

**Acharai- Kedoshim**

Friday, May 4, 2012

13<sup>th</sup> Iyar**LOVE YOURSELF**

Ok, here's the problem: I'm supposed to love my fellow man. Which means that I should accept my fellow human beings as they are. (That's what love means, right?) But can I -- indeed, should I -- accept my fellow human beings as they are?

Should I accept a malnourished child as she is? Should I accept a drug-addicted teenager, a suicidal spouse or a bigoted friend as he is? If a person I love suffers a lack of something -- whether that something is food, money, knowledge, health, moral integrity or peace of mind -- and whether that person wants to be helped or not -- should I not do everything in my power to fill that lack?

Love is an oxymoron. To truly love someone I have to do two contradictory things: I have to respect him and I have to care for him. If I do not accept him as he is, that means that I do not respect him. It means that I don't really love him -- I love only what I wish to make of him. But to love someone also means that I care for him and desire the best for him. And since very, very few people are the best that they can be, caring for someone means not accepting him as he is, but believing in his potential to be better and doing everything I can to reveal that potential.

I can respect someone. I can care for someone. I can accept a person as s/he is. I can not accept a person as s/he is. But I can't do both at the same time. Love sounds great in principle. In practice, it's impossible.

But I love myself. I'm not unaware of my deficiencies -- indeed, in a certain sense, I am more aware of them than anyone else. I want to improve myself, but I don't think less of myself because I haven't yet done so. I respect myself and I care for myself; I accept myself as I am, while incessantly striving to make myself better than I am. I love myself -- truly, fully, in every sense of the word.

The fact that such love is a logical paradox is irrelevant. It may be impossible to do two opposite things at the same time, but billions of people, myself included, do exactly that. I love myself regardless of whether this love makes sense, regardless of the inherent contradiction it embodies.

That's why the Torah tells us to "Love your fellow as yourself." If you find it impossible to love your fellow -- to both respect him and care for him, to be deeply concerned about his faults and be completely unmindful of them at the same time -- think for a minute about how you love yourself.

4 May

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Shabbat Begins: 8.14 pm

Shabbat Ends: 9.25 pm

Then love your fellow as you love yourself.

*By Yanki Tauber*

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