally sensitive to the concern that this relationship should be based on love, mutual respect, and attraction. In fact, in a separate, apparently related teaching, Rabbi Akiva speaks out against the "old time rabbis" who advocated that wives should refrain from making themselves look attractive during those times that they are forbidden to have marital relations with their husbands. Rabbi Akiva permitted married women to beautify themselves as they saw fit, and did not limit physical attractiveness between spouses as a function of physical intimacy.

> *The early Sages ruled that she must not rouge nor paint nor adorn herself in colorful garments while she is a niddah;* ***until R. Akiva came*** *and taught: If so, you make her repulsive to her husband, with the result that he will divorce her! (Talmud Bavli Shabbat 64b)*

Here is another instance where the phrase "until R. Akiva came" is used. If we are correct in our thesis, this is another instance in which Rabbi Akiva taught his new students to be sensitive to feelings, to legislate in favor of love and attraction. The same Rabbi Akiva who permitted the husband with a straying eye to divorce his wife, spoke out against an earlier rabbinic ruling that he feared might make wives unattractive to their husbands. Rabbi Akiva spoke boldly, in order to insure that halacha would never provide the reason for a husband's eye to stray.[10]

Rabbi Akiva further stressed the importance of a person marrying an appropriate spouse in order to avoid the pitfalls of a deteriorated relationship:

> *A man who marries a woman who is not an appropriate for him breaks five different negative commandments of the Torah: "Do not take revenge," (Vayikra 19:18) "Do not bear a grudge," (ibid., 18) "Do not hate your fellow man in your heart," (ibid., 17) "Love your neighbor as yourself," (ibid. 18) and "Your fellow man shall live with you." (ibid. 25:36). Because he hates her, he hopes that she will die, and he abstains from procreation. (Avot d'Rebbi Natan, version 1, chapter 26)*

This very striking passage is, in fact, the only commentary by Rabbi Akiva himself on his "great principle of Torah." He teaches that in a relationship devoid of love, many other Torah laws are unavoidably trampled upon. The great principle is most evident in this passage, which outlines a destructive progression that begins with a loveless marriage: A cascade of negative emotions leads to hurtful thoughts and, eventually, destructive actions.

With this information, and against the backdrop of Rabbi Akiva's application of his "great principle of Torah," we may now return to our earlier question: Did Rabbi Akiva succeed in communicating this idea to his students?

Rabbi Yehuda, one of Rabbi Akiva's five new students, makes a very similar application of law, and warns of the price to be paid for a relationship that has deteriorated. Both the words and the logic he employs should seem quite familiar:

> *If a man takes a wife, has relations with her, and comes to hate her..." Rabbi Yehuda says,[11] ...from this we see that if a person breaks an easy commandment, he will eventually break a more serious commandment. If he does not obey the commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself," he will come to violate the commandments "Do not take revenge" and "Do not bear a grudge," [Vayikra 19:18], and the commandment, "Do not hate your fellow man in your heart," [Vayikra 19:17], the commandment "Love your neighbor as yourself," and "Your brother shall live along with you." [Vayikra 25:36], and he will eventually reach the point of bloodshed. (Sifrei Devarim, Ki Tetze section 235)*

Regarding a totally different sort of interpersonal relationship, the Mishna in Nedarim grapples with the problem of a person who made a vow disowning a friend from his assets. The Mishna discusses the conditions that might annul such a vow (called "opening" the vow), and Rabbi Meir's opinion on the matter also strikes a familiar chord:

> *Rabbi Meir also said: An opening [for annulment of a vow] may be given based on what is written in the Torah, so we say to him: 'Had you known that you were violating [the injunctions], "Do not take revenge," "Do not bear a grudge," "Love your neighbor as yourself," and "Your brother shall live with you," or that he might become poor and you would not be able to provide for him, [would you have made this vow]?' Should he reply, 'Had I known that it is so, I would not have vowed," he is absolved. (Mishna Nedarim 9:4 Talmud Bavli 65b)*

The pattern that emerges is unmistakable: Rabbi Akiva's application of the great principle of "Love your neighbor as yourself" to the area of spousal relationships was applied by two of his new students - first, Rabbi Yehudah in the matter of divorce, and next by Rabbi Meir, to help heal a different sort of rift between two people.

The Sifrei records a similar teaching in a third area of interpersonal relationships:

> *"If one person hates another and lies in wait and attacks him:" From this we learn that if a person breaks an easy commandment he will eventually break a more serious commandment. If he breaks the commandment to "Love your neighbor as yourself" he will eventually come to break the commandments "Do not take revenge" and "Do not bear a grudge," [Vayikra 19:18] and the commandment "Do not hate your fellow man in your heart" [Vayikra 19:17], and the commandment "Your brother shall live along with you" [Vayikra 25:36], until he reaches the point of bloodshed.*

This passage deals with hatred which may lead to murder; once again, there is a downward spiral, and along the way commandments are trampled. Again, Rabbi Akiva's teaching is implemented, although this specific teaching is not attributed to a particular scholar. However, the Talmud states that anonymous teachings in the Sifrei are the work of yet another of Rabbi Akiva's "new" students: Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai:

R. Johanan said: [The author of] unattributed Mishnah is R. Meir, of unattributed Tosefta is R. Nehemiah; of an unattributed [dictum in the] Sifra is R. Yehudah, and in the Sifrei, R. Shimon; and all are taught according to the views of R. Akiva. (Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 86a)

Thus, we see that three of his Rabbi Akiva's new students heard and internalized their teacher's lesson, and applied his great principle of Torah regarding the centrality of building and maintaining loving relationships in their own teachings.

A fourth student, Rabbi Elazar ben Shammua, taught this same principle of love and respect in a more succinct formulation:

R. Elazar b. Shammua' said: Let the honor of your disciple be as dear to you as your own, and the honor of your colleague as [important] as the reverence for your teacher, and the reverence for your teacher as [vital] as your fear of Heaven. (Mishna Avot 4:12)

The emphasis Rabbi Elazar places on honoring teachers, colleagues and students reflects Rabbi Akiva's teachings; we may say that this Mishna is a true expression of Rabbi Akiva's legacy, as it is expressed by one of his new students.[12] Another lengthy midrash recounts that Rabbi Elazar ben Shammua's kindness and concern extended even to non-Jews, a fact that eventually saved all the Jews of a certain province.[13]

It seems clear that Rabbi Akiva was quite successful with his new students. He taught them sensitivity, he taught them kindness, and he taught them love. He taught them that love of our fellow man is truly the central teaching in the Torah. Every aspect of Torah law should be impacted by this love; every aspect of our society evolves from the great principle of love.

The Rabbi Akiva who arrived in the south and taught 5 great students was a Rabbi Akiva who himself had internalized the lesson of his earlier students' tragic deaths. When teaching his new students, he did not leave it to chance that they would understand his message; he drilled it home over and over, and was explicit and specific in teaching them. His pedagogic method, and his diligence in delivering this educational message to his new students, are preserved in another passage that tells the story of the earlier students' deaths, with slight variations:

R. Akiva said: If you have raised disciples in your youth, raise disciples in your old age, because you do not know which will survive, these or those, or whether they will be equally successful.' R. Akiva had twelve thousand disciples from Acco to Antipatris, and all died in the same period. Why? Because they looked grudgingly on each other. Eventually he raised seven disciples: R. Meir, R. Yehudah, R. Yossi, R. Shimon, R. Elazar b. Shammua', R. Yohanan the Cobbler, and R. Eliezer b. Yaacov. Others say: R. Yehudah, R. Nehemiah, R. Meir, R. Yossi, R. Shimon b. Yohai, R. Hanina b. Hakinai, and R. Yohanan the Cobbler. [Rabbi Akiva] ***said to them: My sons, the previous ones died only because they begrudged one another [the knowledge of] the Torah; see to it that you do not act as they did.*** *They arose and filled the whole of Eretz Israel with Torah.(Bereishit Rabbah 61:3)*

Any other man who had lost so many students, whose entire life's work was eradicated, would have given up. Rabbi Akiva had begun

teaching at a relatively late stage of life, and he might easily have felt that all was for naught. Instead, he started again. He found the best minds around, and he filled their hearts with love.

A postscript is taught in the name of the *Chidushai HaRim*.[14] While it is true that law follows Rabbi Akiva, in our inner hearts we should feel the altruism of Ben Petura.[15] And even when we must value and take care of ourselves, the love for our fellow man should still be strong in our hearts.

Many generations later, in the holocaust era, another man saw the same type of destruction witnessed by Rabbi Akiva, though multiplied to impossible numbers. He was a young hassidic yeshiva student named Eli Wiesel, and many years later, he wrote about his love for Rabbi Akiva:

> *I love Rabbi Akiva. I love him for his humanity, for his passion for study. I love him for his love of the Jewish people. His argument with Ben P'tura on the duties and obligations of friendship? His decision teaches us something important. When the surviving friend emerges from the desert, he is no longer alone; he will have to live two lives, his own and that of his dead friend. (Sages and Dreamers, Eli Wiesel page 240)*[16]

For more in depth study see: http://arikahn.blogspot.co.il/2016/05/parshiot-acharei-motkedoshim.html

1. Ben Azzai was a senior student and perhaps could be called "junior partner" of Rabbi Akiva, see Talmud Bavli Baba Batra 158b, Jerusalem Talmud Rosh Hashana 1:1.
2. Often the Talmud makes the assumption that the reader is familiar with biblical texts, and will cite the start of a text when the object of interpretation is in fact the second part of the verse.
3. This teaching is found in three places, the Sifra which is the halakhic midrash to Vayikra, Bereishit Raba and the Jerusalem Talmud in Nedarim 9:4. Only in Bereishit - when commenting on the verse in Bereishit does Ben Azzai come first, and then Rabbi Akiva's position is mentioned. In the other two instances Rabbi Akiva is cited first, and the Ben Azzai is cited as introducing a greater principle. It is possible that Ben Azzai saw himself as not arguing, but expanding the teaching of his master.
4. It is possible that Rabbi Akiva concurred. In Pirkei Avot 3:14, Rabbi Akiva says: "Beloved is man for he was created in [God's] image." It sounds as if the reason we are worthy of love is due to the image of God which we possess.
5. This legal lacuna was pointed out by R' Yaakov of Orleans (a member of the Tosafot school who was martyred in London). See R' Hayim Paltiel, Vayikra 19:18.
6. See R' Pinchas Horowitz's commentary, Sefer haMiknah Kiddushin 57a.
7. The context of this passage deals with helping someone in financial need, but the language of this verse, "v'chai" - suggests a broader application of saving lives.
8. Rav Yakov Emden ruled that as long as one life was preserved Rabbi Akiva's teaching would be fulfilled. He felt that the owner had the right to keep the water or give it to the other person, as long as one person was saved.
9. See Mishna Gittin 9:10 (found in Talmud Bavli Gittin 90a): Beit Shammai say: A man should not divorce his wife unless he has found her guilty of unseemly conduct, as it says, "...because he has found some unseemly thing about her." [Devarim 24] Beit Hillel, however, say [that he may divorce her] even if she has merely spoiled his food, since it says, "...because he has found some unseemly thing about her." [ibid.] R. Akiva says, [he may divorce her] even if he finds another woman more beautiful than she is, as it says, "If it comes to pass that if she finds no favor in his eyes."
10. This connection was noted by the Netziv in his commentary Meromei Sadeh, Shabbat 64b.
11. I am assuming it is still Rabbi Yehuda speaking in the text.
12. This emphasis of respect is found in another passage where Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua teaches that if one comes late for a lecture they should not awkwardly make their way to their seats, if this will cause discomfort to those already sitting see Talmud Bavli Sotah 39a and Rashi's comments. His disciples asked R. Eleazar b. Shammua, 'How have you prolonged your life? He replied: Never have I made use of a Synagogue as a short cut, nor stepped over the heads of the holy people, nor lifted up my hands [as a kohen] without first uttering a benediction.'
13. Kohelet Rabbah 11:1. R. Eleazar b. Shammua was walking on the rocks by the sea, when he saw a ship which was tossed about in the water suddenly sink with all on board. He noticed a man sitting on a plank of the ship [carried] from wave to wave until he stepped ashore. Being naked he hid himself among the rocks by the sea. It happened to be the time for the Israelites to go up to Jerusalem for the Festival. He said to them, 'I belong to the descendants of Esau, your brother; give me a little clothing wherewith to cover my nakedness because the sea stripped me bare and nothing was saved with me.' They retorted, ' So may all your people be stripped bare!' He raised his eyes and saw R. Eleazar who was walking among them; he exclaimed, 'I observe that you are an old and respected man of your people, and you know the respect due to your fellow-creatures. So help me, and give me a garment wherewith to cover my nakedness because the sea stripped me bare.' R. Eleazar b. Shammua was wearing seven robes; he took

one off and gave it to him. He also led him to his house, provided him with food and drink, gave him two hundred dinars, drove him fourteen Persian miles, and treated him with great honor until he brought him to his home. Some time later the wicked emperor died, and they elected this man king in his stead, and he decreed concerning that province that all the men were to be killed and all the women taken as spoil. They said to R. Eleazar b. Shammua, 'Go and intercede for us.' He told them 'You know that this government does nothing without being paid.' They said to him, ' Here are four thousand dinars; take them and go and intercede for us.' He took them and went and stood by the gate of the royal palace. He said to [the guards], 'Go, tell the king that a Jew is standing at the gate, and wishes to greet the king.' The king ordered him to be brought in. On beholding him the king descended from his throne and prostrated himself before him. He asked him, 'What is my master's business here, and why has my master troubled to come here? ' He replied, ' That you should have mercy upon this province and annul this decree.' The king asked him, ' Is there any falsehood written in the Torah? ' 'No,' was the reply; and he said to him, 'Is it not written in your Torah, An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of the Lord (Deut. 23:4)? What is the reason? Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way (ib. 5). It is also written, Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite, for he is thy brother (ib. 8); and am I not a descendant of Esau, your brother, but they did not treat me with kindness! And whoever transgresses the Torah incurs the penalty of death.' R. Eleazar b. Shammua replied to him, 'Although they are guilty towards you, forgive them and have mercy upon them.' He said to him, 'You know that this government does thing without being paid.' He told him, ' I have with me four thousand dinars; take them and have mercy upon the people. ' He said to him, ' These four thousand dinars are presented to you in exchange for the two hundred which you gave me, and the whole province will be spared for your sake in return for the food and drink with which you provided me. Go also into my treasury and take seventy robes of honor in return for the robe you gave me, and go in peace to your people whom I forgive for your sake.' They applied to him the text, CAST THY BREAD UPON THE WATERS.

14. This teaching of Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter (known as the Chiddushei Harim), is reported by his grandson Pinchas Menachem (Elazar) Yostman in his Siftai Tzadik Parashat Kedoshim section 11.
15. Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser - the Malbim in his commentary to Vayikra 19:18, 45 speculates that Ben Azzai agrees with Ben Petura.
16. As it says "His brother shall live with him."

Effective Rebuke

> *You shall surely rebuke your fellow man, and you shall not bear a sin over him. (19:17)*

All Jews are responsible for each other. Therefore, if a Jew sees another committing a sin, he must rebuke him and set him straight. But how does one rebuke another Jew? This is a very difficult thing to do. In fact, it is one of the most difficult *mitzvos* to perform properly.

The final words of the commandment are "*velo sisa alav cheit*, and you shall not bear a sin over him." What exactly does this mean? Rashi explains that if you embarrass the person you are rebuking, you are committing a sin. This is an important guideline for the *mitzvah* of giving rebuke. It must be done carefully, discreetly and oh so gently. Otherwise, you will embarrass him. Then you will not only have failed in your rebuke, but you will also have committed a very grave sin.

Rav Gedaliah Schorr suggests a further interpretation based on a variant translation of the words *velo sisa alav cheit*. They can be read as "do not raise up the sin over him." Do not magnify the sin and minimize the person.

If you see someone doing a sin, do not place the emphasis on the magnitude of the sin. Do not say, "How could you do such a terrible thing?" You are raising up the sin over him, dwarfing him by the magnitude of what he has done. You are making the person feel about two inches tall. This is not the way to offer rebuke. It is offensive, and it is also almost guaranteed to be ineffective. Better to place the emphasis on the person and say, "How could a person such as you do such a thing?" Better to raise him up over the sin, to show him that to do such a thing is beneath him, that he is too great to do such a thing. This is the way to rebuke with genuine kindness and lasting effect.

A rabbi was once asked to be guest speaker in a neighboring town, and he chose rebuke as his topic. After speaking about the importance of giving rebuke properly, he told a story.

"I do not know this story firsthand," he began. "But I've heard many times, and I believe its is true. The Chafetz Chaim had a *yeshivah* in the Polish town of Radin. In those days, during the early part of the 20th century, there were many pressures on *yeshivah* boys. Some of their peers were leaving their faith and seeking greener pastures in socialism, secular Zionism or just plain secularism. I suppose it was inevitable that some of the boys in the *yeshivos* would also be affected, that a tiny number of them would do things no *yeshivah* boy would do today.

"One of the boys in the Chafetz Chaim's *yeshivah* was caught smoking on Shabbos. The Chafetz Chaim was told about it, and he summoned the boy to his room. The boy stayed in the Chafetz Chaim's room for about two minutes, and afterward, he kept Shabbos scrupulously.

"Can you imagine what the Chafetz Chaim's rebuke must have been like? Ah, if only we could have an inkling of what went on in that room for those two minutes! What did the Chafetz Chaim say to this boy? It would be like a beacon of light for us. I'm sure all of us would love to know what he said. But we don't. And so we just have to try and do the best we can."

After the rabbi finished speaking, a man came over to him. His face was tear stained. "Rabbi, I can tell you what the Chafetz Chaim said to that boy," he declared. "You see, I was that boy."

The rabbi was stunned. "Please tell me," he whispered.

"When I was called to the Chafetz Chaim's room," he said, "I was terrified. What could I say to the great *tzaddik*? How could I justify smoking on Shabbos? And right in his *yeshivah*! I couldn't even justify it to myself. It was one of those rash and foolish things young people often do without thinking. I walked into his room, and there, he was, his holy face distorted in a grimace of pain. He walked over to me, his head barely reaching to my chest, and he took my hand in his. 'Shabbos,' he said softly, and he began to weep. After a minute, he looked up at me and said it again, 'Shabbos.' His hot tears dripped onto my hands, and the sound of his weeping penetrated my heart. That was all it took. Two minutes of the Chafetz Chaim's pain."

The Chafetz Chaim did not put this boy down. He did not berate him or belittle him. He gently but powerfully impressed on him the sacred nature of Shabbos. That was the most effective rebuke he could have given him.

Rabbi Akiva's Principle

One of Rabbi Akiva's most famous sayings is, "*Ve'ahavta lereiacha kamocha*. Love your neighbor as you do yourself. This is a fundamental principle of the Torah." This *mitzvah* is one of the pillars of the entire Torah. We find a similar thought expressed by Hillel. The Talmud relates (*Shabbos* 31a) that a prospective gentile convert to Judaism asked Hillel to teach him the entire Torah "while standing on one foot." Hillel replied, "Do not do to others that which is hateful to you. This is the essence of Torah. All the rest is explanation."

It seems to me that Rabbi Akiva was most suited to speak about the importance and centrality of this *mitzvah*. Rabbi Akiva was a great *rosh yeshivah* with many thousands of students, and he experienced a shattering tragedy. All of his twenty-four thousand students died during the Omer period between Pesach and Shavuos. It is an incredible number, a number that fails to penetrate the consciousness even in our day of huge

yeshivos.

How would one of us have dealt with such a blow? What would we have done if all twenty-four thousand ¾ twenty-four thousand! ¾ of our students had died in one fell swoop due to some character flaw, a catastrophe that inevitably must have reflected somewhat negatively on their *rosh yeshivah*? First, we would, of course, have to deal with a serious bout of depression and despondency. And if we managed to get over that, we would probably retire with a broken heart.

What did Rabbi Akiva do? The Talmud tells us (*Yevamos* 62b), “When Rabbi Akiva’s students died and the world was desolate, he went to the south of Eretz Yisrael and started over again!”

Rabbi Akiva clearly had unbelievable resilience. No matter how great a disaster he suffered, he would find a silver lining in the darkest cloud. He would discover something positive, something to give him new hope, and this would give him the strength and the confidence to start all over again. “All is not lost!” he would exult when he had lost just about everything.

Rabbi Akiva lived through the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*. The Talmud relates (*Makkos* 24a) that several Sages were walking past the ruined *Beis Hamikdash* and saw a fox emerging from the site of the Holy of Holies. They all burst into tears, except for Rabbi Akiva, who began to laugh. “Why do you laugh?” they asked him. He replied, “Because if the prophecy of destruction has come true so literally, then the prophecy of redemption will also come true literally.”

This ability to find the glimmer of light in the deepest darkness, to find the positive, the spark of hope, in the worst of times, made Rabbi Akiva singularly attuned to the *mitzvah* of loving others. He – more than anyone else – was able to see the worth in all people and love them for it.

The Baal Shem Tov give us an additional insight into the concept of loving your neighbor “as you do yourself.” When a person gets up in the morning and takes stock of himself, he thinks, “I am basically a good person. I have my faults and foibles; I am not perfect. But I am more good than bad.” This, the Baal Shem Tov says, is how we must evaluate our neighbor. He is basically good. I can overlook his faults.

The Great Rule of Torah

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

In this week's Torah portion, we find the famous imperative, "Love your fellow as yourself, I am God" (Leviticus 19:18). Rashi (on Torat Kohanim) cites Rebbe Akiva, who said of this mitzvah, "This is a great principle in Torah" *(Zeh klal gadol baTorah)*. From these few words, a number of questions come to mind:

1. Why does the verse, "Love your neighbor as yourself" conclude with the words, "I am God"? (This question can be asked every time a verse concludes with the words, "I am God," but for now, we will focus on this verse.) The implication of this statement is, "I am God who commands you to do this mitzvah." Surely we know by now,

more than halfway through the Torah, that we perform mitzvot because they are the will of God! What does this statement mean?

2. What does Rebbe Akiva mean when he says, "This is a great principle in Torah"? Since when do our Sages rate the mitzvot?
3. Rashi, in many other places, explains that the statement, "I am God" comes to teach us that God is "*ne'eman l'shalem s'khar*" - that He is believed to pay reward. Why does Rashi use the word "*ne'eman,*" which implies belief, instead of the seemingly more appropriate word "*batuach*" (sure)? Divinely-allotted reward and punishment is not dependent on our belief; it is guaranteed! Why not say so?

Maimonides suggests an idea that will help us resolve these difficulties. He states that two people can perform exactly the same mitzvah, yet be granted entirely different amounts of Heavenly reward. How is this fair? Maimonides explains that one person may have performed the mitzvah with great difficulty, whereas the other person may not have been challenged by it at all. A simple example is with the mitzvah of *tzedaka* (charity). A rich person who gives a dollar to a needy individual is judged quite differently than a person who is struggling to get by, yet still manages to scrape together a dollar to give to charity. We are rewarded according to the level of effort we put into our performance of mitzvot and the level of difficulty this entails.

Now we can answer our third question. Rashi says that God is *believed* to pay reward, rather than saying He is guaranteed to do so, because we must *believe* that God takes into consideration the effort we put into our mitzvot. Although the actions themselves do have inherent value, the level of difficulty for us in performing them leads to differing levels of spiritual reward. There is no way we could ever empirically compute this - so we must believe that God knows how to combine all the variables and reward us fairly.

HUMBLE AND GREAT

In order to answer our two remaining questions, we must explore the accepted concept among philosophers that love can exist between people only when they have many things in common. The Tiferet Shmuel (vol. 1) explains that, based on this idea, one might mistakenly think that it would be difficult for great leaders and scholars to love common, ordinary people. If love depends on similarity, how could a scholar who spends his days delving into the intricacies of Jewish texts possibly cultivate love for the average person? What does an accomplished scholar have in common with a ditch-digger?

Although it is true that common ground helps people build relationships, Judaism rejects the hierarchical underpinnings of this idea. The Torah says of Moses that he was the greatest prophet who ever lived (Deut. 34:10), and also that he was the humblest person on the face of the earth (Numbers 12:3). These seem like contradictory statements. Didn't Moses realize he towered over everyone else? How could he be humble?

The Tiferet Shmuel explains that, although Moses recognized his unique capabilities, he viewed everyone within the context of their circumstances. When meeting an average person, Moses would think, "Perhaps the five minutes of Torah learning that this water carrier squeezes into the end of his exhausting day are more precious to God than all my achievements!" In this way, Moses maintained his humility.

This is exactly Maimonides' point that we mentioned earlier - that God evaluates the effort it takes to perform a mitzvah. There is no way for us to know whose effort is worth more or less. Every learned person must try to

adopt Moses's attitude of humility, and think, "Perhaps this simple, ordinary person is actually greater than me in God's eyes. Perhaps his effort is worth more."

The Tiferet Shmuel thus understands the command, "Love your fellow as yourself," to be addressing the leaders and scholars. God tells them, "Love everyone - even average people - as yourself." If the scholar claims that such love is impossible because of the vast differences between him and the average person, God concludes the command with the words, "I am God" - in other words, "I am the one who assigns reward." Why should the scholar assume that he is on a higher level than the average person? The average person might be equal or greater because of the effort he invested!

This answers our first question. The verse, "Love your fellow as yourself" does not conclude with the words, "I am God" in order to identify God as the source of the mitzvah. Rather, these words teach us that God can be trusted and believed to reward people according to their effort. This also answers our second question. Rebbe Akiva is not rating or ranking this mitzvah. Rather, his statement must be read as follows: *Zeh klal... Gadol b'Torah.* In other words, "This principle [is intended for those who are] great in Torah"! The principle "Love your fellow as yourself" is especially relevant to those great scholars who might be tempted to think that they have little in common with the average person.

May we all be blessed to make a shift in our thinking and approach each person we meet with the thought, "How would I fare if I were in his shoes?" May we merit to see the atmosphere of camaraderie and love that will arise from this perspective, and may we thus deserve to experience the world coming full circle and returning to its state of paradise.