

A woman was walking along the beach when she stumbled upon a bottle. She picked it up and rubbed it, and a genie appeared! The genie said, 'I am able to grant you one wish.'

The woman did not hesitate. She said, 'I want peace in the world, especially across the entire Middle East region. Here: let me show you on this map.'

The genie looked at the map and exclaimed, 'Lady, be reasonable! People have been at war for centuries – make another wish. Be reasonable.'

The woman thought for a minute and said, 'Well, I've never been able to find the right man: one who will listen to me, will be considerate and fun, help around the house, love me more than football, and be faithful. That's what I wish for . . . a good man.'

The genie let out a sigh and said, 'Let me see that map again. . . .'

This play has been around for decades, and it has been adapted for various audiences. But we all know that the situation in the Middle East, in Ukraine and in many other places is no joking matter, and that it cannot be solved by a genie released from a bottle. I am sure most readers would wish for all these conflicts to end, and that lasting peace would be experienced. However, what is the solution to bring this about?

I do not claim to have the solution in the following paragraphs, as it has been said that we cannot expect simple answers to complex questions. David Gurteen (a writer and leadership presenter) goes further than this by stating, 'There are no solutions to complex problems. . . . We can never solve complex problems; we can only ever respond to them in a continuously adaptive way!' (www.conversational-leadership.net/solutions-to-complex-problems/) No solutions!?

While recognising that there are no simplistic solutions (if any), I would like to share one of the laws that the Jewish people were given by God as they progressed towards nationhood some 3,500 years ago.

Under the leadership of Moses, the law is recorded in Leviticus 19:17, 18: 'Do not bear a grudge against others, but settle your differences with them, so that you will not commit a sin because of them. Do not take revenge on others or continue to hate them, but love your neighbours as you love yourself. I am the LORD.'

Three thousand five hundred years ago, these were both remarkable and unusual laws, and they still are today, particularly verse 18:

'Do not take revenge on others or continue to hate them, but love your neighbours as you love yourself. . . .'

Love your neighbours as you love yourself? Seriously? I do not believe many people would object to loving themselves, but placing this on a parity with loving our neighbours is extremely challenging.

I recall, when collecting donations for charity, I would sometimes be told by those unwilling to donate that 'charity begins at home'. This means that people should deal with the needs of people close to them before they think about helping others. I suppose, in its most literal meaning, the first person I need to look after is myself!

This ancient law recognises the importance of self-interest in 'love yourself', but states that the same love, care, and interest for one's self must be shared with our neighbours! In other words, charity does begin at home: and, because I give charity at home, I must also give charity to my neighbours.

This ancient law reveals that self-interest or self-love is taken to a higher level when it is extended to love for our neighbours.

This may be considered an impossible goal, and one for which nations are not willing to make such a sacrifice of self-interest.

But, for a moment, let us imagine what the world would look like if neighbours were loved to the same level that people loved themselves: most of the international and local news coverage would be very different from what we currently witness.

One thousand five hundred years after the giving of the Levitical law, another leader, a Jewish teacher by the name of Jesus, gave a further reflection of this command.

His teaching, which is referred to as *The Golden Rule*, states:

'Do for others what you want them to do for you: this is the meaning of the Law of Moses and of the teachings of the prophets.' (Matthew 7:12)

There are those who take *The Golden Rule* to mean: 'Treat others nicely so you can expect good things from them in return.'

However, Jesus' understanding, as He modelled in His life and death, was that sacrificial loving and giving should be done even without the expectation that it would be returned. Jesus' life and death highlighted that actually *we can* love our neighbours (and our enemies) even more than we love ourselves!

To love our neighbours more than we love ourselves is no simple answer. Indeed, it is possibly one of the most complex solutions ever shared.

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