

PRIVACY

by Joshua Kruger

The Story

"Oh my," said Mrs. Silver to her children. "The oven seems to have lost power."

"The air conditioner and fridge have also shut down, Mom" said her eldest son Ariel.

"Is it a blackout?" asked his younger sister Talya.

"Maybe it's just a problem with our house?" said Ariel. "Why don't we check the electric cabinet?"

"Good idea" said Mrs. Silver as she opened the panel. "All the circuit breakers seem to be alright. Sunset is in less than an hour, so we better figure out why we've lost power quickly before night sets in. Why don't the two of you go next door and see if the Cohens have also lost power?"

Ariel and Talya walked over the Cohen's house and knocked on the door.
There was no answer.

"I guess they're not home," said Ariel. "Talya! What are you doing?"

Talya had her face up to the window beside the door. "I'm looking inside to see if anyone is home."

"I'm not sure you're allowed to do that" said Ariel hesitantly.

"Why not?" asked Talya.

Ariel thought to himself. Maybe it wasn't a problem. After all, Talya wasn't entering their property.

"Let's check with Mom" he said to his sister.

Discussion

Q: Is there a problem with Talya looking through the window?

A: Yes. There is an important concept in Jewish law called *hezek reiyah*. This means "Damage that is done by looking." How can we do damage by looking at something? When we see someone doing something that is private, it can cause that person great embarrassment and harm. According to halacha, we must assume that anything that occurs in someone's home is private. Therefore, others should not look into people's homes or on their property (e.g. backyard). This is such an important rule that the chachamim actually forbid building a window in your house if it will allow you to see into your neighbor's home (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat, 154:3). Even passers-by must refrain from looking into other people's homes, even through an open window (Pischei Choshen, Nezikin,

Chap. 14 note 3).

Q: What is the connection with our parasha?

A: The concept of hezek reiyah is derived from Bilam, who recited the famous phrase "How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov, your dwellings O Israel" (Bamidbar 24:2). What did Bilam see? He saw that the Jews took care to make sure that the doorways of their homes did not face each other, which allowed for privacy in each home (Bava Basra 60a).

Back to story:

Ariel and Talya returned home to find that the electricity was back on.

"It was a problem with our circuit board after all" said Mrs. Silver. "I think I've fixed it. We should be fine".

Talya picked up one of her dolls from her room and went to her mother. "Mommy, is there a "no window peeking" rule in the Torah?"

Their mother laughed, "Well I doubt it's called exactly that, but aren't you happy that your bedroom window has curtains on it, to give you privacy?"

"Mm hmm," Talya nodded her head in agreement.

That night Talya used the last few minutes before bedtime to drape some pink tissues over her dollhouse's windows. Now her dollies were able to have some privacy as well!

(Written by Josh and Tammy Kruger, in collaboration with Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer of the Institute for Dayanim, and based on the following article by Rabbi Pfeffer:
<http://www.dinonline.org/2014/06/30/hezek-reiyah-invasion-of-privacy-in-halachah/>)