



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

## WHICH NEIGHBOUR?

The great human duty is to love our neighbour as ourselves (Vayikra 19:18). Rabbi Akiva called it "the great principle of the Torah".

Commentators address themselves to all three phrases - "love", "your neighbour", and "as yourself".

Over the years we have looked in detail at the first and the third phrase, so this year let us examine the word "neighbour" and ask the question, "Who is my neighbour?"

The Hebrew REI-A is understood by some as "your Israelite neighbour". If this were the sense of the term it would already be an important idea, especially in an age like ours when - tragically - one group of Jews is seen and heard insulting another and giving them the no-love treatment.

But REI-A is used in the Torah in a general sense and is not limited to our fellow Jews. In Sh'mot 11:2 it means an Egyptian. In D'varim 10:19 it means a stranger. In Vayikra 19:34 the command to love a person as yourself applies to any fellow human being.

Who then is my neighbour?

Anyone. Everyone. All are made in the

image of God. All are children of the same Father. All (even the unlikeable ones!) are entitled to our love and respect.

## CHAMETZ ALL YEAR ROUND

We don't talk too much about chametz once Pesach is over. Maybe we should. There is a lesson for the whole year in the idea of chametz.

Apart from one small segment of the year, the ingredients of chametz are no problem. The problem is caused not by the make-up of the chametz but by the date. If it is Pesach, chametz is out: for the rest of the twelve months it is in and acceptable.

Let's now apply this idea to this week's Torah reading, K'doshim, "Be Holy". What makes us holy is not withdrawal from the world but elevating every ordinary event and experience.

Water makes us holy when we need to be physically and spiritually clean. Fire makes us holy when we need to prepare food and kindle the Shabbat light. But like everything else, water can also be a curse; floods do untold damage to human life. Fire can be a danger when it spreads and destroys nature and human habitation and life.

Like chametz, the question is the timing. If we carefully control water and fire, we can use them to make life magnificent. If

they get out of control, they become our enemies.

As someone has said, a brick can be used to build a place of worship - or to construct a gas chamber. The question is what we do when the moment of opportunity is upon us. -OZ

**Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH**