

DO NOT HATE PART 2

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

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

Last week we discussed one aspect of the command of 'do not hate' - we saw that keeping our feelings to ourselves can often have a detrimental effect, leading to increased hatred. However this prohibition is not limited to literally keeping our feelings in our heart; another way of transgressing it is to act in a two-faced manner to the object of our displeasure, speaking pleasantly in his presence but degrading him behind his back.

This mode of behaviors is negative for a number of reasons. Firstly, we discussed last week that by speaking openly and honestly to the person we can hopefully resolve the situation. However, speaking badly about him to others will not help to reduce the antagonistic feelings, indeed they will probably increase. Perhaps even more damaging is the fact that the victim of such criticism is being attacked without his awareness - thus he is totally unable to protect himself. It is positively cruel to place somebody in such a position - bad things may happen to him as a result of the negative things said about him and he will not be able to defend himself.

Moreover, by speaking badly to others about him this will surely cause them to feel more hostile towards him, denying him of a fair chance at maintaining good relationships. Further, very often, such talk can genuinely damage a person's reputation and cause him monetary loss.

In addition to the damage that can be caused by speaking badly about a person behind his back, such behavior also reflects a lacking in one's character. To be friendly to a person in front of him but degrade him when he is not present demonstrates a strong element of dishonesty. The Torah describes in great detail the enmity that Joseph's brothers felt towards him; they felt that he was arrogant and a threat to their well-being. Despite their miscalculations in this area, they are nevertheless praised for one aspect of their behavior - they did not act in a deceitful manner to Joseph. They made it perfectly clear as to how they felt towards him and therefore he was not placed in a position of false security. This is a reflection of their positive trait of honesty.

Of course we should all strive to resolve unpleasantness through open discourse, but even if we are unable to do this, then we must certainly strive to avoid acting in a two-faced manner to our fellow man - even if we are upset with him he does not deserve to be attacked from behind.

¹Parshat Kedoshim, 19:17

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