



# THE JEWISH CENTER

# Bulletin

Vol. XXXVIII

11 Teveth, 5728—January 12, 1968

No. 8



## "LAW AND LOVE"

### III. Act Lovingly To Thy Neighbor

Finally, we must not ignore those (and they may well be a majority of human beings) who cannot or do not experience love. Such people are no less decent, no less sensitive, no less moral or ethical than those who do love. They have every right to a decent life and to the protection of their emotions, of their families, of their children — no less so than those blessed with the gift of feeling love.

Jewish law attempts to create the conditions under which love can flourish in human relationships, and under which people can live humanly with each other even if they do not attain love. If one examines the consistent manner in which the Talmudic Sages applied the commandment *ve'ahavta le'reiakha kamokha*, he will discover that its correct translation ought to be not "*Love thy neighbor as thyself*," but "*Act lovingly towards thy neighbor as thou wouldst act towards thyself*" (see the commentary of Rabbi S. R. Hirsch on this verse).

It is precisely because of Judaism's concern for the integrity of marriage and home that it legislates on such matters. In fact, the more important the subject, the more does Judaism hedge it about with laws. It is because marriage is so sacred and sexuality so sensitive that the Torah prefers to protect it legally rather than wax poetic about it romantically. Torah considers marriage and family and *yihus* (the legitimacy of lineage) so significant, that it will not allow them to be left to the whim of sudden passion and instantaneous infatuation.

That is why *gittin* and *kiddushin* (divorce and marriage) abound in such complex technicalities. Marriage is a lifelong relationship of the most significant and far-reaching consequences which is initiated by a single ceremony or contract. Therefore, we must make sure that both parties know exactly what they are doing, that both offer their free and untrammelled consent, in order that no avoidable errors be perpetuated. Hence, the Halakhah's insistence upon the formality of the ring, of the witnesses, of the proper quorum, and so forth, so that there be no misinterpretation or misunderstanding of what is occurring.

For this reason, the Halakhah places even greater emphasis upon the technicalities of *gittin*, of divorce, than upon *kiddushin*, because the former has such a massive impact upon the lives not only of two people, but usually many more. Every detail therefore becomes exceedingly important. To undo a relationship is even more difficult than creating it in the first place. With all the difficulties imposed by the Halakhah in divorce, these laws have been the safeguard of Jewish morality throughout the ages.

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