

"Love your neighbor as yourself." (19:18)

This comprehensive dictum of morality, the golden rule of human conduct, originated in the *Torah*. *Chazal* relate an incident between Hillel and a gentile who asked him to condense the entire *Torah* into its briefest possible form. Hillel answered, "*What is hateful unto you, do not do unto your friend.*" This statement has become the accepted interpretation of "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" We may wonder why Hillel rephrased the *pasuk* into a negative form. Indeed, it would seem implied that Hillel focused only on negative morality - which definitely does not present a *Torah* perspective. **Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl**, raised this question in response to an incident which involved two Jews.

A *Maggid*, preacher whose livelihood was derived from the *mussar* lectures he gave in various towns, once came to a *shul* in Kovne that belonged to a noted wealthy merchant. The *maggid* asked permission to deliver his *drashah* that afternoon. The merchant replied in the negative, since the hours coincided with his *Talmud shiur*. The *maggid's* retort, that he needed the money he would earn from the lecture, did not seem to move the merchant.

Rav Yisrael Salanter, who was studying in the *shul* at the time, overheard the dialogue between the two. He turned to the merchant and asked, "Why does Hillel emphasize the negative in interpreting the phrase, "*Love your neighbor as yourself?*" Why did he not simply say, "What is good for you - do also for your friend?" "The reason," offered *Rav* Yisrael, "is that to demand that one do for others what is good for him is not necessarily correct. That which is good for one is not always good for another. For instance, let us examine our present situation. For you, it is good to study your *shiur* right now. The *maggid*, however, who is starving and in need of his meager earnings, must deliver his *drashah* right now. What are we to do? Shall we do what is good for you, or what is good for the *maggid*? Hillel responds with his interpretation of the *Torah's* message, 'What is not good for you, do not do unto others.' Consequently, my friend, put aside your *Talmud* and permit the *maggid* to deliver his *drashah*."