

February 9th, 2018
24 Shevat 5778

To My Dear Students,

Our Torah Portion, *Mishpatim*, teaches that when one lends another money he performs a great kindness. Yet, for the Torah, this lending is not sufficient to fulfill the commandment to help another. We read, "When you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you, do not act toward him as a creditor; do not lay interest upon him. If you take your fellow's garment as security until sunset, you shall return it to him. For it alone is his clothing, it is his garment for his skin. In what should he lie down? So it will be if he cries out to Me, I shall listen, for I am compassionate."

Rashi comments that if the lender is aware that the borrower is temporarily not able to repay the loan, the lender should not burden him and embarrass the borrower. Nor should the lender, upon agreeing to help, make the borrower feel guilty or uncomfortable. Nor should he give grudgingly and make the borrower understand that the lender is giving halfheartedly. There is more to the act itself than just acting. Kindness must accompany the act itself.

The essence of our relationship with G-d is to treat one another with kindness. This is why Hillel identified Judaism's fundamental principle as, "Love your neighbor as yourself." He could have easily selected the verse recited twice daily, "You shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart." But instead he chose the obligation to love one's neighbor as the heart of Judaism. Of course, kindness is a foundation of love.

Two Temples once stood on the heights of Jerusalem. Each was destroyed for the committing of a different sin. The first was leveled because of *avoda zara*, idolatry, the rejecting of G-d; the second was razed because of *sinat chinam*, hatred and jealousy between Jews. The First Temple lay in ruins for only a few years. G-d was ready to forgive and allow it to be rebuilt because the sin that brought about its destruction was against Him. The Second Temple's destruction was the result of people treating one another unkindly. That destruction has lasted from 70 c.e. to this very day.

A bumper sticker was once popular. It read: "Practice random acts of kindness." Essayist Bob Brody writes that we need "intentional, not random," acts of kindness; we need "not flashes of empathy and altruism" but consistent and purposeful acts of kindness that are woven into our natures and characters.

All this comes to teach that the reality of Divinity is witnessed in the moral activity of humanity. Addressing G-d is important, but it is more important to address the needs of human beings not only with the act itself, but also with kindness as its motivation. That is the ideal meaning of religion; that is the essence of Judaism. For G-d's kindness is not simply to be *believed*; G-d kindness is to be *behaved*.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Mark S. Miller