

RADIO PROGRAM (LEVITICUS
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Shalom. In Leviticus, Chapter 19, Verse 18, we have the very famous saying, "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." This, of course, is the foundation of the ethics of mankind, because only if we love our neighbor as ourselves can there be any ethics, can there be any morality, can there be any justice. We must always love our neighbor as ourselves. We must never put our neighbor in a lower position than ourselves. We must never say, "I am better than he is and, therefore, I can impose my will on him and do anything to him I like."

Yet, if we look at this sentence carefully we will notice an anomaly, something which just does not seem to fit in. Why doesn't this verse just say, "And you should love your neighbor"? Why does it say, "And you should love your neighbor as yourself"? What's more, why after it does it then says, "I am the Lord"? Why shouldn't there just be a very simple statement, "And you should love your neighbor" period? Why does it say, "And you should love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord"?

It seems to me that the Bible here is telling us something extremely important, something extremely important for our own generation, something which our own generation has forgotten, and, because of that, we are having many, many difficulties. What does this sentence say? That you should love your neighbor as yourself. It doesn't just say you should love your neighbor. Why? Because, my friends, you really cannot love your neighbor unless you love yourself. This may seem to be a contradiction in terms, but really, I do not believe it is, because one of the great tragedies in the world today is that people do not love themselves. This does not mean that they are not selfish, but they, themselves, are so filled with self-hate and

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with guilt that they cannot even conceive of loving another person because they, themselves, are not worth anything. The trouble with the philosophy which says, "I can do anything I want with my body and my life" is that in most instances it is a destructive philosophy, because it means I can destroy myself if I want. If I want to take drugs, I can take drugs. If I want to kill myself, I can kill myself, and it is nobody else's business. Why? Because I am only responsible to myself. I am not responsible to anyone else. The talents that were given to me, the opportunities that were given to me, so what? They are mine. A person is not viewed as a custodian of certain talents, certain opportunities that he must develop and perfect in order to make this a better place to live. He is no longer thought of as accountable to G-d for his body and talents and opportunity. That's why it says, "I am the Lord", because a person must always think he is accountable to someone else, that those talents that he has will always be used for the right thing. He has no right to commit suicide. Why doesn't he have the right to commit suicide? Because the life was not his in the beginning. He was given it. He was given an opportunity to be G-d's partner in the creation of the world, and if he does not believe in this, if he think this is not so and all life is is doing what he wants to do, then eventually he will begin to hate himself, and if he hates himself, then he will act in a most despicable fashion, and anyone who hates himself cannot love anybody else. In fact, we all know people who are constantly complaining and carping. Why do they do these things? Mainly because they hate themselves. They see in others hateful traits, those traits which they hate in themselves. How many times have you heard someone get up and yell and scream at something when you know they are doing exactly the same thing? They hate in others what they, themselves, are doing, because they really hate themselves. These people who hate themselves cannot love anybody else because they are not rest with themselves. They cannot view other

people's faults with compassion. Why? Because they hate themselves, and they are so filled with their own self-hate that anytime they see a trait, which they do not want to admit they have but they really know they have, in somebody else, they hate that person. They hate that person with a vengeance. Why do they hate that person? Because they are not at peace with themselves, and because of this they are hateful and spiteful people.

I do not know if any of you have read the story by Dostoyeski, "Notes From the Underground", but read it again. There you will see the classic example of the man who so hates himself that he has to destroy everybody. He says, "If I am no good, the whole world is no good, and there is only one thing to do: destroy it all. Get rid of it all. It is all crummy, rotten, corrupt." Why? Because he thinks he is all crummy, rotten, and corrupt. There is no hope for him. Not only does he hate everybody, but he cannot even find G-d. He cannot find purpose in life because it is all crooked, all corrupt, all no good.

This, unfortunately, my friends, is what many of our young people feel today. People ask, how is it that they have everything? They have almost all the material comforts known to man. They have wonderful opportunities available to them. What's the matter with them? Why do they go on drugs? I think personally they do these things mainly because of a sense of guilt. Perhaps they feel guilty because they have so much and other people do not. They feel this is a rotten world. They feel things are not right, all corrupt, no good. Why do they think everything is no good? Because they do not feel good. They feel they are corrupt. They have not been able to love themselves, and until a person is able to love himself (that means to come to peace with his own faults - it doesn't mean not to try to correct them), to realize that in spite of all my faults, there is still hope for me. I can still do great things.

Until he comes to this realization that there is hope for him as an individual, that he, himself, can do great things, then there will be no loving of your neighbor. A person who hates himself, and we all know people who hate themselves. Most drunks hate themselves. That's why they drink, because they cannot face themselves and what they are doing to other people and to themselves. They cannot live with themselves. The same is true of most drug addicts, as well. They cannot face the reality of themselves. They cannot make peace with themselves, and, because of this, they have no love for others either. They transfer all their self-hate to hatred of others. They have no hope. They have no hope for the world, because they have no hope for themselves.

The great antidote to this self-hate is to realize that all of us have faults, but we can overcome them, and we will overcome them if we will just give each other a chance. We can only give each other a chance if we give ourselves a chance. Yes, my friends, the Bible knows what it talking about when it says, "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself." You first have to love yourself and then you can love a neighbor. You first have to be able to make peace with your own faults and feel you an overcome them, to see there is hope for you. If you then feel there is hope for you, than you can love your neighbor and then you can believe that there is a G-d, that there is hope for the world. What does it mean to believe in a G-d? That there is hope, that this world can be perfected, that things can be done, because if you take away a man's hope you destroy everything, and hope begins with the individual.