

KINDNESS TO MAN OR PRAYING TO G-D?

By Yosef Vogel

Which is a greater Mitzvah. Praying to G-d or showing kindness to man?

Well, one could argue, is not religion all about getting closer to G-d? And if that's the case then praying to G-d would achieve that connection more effectively than being kind to our fellow man.

If we had to sum up religion using just a few words, surely we would incorporate the word G-d.

One of the greatest insights into this dilemma can be found in the opening verses of this week's Torah portion. We are told that G-d paid a visit to Abraham. In the middle of their meeting, Abraham sees three strangers who seem to be in need some food and drink. Abraham has to make a quick decision. He can either seek out these three men and invite them into his home. Or he can continue spending his time with G-d. After all how often does G-d pay a visit.

What would we do?

It is here that we find something quite astonishing. For as the verse continues we learn that Abraham, without any hesitation runs towards these people, whom he does not even know, and shows them outstanding hospitality. Abraham in effect chooses to show kindness to strangers and tells G-d to wait.

It is this story of Abraham - the first Jew - that contains one of the most profound insights into the nature of religion and our connection with G-d. Abraham is teaching all of us - his children - that if one wants to truly get close to G-d, there is only one route. To get closer to G-d, one must show kindness to our fellow man. For it is only by loving those whom G-d loves, that are we sure we are being genuine in our love towards him.

The same test applies in all our relationships. Most times we are so preoccupied with ourselves, that even when we want to show love to someone, we do so on our terms. We are thinking primarily about ourselves and how this relationship satisfies us. We totally forget about what our loved ones really want, since we are thinking primarily about ourselves.

Abraham teaches us that Showing kindness to strangers, people from whom we will never receive anything in return, is what Judaism is all about. It is even more important than a private audience with G-d. It is also precisely for this reason that G-d wanted to spend time with Abraham.

2nd November

Vayeira

Shabbat Begins: 4:17 pm

Shabbat Ends: 5:19 pm