

To: Jewish Herald Voice
From: Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

We learn that Rabbi Akiva and two of his students Ben Azai and Ben Zoma had an argument. The argument was: what is the most important sentence in the Torah? Rabbi Akiva said the most important sentence in the Torah is, "You should love your neighbor as yourself." His student, Ben Azai said, no, the most important sentence in the Torah is, "This is the book of the generations of man," while another student said that the most important sentence in the Torah is, "One lamb you shall offer in the morning and a second lamb you should offer in the evening."

Now, we can understand why Rabbi Akiva said that you should love your neighbor as yourself. It is the great principle of religion. We must all learn how to get along, how to love each other. We can also understand why Ben Azai said the most important sentence is, "This is the book of the generations of man." This teaches us that we are all human beings. There are no sub-human beings in the world. Some people say you should love your neighbor as yourself, but only people who are like you. The other people are really sub-human. This is what Hitler said about we Jews. Ben Azai said we must all believe that we are all human beings on the same level. We can understand how this expands the principle of Rabbi Akiva to include everyone, but what is Ben Zoma talking about, bringing a sacrifice in the morning and evening? Why is that the most important sentence in the whole Torah?

The reason, according to many rabbis, is because you can believe in all these lofty principles of loving your neighbor as yourself, and that we are all the descendants of Adam on an equal footing, but if these are only theoretical constructs, they do not mean much. Ben Zoma was saying you have to implement them every day of your life. You cannot stop and say, "I did enough. I don't have to do anymore." Every day, morning and evening, we must continue to try to implement these principles, and this requires many times great sacrifice of our time and our money.

This, basically, is what the prayers of Rosh Hashonna are about. On Rosh Hashonna we blow the shofar, and the shofar has basically two notes: the Tekiah and the Teruah Shvrim. The Tekiah stands for lofty principles, and the Teruah Shvrim stands for the agony that we all must go through to achieve these principles. That's why the Teruah Shvrim is bracketed by one Tekiah on one side and another Tekiah on the other side.

We have three special prayers on Rosh Hashona. The Malchuyos speaks about G-d creating us all. He is the King of us all, and we say that at the end of days everyone will recognize Him as their King and Father. In the Zichronos portion, we mention that G-d loves us all and cares for us, and we stress Noah a lot. You should love everybody as yourself. Finally, in the Shofros we talk about the Teruah. You not only have to hear the Tekiah, but we have to listen very carefully to the Teruah because it is only through the Teruah that we can reach the time we all long for when the world will be perfect under the rule of G-d.

Right after we blow the shofar, we say that, “Happy are the people who know the Teruah because they walk in the light of Thy favor.” In other words, most people agree, that we should love our neighbors as ourselves and this includes everyone, but trying to implement these principles is very difficult, and most people only give them lip service. We are stressing on the holiday of Rosh Hashonna that not only do we accept these wonderful principles, but we are going to work hard to implement them in the coming year to make them more of a reality. May we all have a New Year filled with joy and happiness, simchas and nachas because we are all working hard to make this world a better place so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.