

ANI LDODI VDODI LI - I AM MY BELOVED'S AND MY BELOVED IS MINE (SHIR HASHIRIM 6:3): HOW DO WE RECONCILE? PART 2

by Hadassah Johnson

In Part One of this article we discussed our need to reconcile with HaShem and one another. In Part Two we will discuss how we can reconcile with one another. It is not enough for us to know that we need to reconcile, but we must understand how to reconcile. The definition of reconciliation is, to bring together, to unite, and to restore to purity.

What causes the need for reconciliation? The need for reconciliation is caused by separation. Separation in relationships is caused by sin. Whenever there is sin, there is injustice. Whether it exists because of hurtful unjust words or deeds, injustice against another human being causes a break down in communication and relationship. Thus, whenever there is division between two or more individuals there needs to be reconciliation.

As we return to our G-d, it is a wonderful time to return to one another. Oftentimes it is seemingly easier to turn to HaShem whose mercies are abundant and new every morning, than to turn to one who is close to us, for example, our spouses. But the Torah states that man and woman together form the image of G-d. Whenever there is a breach (fracture, break) in relationship between husband and wife, there is a breach in relationship with HaShem Himself.

The Talmud (Tractate Yoma, pp.85a-85b) records the following in regards to reconciliation of relationships: The Mishna states, *The transgressions of man toward God are forgiven him by the Day of Atonement; the transgressions against other people are not forgiven him by the Day of Atonement if he has not first appeased the other person.*

The Gemara adds that *"Rabbi Joseph bar Helbe put the following objection to Rabbi Abbahu: 'How can one hold that faults committed by a man against another are not forgiven by the Day of Atonement when it is written (I Shmu'el 2): 'If a man offends another man, Elokim will reconcile.' '... Thus, the correct understanding of this verse is If a man commits a fault toward another man and appeases him, then, and only then, G-d will forgive."*

By the above, we understand we must make right that which is wrong and we must forgive and be

forgiven, both by Hashem, and by each other. If an offense between two men must be forgiven before they can obtain HaShem's forgiveness, how much more must a husband and a wife forgive and be reconciled. Are they not one flesh and bone? Does not Amos 3:3 ask the question, "*Can two walk together, except they be in agreement? Is not unity mandatory to raise a mishpochah tzaddikim (a family with righteous children).*"

In the month of Elul we actively proclaim that HaShem is our Beloved and we belong to Him. But, as mentioned in Part One, returning to our G-d is more than feeling and heightened awareness of his essence and Torah in our lives. It is responsibility. First and foremost, it is a responsibility to love. Such responsibility requires reconciliation and such reconciliation must begin in the home itself. Secondly, it is a responsibility to return to the ways of HaShem and principles of Torah.

But how do act we act out this responsibility? How do we return and reconcile? How do we make wrongs right?

I recently heard a story of a man who failed to treat his employer with respect. His lack of respect offended the employer and eventually caused the man to lose his job. The man justified his attitude because his employer did not example the religious values he professed. Ten years later, while the man was putting together an advisory council for a project he was working on, the name of this former employer came to mind. At first he rejected the thought of contacting him, but his name continually came to mind. The more the man thought about his past employment, the more he realized that his attitude manifested ungratefulness and pride. Upon seeing his own error in the relationship—he drove to the workplace of his old employer and confessed what he felt had been the problem. The employer responded by saying, "Son, I told my wife that if you didn't change your attitude you would never succeed in life. Now I see you have succeeded because you have changed your attitude."

As you can see in this story, the man's ungratefulness and pride kept him from treating his employer with respect. Even though the employer himself had failings (which we all do), he still deserved respect because of the position he held, and because every man is made in the image of HaShem and is to be respected. The answer to this man's reconciliation with his old boss is a direct parallel to the four steps our sages tell us lead to teshuva--a reconciliation with G-d. 1) Recognizing the sin of his own attitude in the relationship. 2) Sincerely regretting his wrong attitude. and finally, 3) Confessing his error to the one he wronged and asking for forgiveness. The man accomplished this by meeting with his ex-boss face to face. The fourth and last step, a determination to avoid the incorrect behavior in the future allowed this man's relationship with his boss to be restored.

So how do we reconcile? The prophet tells us "*Take with you words and return...(Hoshea 14).*" When reconciling with anyone, we must prepare our words and confront them. But as the success

of our mission depends on the manner of our confrontation, let us beware when we do so. There is negative confrontation (i.e. accusing, argumentative and belittling attitudes and words) and there is positive confrontation. Positive confrontation consists of truthful words spoken out of concern and love, not hate or anger. Positive confrontation is one of the greatest principles of freedom. It is rooted in mercy towards others and love for Torah principles. The word confront means, to meet face-to-face. Confrontation is the very act of bringing together. Many feel that confrontation is taking up a sword or pointing the finger at another, but on the contrary its purpose is to bring reconciliation. Confrontation handled properly eliminates tension, hurt feelings, outbursts of anger, and verbal misuse. Positive confrontation brings hurt emotions and injustices to light so they can be healed and corrected. Oftentimes the result of hurt emotions or unjust treatment from another is oppression. Oppression is a weight or pressure upon our minds that limits our ability to think clearly and act soundly.

Thus, to release that pressure, we need to reconcile. This is the season of reconciliation--let us be sure that we take full advantage to reconcile ourselves with each other.

Firstly, to effect a full reconciliation, we must be willing to confront ourselves to see whether or not we are the source of the contention. Pride is the number one enemy of unity. Pride wants others to see our perfection, while humility wants others to see HaShem. *"A pauper utters supplications, but a rich one responds with brazen words."* (Mishlei 18:23) We must do t'shuvah for our part of the problem, and if it has harmed another we must ask him for forgiveness and if necessary make restitution. If the situation involved harsh words, lashon hora (lit. gossip, but includes all forms of incorrect speech) which, in most cases, is the cause of bitterness, emotional hurts, and severed relationships, or sins mentioned in the Viduy, we must present them and the problem to the other party involved. We must come together for the purpose of seeking peace and reconciliation, not pointing the finger or justifying our own actions or reactions.

We must humbly, without fear, entreat another by speaking the truth no matter how difficult, humiliating or revealing it is. Whatever attitudes, motives, or words that have caused the problem need to be confessed and brought to the light. When someone hurts us by word or deed we should make them aware (privately) of the error in their actions. This in turn, enables the offender to see his error and ask for forgiveness. On the other hand, if we offend by our actions or words, we need to be willing to entreat the person we hurt to seek forgiveness and reconciliation from that person. This means we use positive confrontation. We are not meeting together to tear down, but to build up. To do this, we first must speak the truth about the problem and the attitudes, feelings, motives, the situation, what was said, what was heard, etc. *"Speak the truth with one another; and in your gates judge with truth, justice and peace."* (Zecharyah 8:16)

Most of all, we must believe that oneness and wholeness in our homes and community is not only attainable, but is more important than our own agendas, ideologies, and differences. We need to be willing to lay aside whatever is contrary to our goal as a family and community. Then when we meet together, even though we differ in opinion and religious upbringing, we can agree to disagree without working harm one to another.

In Hoshea 5:3, HaShem says, *"I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."* Elul and especially the week preceding Rosh Hashanah we seek HaShem by Slichot (prayers of repentance with the intent to draw his presence near and gain His favor and forgiveness). In our prayers, let us remember one another also. Let this be a New Year of reconciliation and restoration of spouses, families, neighbors, and the Jewish community!

May HaShem prosper you and your household this year!

L'Shana Tovah!

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