



## Setting Standards

We have discussed the ripples from a stone thrown into a pond as a metaphor for what happens when we begin to bless ourselves. But, if we simply splash around with no thought to blessing, we still make ripples. And we can certainly splash around making blessings for others without blessing ourselves. So, why is it important to start with ourselves?

In the first century before the Common Era (BCE), a rich young man made the rounds of the Jewish teachers, asking them to explain the entire Torah while standing on one foot. The young man said he would convert if any of them could do so. One great teacher took him up on it.

“What is hateful to you, do not do it to others,” said Hillel, “That is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary. Now go and study.” So, the young man went and studied.

A little more than half a century later, another Jewish teacher, Jesus, said it this way, “Whatever you want people to do to you, do so to them, for this is the law and the prophets.”

Hillel’s students went on to become the Rabbis of Judaism and Jesus’ students went on to become Christians. They both spoke of the same scripture, and they both summed up the teachings by setting a standard based on me. Neither one offered an objective standard at all. Both said that I am to be the judge of right behavior by what I would want or not want done to me. I am the standard by which I measure behavior!

Now, this does not mean that my behavior is the best, most righteous, top-of-the-line, or the “one true way.” My behavior is not the standard even for myself. But, how I want to be treated is.

Think a minute about what people expect a “loser” to take. People make fun of him, they laugh in his face. He is expected to laugh with them. He may be poked and prodded, dumped on, pushed around, shouted at, and blamed for things he had no control over. A “loser” is not asked to vote on group activities,

although he may be permitted to go along if he sits quietly and does whatever he's asked to do. Nobody tells him when he's done a good job, or looks good. Nobody cares about his opinion. Nobody really wants him along, but there's got to be somebody to blame when things go wrong. And he can take out the trash and clean up the mess.

Is that how you want to be treated? Me neither.

I want people to listen when I speak, to talk with me honestly. I want them to become my friends. I want people to celebrate with when I do well, people to commiserate with when I fail, people to cry with when I am hurt. I want people to cut me some slack when I need it, to hold me accountable when I need it. I want people to care about me.

Hillel and Jesus both knew this about me. Without ever meeting me, they knew what I would want. Because they both wanted it, too. And because they had learned from the Eternal. So, if my standard of how to treat others is based on doing to them what I'd want done to me and not doing to them what I wouldn't want done to me, what does that mean?

In this culture, in this century, it means that two very basic ideas must govern my behavior. First, I must know how I want to be treated and believe that I have a right to be treated that way. Second, I must apply that belief to others as well. Each of us has a right to be treated like a person of value and dignity. This is so simply because each of us is a person of value and dignity.

Remember, Neil Armstrong would never have taken that moon walk without a massive crew of others behind him. Those are his boot prints up there, but they do not mark his achievement. Instead, they mark the achievement of all of the astronauts in the program; and the test pilots, scientists, engineers, chemists, doctors, nurses, administrators, soldiers, sailors, marines, typists, secretaries, file clerks, and janitors. Because without any one of these people, nobody could have broken the bonds of our atmosphere, let alone plotted a course for the moon. So, when Neil stepped down on the moon and said it was "one giant leap for mankind," he wasn't just blowing smoke. Those words acknowledged the facts. Nobody succeeds alone.

So, the CEO of a Fortune 500 company is no more worthy than the woman applying for welfare or getting a box from the food bank. The Queen of England or the President of the United States is no more dignified than the beggar on the street. And if this is true, what does that mean for the rest of us?

We all have a spark of the divine within. That's part of the human condition. When I recognize your sparks, I treat you the way I would want to be treated in your place. When you recognize my sparks, you treat me as you would want to be treated in my place. By doing so, we send light into our world. And the ripples move across the pond as we bless ourselves and one another.