

Yesterday we read one of the most famous verses in the Torah;

כמוך ואהבת לרעך כמוך Love your fellow as you love yourself."

Can you love others as you love yourself? This was a matter of debate in the middle ages. Nachmanides says no. It is elemental to being human to love oneself more than other people. He asserts that what the Torah means in this precept is not to do anything to another person that you would not want to happen to you. This is the famous dictum of Hillel the Elder when asked to convey the whole Torah while standing on one foot. He said, "what is distasteful to you, do not do to another."

Rabbi Yosef Shor Bor a Tosafist of the 12th century has a totally different approach. He maintains that a person can and should learn to love others as they love themselves. He says G-d's love is that love and therefore man, who was created in G-d's image, was endowed with the ability to share love equal to his love of self with others.

I believe that there is perhaps still a third approach to the interpretation of this verse.

This past year was quite a difficult year for us all. Death, disease, quarantine, isolation, fear and anxiety were evident constantly. When this occurs, people tend to withdraw and insulate themselves. They coil up in a protective position waiting for the danger to pass. They create a force field around themselves and their family and feel they cannot afford the luxury of taking care of others.

When the Torah said to love others כמוך our community exemplified a third approach to the definition of that word. We loved our fellow at times more than we loved ourselves! People totally were selfless in their devotion to others. In our community there were people of tremendous courage and heroism.

Our doctors and nurses braved this unknown virulent and contagious virus and went to work to save lives. We had volunteers to answer emergency calls in our community. When the medical facilities were overwhelmed the people in our community were counseled by our doctors. They divided the Shabbatot among themselves to be on call in our community. Our leadership was stellar. We closed down immediately even as other synagogues were reluctant to do so. Many people went into action to provide valuable resources that had become scarce. Arrangements were made for shopping, and when that was not feasible, we had people making food deliveries. Our Women's' League was absolutely indefatigable in their efforts to assist people in every way imaginable. Our mikvah women showed great courage in agreeing to fulfill their essential role in making appointments and tending to the women.

Our women demonstrated great heroism in going to the mikvah. I am positive that there was nervousness and great anxiety in mikvah attendance.

Our gabbaim did yeoman work in keeping minyanim properly scheduled while abiding by all the pandemic rules and regulations. One manned the computer setup. Another saw to it that all the Torahs would be delivered to the outside minyanim and waited sometimes until late Saturday night to assure they were properly returned to the shul. Another, opened the shul every morning at 5:00 AM and zoomed the Daf Yomi to many people.

Our programming was excellent. There were Zoom classes, lectures, programs, seminars, entertainment, cooking demonstrations and everything else imaginable.

We had our people donating blood Plasma rich with antibodies to help save lives. We had many of our young people volunteering to learn the Parsha every Shabbat.

We were the “epicenter” of kindness and goodness!

As a community we went beyond ourselves, beyond **כמוך** and we are better for it. G-d bless us all.