

WHAT'S THE DEAL BETWEEN MAN & G-D

By: Rabbi Yosef Vogel

KI TAVO

Elul 20, 5772

We all have a wide range of relationships. We interact with many different types of people on a number of levels.

The most important component in any relationship is to clearly understand the type of relationship in which we are engaged. There are personal relationships and professional relationships. Each has its own dynamic and must not be confused. What is appropriate behaviour in one type of relationship can be destructive in another. Indeed, one of the main causes of the problematic relationships we have is due to the lack of clarity as to its exact nature.

Which brings us to the most complex and challenging type of relationship; that of man & G-d.

The probabilities are that for most people there is almost no understanding as to the type of relationship one can have with G-d or indeed if a human being can attempt to have one at all. Besides, a basic component in a relationship is the feedback factor, which in the case of a G-d / man relationship is totally lacking.

It is at this point that I would like to share with you a perplexing statement quoted by *Rashi* in explaining a verse in this week's Torah portion. After the Jew brings the gift of the first fruits to the temple, he implores G-d to bless the Jewish people. *Rashi* comments as follows; "we have done what you decreed upon us, now, you do what is incumbent upon you". This statement seems both highly inappropriate and inconsistent with the conventional view that we should not perform the commandments for the sake of any reward. We should behave as good human beings because we are obliged to do so, without having any ulterior motives. After all, who is man to ask G-d to do anything.

It is with this statement that we can unravel and discover fresh insight into this most complex relationship between man & G-d. Because this relationship is of a highly spiritual nature it is extremely challenging. We don't see G-d, nor hear him. We don't know if He is happy with us, or perhaps He is angry. As a result we do not make any serious attempt in having any relationship with G-d. The truth however is that we as His children are allowed and indeed even encouraged to engage with G-d even as humans relate with each other on the most basic level. True, G-d wants a relationship with his people that is both lofty and altruistic. However, he also profoundly appreciates even a most basic level of relationship based on give and take.

The great Chassidic master *Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev*, on his regular visits to the market place where he would encourage hundreds of Jews including the most estranged and simple - would encourage them to build

7th September

Sedra: **Ki Tavo**

Shabbat Begins: 19.19pm

Shabbat Ends: 20.19pm

relationships with G-d, that were both pure and simple. He explained, that G-d was not looking for a lofty relationship with man, only a pure and honest one. In dealing with G-d, he said, it is not about moving beyond ourselves but about discovering the pure and innocent child that exist inside all of us that has a profound sense of fairness. And it is this sense fairness that G-d wants us to revive and to use to negotiate with him. For this is the part in man where he is one with G-d.

A STAR IS BORN

Every once in a while a shining star is born, making an enormous positive global impact on the world. Although these moments are rare, the continued influence of these great lights radiate uninhibitedly beyond any proximity of time and space.

We use the word greatness too often in describing these extra ordinary people. Yet, how do we measure greatness and what does the word really mean?

In the year 1698 (5458) on the 18th of Elul, in a small town in the Carpathian Mountains a special soul entered this world. A man who would touch the lives of thousands of people in his lifetime and many millions thereafter. The ideas he taught, the stories he told and the experiences he shared continue to inspire young, and old, secular and religious alike, until today.

Who was this man and how did he manage to make such an extraordinary impact on so many people.

The great **phenomenon**'s in life as with great people in history almost always have something very simple that defines them. The complexities of their personalities or the intricacies of their life experiences exist only on the exterior. At the core however it is something pure, simple and powerful that radiates to the outside world. The more pure and simple the **phenomenon**, the greater the impact.

This man possessed something more pure and simple than most others. And it was this something that he shared with thousands of people that changed their lives forever. The **phenomenon** we are talking about is "Love". Not conventional love, but pure love. The kind of love that is selfless. Unadulterated, unconditional and uninhibited. It is so pure that nothing can stand in its way. It is so powerful that no person can resist it.

It was this pure unadulterated love to each and every Jew imbued in his timeless teachings that made the Baal Shem Tov a great man, the rest is commentary.

7th September

Sedra: **Ki Tavo**

Shabbat Begins: 19.19pm

Shabbat Ends: 20.19pm