

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

The Mishna in the tractate of Yoma (8:9) tells us that "Sins between one man and his friend, Yom Kippur does not atone for until one appeases his friend."

In essence, there are two types of commandments found in the Torah: those concerning the relationship between man and G-d, and those concerning the relationship between man and man. The observance of the laws of Shabbos and the laws of Kashruth are examples of commandments between man and G-d. The prohibitions against stealing, murder, slander, and causing embarrassment are examples of commandments between man and man. These later laws actually consist of two components: The man to man aspect, which we have mentioned; the man to G-d aspect, which exists because of the fact that G-d is the one who commanded us not to steal, and if we do steal, we are not only harming another person, but we are disobeying Hashem as well.

The Mishna in Yoma is telling us that before one can be forgiven for a sin committed against another person, such as embarrassing the person, stealing from the person , etc., the "victim" must forgive the person who committed the act against him. Only then will Hashem forgive the person for the disregard of His commands.

Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein comments that we find even among those who take repentance very seriously a laxity when it comes to interpersonal relationships. It does not take much to have committed an infraction against another person - simple gossip about someone, causing slight embarrassment, or failing to pay back a loan on time suffices. People have a feeling that they do not have to ask for forgiveness from their fellow man as "he probably forgave me for that." The truth, Rabbi Levenstein says, is that people are not always as forgiving as we assume them to be. We must be aware that getting forgiveness from our fellow man is not an easy process. We need to sincerely ask, and even beg, if necessary, our fellow man to forgive us. We may need to appease him first, and only then will forgiveness come.

Other difficulties can arise as well. The case may be that the victim is not aware of the scope of the damage caused to him. If that is the case, then the forgiveness elicited may not help, as the forgiveness is only for what he knows about. In order to get true forgiveness, the person has to fully inform his victim about what has occurred to him, as only then can the victim say "I forgive you" with a complete heart. Once one has been forgiven by his fellow man, he has overcome the more difficult part of the repentance process: our sages have told us that it is easier to be forgiven by

Hashem than it is to be forgiven by another person.

We must remember as we approach Yom Kippur that in order to achieve atonement, we must ask all those who we have harmed for forgiveness. In order to truly repent, we must make a firm commitment to "be nice" to our neighbor - to be sensitive to others' needs and situations, and act accordingly, in a way that will not necessitate a visit before the next Yom Kippur to ask for forgiveness.

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