

SOCIAL JUSTICE: AN INTRODUCTION – TEXT 4

תלמוד ירושלמי נדרים ט:ה

וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹד רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אָמַר זֶה כָּלֵל גְּדוֹל בְּתוֹרָה שְׂאֵם תִּשְׁמֹר מִצְוָה זוֹ תִּינָצֵל מֵהַרְבֵּה עֲבִירוֹת. בֶּן עַזַּי אָמַר (בְּרֵאשִׁית ה) זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדוֹת אָדָם לְלַמֶּדֶד שְׂכוּלָם בָּאוּ מֵאֵב אֶחָד זֶה כָּלֵל גְּדוֹל מְזֶה חָשׁוּב יוֹתֵר מִוְאֶהְבֶּתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹד, כִּי בְּסוֹף הַפְּסוּק נֶאֱמַר: בְּדַמּוֹת אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אוֹתוֹ, וַיִּכְשִׁיתָבּוֹנֵן הָאָדָם בְּזֶה, יִזְהַר מְאֹד בְּכַבּוֹד חֲבֵרוֹ. וְאָמַר שְׂכָלֵל זֶה חָשׁוּב יוֹתֵר לְפִי שֶׁהוּא כּוֹלֵל שְׁנֵי עֵינֵינִים. מְכַשְׁנֶזְהֵר בְּכַבּוֹד חֲבֵרוֹ לְחוּס עַל כְּבוֹד קוֹנֵו שֶׁהוּא בְּדַמּוֹת אֱלֹהִים, אִז קו"ח שְׂיִזְהַר מִלְּמַעוֹל מַעַל בָּה' וַיִּהְיֶה זָרִי בְּעַשִׁיית הַמִּצְוָה לְכַבּוֹד וְתִבְרָךְ.

JERUSALEM TALMUD, *NEDARIM* 9:5

‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Leviticus 19:18) – Rabbi Akiva says, this is the fundamental principle of the [whole] Torah, because if you keep this commandment, you will be saved from multiple transgressions. Ben Azzai says, ‘This is the book of the generations of man’ (Genesis 5:1) – so as to teach you that all human beings came from a single parent – is a greater fundamental principle than ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’, since at the end of that verse it says, ‘In the image of God he made him [man].’ When a person [lit. man] considers that, he will take extreme care for the dignity¹ of another person. The reason for this principle being more important is that it is bipartite: a person who takes care for another person’s dignity, aware of the dignity of that person’s creator (since the person is in the image of God), will take care all the more not to defraud God, and will be energetic to perform commandments in order to honor The Holy One.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- What is the difference between Rabbi Akiva’s view and Ben Azzai’s?
- What does it mean for all human beings to have come from one parent?
- What exactly is the bipartite process described at the end of the text?
- How might this text apply to our quest for social justice?

¹ This word could also be translated, ‘honor’

