

DO NOT HATE PART 1

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

"Do not hate your brother in your heart, you will surely rebuke a member of your people, and you will not bear sin upon him."¹

Over the past several weeks we have seen how the Torah stresses the importance of loving our fellow man.

There are occasions in life when it is very difficult to have positive feelings towards certain people and at times we may even feel decidedly negative about them. The Torah is aware of this phenomena and instructs us how to deal with it. There are a number of reasons as to why we may harbor negative feelings towards a person: One of the most common is when we feel that this person wronged us in some way. He may have said something that hurt our feelings or he may have done something that caused us pain. How should a person react to such a situation? The Torah begins by telling us not to "hate your brother in our heart" - that means we should not simply keep our feelings to ourselves and act as normal towards him. You may wonder what is so bad about that - after all perhaps we will forget about it with the passing of time? If this is the case then it may be advisable to remain quiet, however, more commonly, we tend to build up negative feelings towards that person in our heart and they are never truly resolved. Consequently, even after a long time, we may still think about the past incident whenever we come in contact with that person. One author writes that he once sent a slightly arrogant sounding letter to a well-known author. In reply the author insulted his bad manners in a most unpleasant manner. The victim writes that ten years later he heard about the death of this author and all he could think about was how the author had hurt his feelings so many years earlier!

So how should we react? The Torah answers - do not keep your feelings inside, rather "you will surely rebuke a member of your people." The word 'rebuke' sounds rather harsh, however the Hebrew word, 'tochacha' really means to clarify. When someone upsets us we should clarify the situation with him. This means that after a brief amount of time when the initial high level of anger has cleared, we should approach the person and gently speak to him about how hurt our feelings. This should only be done in private so as not to cause any embarrassment to the person and there should be no hint of anger or aggression in our words. What normally happens in such a situation is that the person apologizes for his behavior, explains why he acted in such a way, and emphasizes that he had no idea that what he had said or done had caused pain. This is one aspect of how the Torah guides us how to have healthy, positive relationships.

¹ Parshat Kedoshim, Ch.19, v.17.

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