

## The Two-Way Mirror

By: Rabbi Yanki Tauber

Does G-d care if I cheat on my taxes? Am I going to be a better husband/wife/parent if I keep kosher? Are these the same question?

The 613 *mitzvot* ("commandments") of the Torah are commonly divided into two categories: 1) laws that govern the relationship "between man and G-d" (*bein adam la-makom*); and 2) laws that legislate the proper conduct "between man and his fellow" (*bein adam la-chavero*). Even the Ten Commandments were inscribed on two separate tablets, one containing commandments such as "I am G-d your G-d" and "Remember the day of Shabbat," and the other proclaiming laws like "Do not kill" and "Do not steal."

But is this division a legitimate one? Let us examine the evidence.

On the one hand, we have the aforementioned two tablets (though one still needs to explain how "honor your father and your mother" ended up on the "between man and G-d" side). On the other hand, we have the famous story the Talmud tells about the prospective convert to Judaism who came to Hillel asking to be taught the entire Torah while standing on one foot. "What is hateful to yourself," said Hillel, "do not do to your fellow. This is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary." (But how is putting on *tefillin* a commentary on "Love your fellow"?) There's also the statement by the Zohar that the divine instruction, "I am G-d your G-d... You shall have no other gods beside Me," is the essence of all 613 commandments and prohibitions of the Torah. (Meaning that helping my neighbor shovel his car out of a snowbank proclaims the oneness of G-d and disavows the existence of any other gods beside Him?)

The masters of the mystical wisdom of the Kabbalah insist that, ultimately, there is no essential difference between the Torah's "civil" laws and its so-called "religious" laws. Each *mitzvah*, whether it's visiting the sick or waving a *lulav* on Sukkot, is a facilitator of the flow of desire and gratification between G-d and creation -- a flow that sustains all of the created existence and fulfills the divine intent in creating it in the first place. So a crime against G-d (which causes a disruption in the flow) is a crime against all of His creations; and a crime against a fellow creature is also a crime against G-d (for the same reason). A kindness to a fellow is a kindness to G-d, as it contributes to the realization of His desire in creation; and a positive "personal" relationship with G-d has a positive effect on His relationship with creation as a whole and with each and every citizen of His world.

So why did G-d deliver His Torah to us in two tablets? Maybe it's because He wants us to understand that there are two sides to life. Life is not an uninterrupted spiritual experience, nor is it exclusively a social exercise. Life means dealing with people, but also conversing with oneself; it means meditating and praying, as well as digging neighbors' cars out of snowbanks.

G-d is the absolute oneness, and human life is the endeavor to express His oneness. But true oneness is not uniformity. True oneness tolerates, indeed embraces, various and even opposite particulars. For there is no greater expression of oneness than the ability to see opposites reflected in each other.

28 January | 23 Shevat

**Mishpatim**

Shabbat Begins: 4:27 pm

Shabbat Ends: 5:34 pm

So G-d divided the divinely-ordained blueprint for life into a "between man and G-d" column and a "between man and man" column. And then He granted us the ability to see each side reflected in the other. To see a fellow's needs peering out to us from the pages of our prayerbook. And to see G-d's face smiling to us from a beggar's mumbled gratitude, from the wonder in a child's question, from a loved one's trusting eyes.

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