

Love your fellow as yourself. (19:18)

Rashi quotes the well-known dictum of Rabbi Akiva, “*Zeh klal gadol baTorah*: “This is a great principle of the Torah.” Why is the word “*baTorah*” added? It would be sufficient to have said simply, “This is a great principle.” The *Chasam Sofer* explains that the principle of loving one’s fellow *kamocho*, like yourself, is specifically *baTorah*, concerning Torah study and other spiritual pursuits. Regarding physical pursuits, one’s personal needs precedes those of his fellow. There is a case in *Chazal* in which Rabbi Akiva seems to underscore the difference between spiritual pursuits and physical pursuits with regard to helping one’s fellow.

Two people are wandering in the wilderness, and only one of them has a cup of water. In order for one of them to survive the wilderness, he requires that cup of water. Who gets it? Does the one who has the water drink it and watch his friend perish before his eyes, or does he give the water to his friend, so that he dies? They have another option: They can share the cup of water and both die. Obviously, this option does not make anyone happy. Rabbi Akiva, who teaches that loving one’s fellow as he loves himself is a cardinal principle of the Torah, surprisingly is of the opinion that the one who has the water should drink it all, because this way at least he will live. What about the “principle” of *v’ahavta l’reiacha kamocho*? Veritably, Rabbi Akiva focuses on the *pasuk v’chai achecha imach*, “Your brother shall live with you” – only if you are alive. In other words, you/I come first. Rabbi Akiva’s words appear to be contradictory. Apparently, one’s love for his brother has limitations.

Based upon what we said earlier (*Chasam Sofer*), *Zeh klal gadol ba’Torah* – “This is a principle in the Torah.” Yes – when it involves Torah study, your friend comes first. You should reach out and teach even at your own expense. This is Torah; if you could have helped your friend learn, but you did not, due to your concern regarding your own Torah – then your Torah is of little value. You sacrifice your own growth for the sake of others. When it concerns your physical/material needs, however, your life precedes that of your fellow. The Torah’s principle concerns Torah/spiritual pursuits.

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, teaches that just as it is incumbent upon every Jew to give *maaser*, one tenth of his earnings, to the Jewish poor, it is equally important that one give up one-tenth of his time to study Torah with those who are weaker than he is. Indeed, the *Bnei Yissachar* teaches that the greatest form of *tzedakah*, charity, is to teach Torah to one who is weaker than he is.

Horav Elimelech Biderman, Shlita, relates the story of a Holocaust survivor who came to a *yeshivah* in London (after the war) with a burning desire to learn Torah. The problem was that, as a result of his incarceration in the Nazi death camps, he had lost years of study. He was far behind the level of the other *yeshivah* students. What made things worse was the fact that the other *bachurim*, students, were themselves busy learning. They neither had the time nor the patience to learn with such a weak student. Two students, however, “found” the time and had the patience to learn with him. They were *Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita*, the *Ravaad* of Yerushalayim, and

Horav Tuvia Weiss, Shlita, the *Gaavad* of Yerushalayim. Apparently, the time they spent with him was not a detriment to their own learning. Perhaps the merit of helping a Holocaust survivor return to Torah stood by their side as they ascended the ladder of spiritual growth to become premier *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah giants.

During a recent trip, I was walking to my hotel from *shul* in the morning. A young man walking nearby was occupying himself with plugging in his earphones to listen to what I assumed was music. A third man, older than myself – and probably more religiously intense than I -- asked the young man to what type of music he was listening. (He assumed that with his sneakers and running pants, he was of the genre who would be listening to music – never assume.) The young man replied that this was the only time that he could learn the “*Daf*” (*Yomi*); he was listening to a *shiur* while he walked to his hotel room and would finish sometime during the day. The gentleman countered, as he looked at me, *Dos haist nisht gelerent*; This is not considered learning.” I replied that different forms of learning exist. For someone to listen to *Daf Yomi* while he is taking a half hour walk may not be the same as learning in the *bais hamedrash*, but he must be commended, because he could be doing and listening to alternatives that are far from appropriate.

Veritably, many occupy their free time with various forms and venues of learning, but what about *Torah lishmah* – pure Torah study, to fulfill Hashem’s command? Does such study have value if it is of lower quality? Surely there is, considering the alternative, but at what point will a person say, “My learning is really not that valuable. Why bother?”

Rav Elimelech Biderman relates a lecture given by *Horav Chaim Kreisworth, zl*, that disproves this theory. “I once presided over a *din* Torah, monetary litigation,” began *Rav* Kreisworth, “where the claim was for a thousandth of a percent. The diamond broker contended that he had been promised 005% for each sale that he concluded. The merchant for whom he worked argued that their agreement had been for 004%. Their discord was over a pittance (supposedly), one thousandth of a percent.” Indeed, the crowd attending *Rav* Kreisworth’s lecture thought this to be quite humorous. Why should people squabble over such an insignificant amount?

Rav Kreisworth said, “Do not laugh. There is nothing funny about one thousandth of a percent if the claim concerns the brokerage fee for one billion dollars of diamonds. In such a case, a thousandth of a percent equals one million dollars! This is not a small amount of money.”

The *Rosh Yeshivah* concluded his *shiur*, explaining that sometimes people think that the Torah which they learn has little value, since it is not studied entirely *lishmah*. They should know that due to the eternal value of Torah, its worth is beyond comprehension. Thus, even a miniscule percentage of the reward one receives for studying Torah is far beyond our ability to grasp – beyond millions.”