

BROTHERLY LOVE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

**He kissed all his brothers and wept on them. Afterwards, his brothers spoke with him.
(Bereishis 45:15)**

This week's Parsha is as good as any to discuss the concept of achdus-unity. After watching Ya'akov Avinu's family get torn apart in different directions over the last two parshios, we finally get to see everyone reunited, and better together than ever before. In this week's parshah, gone is the hatred and jealousy that set things in motion back in Parashas Vayaishev, replaced instead by a real brotherly love that should have been there from the beginning. Oh well, better late than never.

Two Jews, three opinions. What a way to describe a people. How can you expect to have national shalom bayis with a national reputation like that? Why is it even like this in the first place? And, lest you think that it has to do with immaturity or selfish tendencies, we find the same thing occurring amongst those on much higher levels, like between Bais Hillel and Bais Shammai.

On such levels, it can be assumed, schism has more to do with spiritual perfectionism. Perfectionism breeds rigidity, which can make a person critical of himself and others as well, especially if the "others" are not as much of a perfectionist as he or she is. If this is true in everyday life, how much more so must this be true when it comes to the keeping of Torah and the service of God.

Let me give you an example along these lines that someone recently shared with me.

There is a halachah that, when the Chazon repeats the Shemonah Esrai, anyone who is not still praying should listen attentively to every word he says, and answer "Boruch Hu u'boruch Shemo" and "Amen" at the appropriate places. Saying these things at the right time is no small matter, halachically or philosophically, and one should be stringent regarding this law for their own benefit.

There is another reason to be stringent with this halachah: in order that the blessing being said by the Chazon will not be in vain, since he is, technically- speaking, saying it on behalf of the minyan, there should be at least a minyan of people paying attention to what he is saying at any given point in time. Since people tend to drift off when standing around, some people do not even know or care about the issue to begin with, and it is impossible to know how many people are actually paying attention at any given moment in time, even in a large minyan, everyone should assume that he is one of the 10 necessary men.

This means, therefore, that even learning Torah during Chazaras HaShatz is a no-no, because one

should really pay attention to the entire blessing that the Chazon is saying in order to answer Amen to it. Though there may be some exceptions to the rule, for the most part, that is the halachah, and one should adhere to it, no matter how much he loves learning Torah, or how little time he has during the course of a day to do so.

However, my friend's "neighbor" in shul learns anyhow, and they doven together in a very small minyan to begin with. No one else learns at that time, not even the Rav of the shul, or any of the other prominent rabbis who happen to be part of their minyan. But, that doesn't seem to faze this person, who just goes about his learning as if the halachah supports him completely. When at first this bothered my friend, he assumed it was because he was jealous; he'd rather be learning too at that time. But, knowing the halachah, he has a difficult time justifying it: "If God doesn't want me to learn at such a time," he has thought to himself at many a weaker moment, "then for whom would I be learning?" So, when his neighbor learns anyways, he has trained himself to just look away and mind his own business.

"Besides," he has told me, "I wouldn't know how to tell this person the halachah without embarrassing him," an additional reason to keep his peace.

But, this "neighbor" made other mistakes during tefillah, and my friend noticed that all of them were combining and affecting his perception of this person, to the point that he was actually becoming aggravated by the situation. My friend, being somewhat of a perfectionist, at least when it comes to the laws of tefillah, it was hard not to be affected when such blatant errors occurred "in his face" everyday.

Besides, he also wondered to himself, was he being negligent by not telling his neighbor the proper law? As the Talmud states, if a Jew sees another Jew err, and does nothing to remedy the situation, then he is held responsible by Heaven for the each time the sin occurs (Shabbos 54b). "I have plenty enough of my own sins to worry about," he told me, "without having to add to my list those of other people as well!"

What a dilemma it was becoming for him.

As Divine Providence would have it, one day, the daily halachah sheet he receives each day by e-mail turned its attention to the laws of prayer. After a short while, it actually addressed the halachah of not learning during Chazaras HaShatz. So, he decided to innocently leave the page, less his email address, on his neighbor's shtender the next morning, making it look as if it just happened to end up there that day.

He did exactly that, able to do so because his neighbor tends to come at the last minute to shul anyhow. His neighbor came to his place in shul and immediately noticed the paper on his shtender. Curious, he picked it up and began to read it, instead of just pushing it aside as if it was there by mistake, as my friend thought he might do. In fact, he read the entire thing, and then, seemingly taking it to heart, he looked around to see if he could find the person who might have just left it there

for him.

But obviously, to no avail, for my friend just went about his business as if he knew nothing at all about the situation. Satisfied that he had done his part to help this person out, he happily went back to his own world, grateful for how easily everything seemed to work out. He was able to straighten his neighbor out without having to personally confront him.

Sure enough, that day, during Chazaras HaShatz, his neighbor paid perfect attention to the entire repetition. However, though this new behavior lasted for a few days, all of a sudden, one day, his neighbor began to pick up his sefer and learn once again during Chazaras HaShatz, albeit for shorter periods of time than before.

My friend thought this was somewhat strange, and wanted to ask him, now more than ever before, how he justified his behavior. He even considered putting the same halachah page on his neighbor's shtender as before, this time underlining the relevant words, but thought that it would be a little too obvious. So, he decided instead to just bite his tongue this time, and just let his neighbor's errant behavior go.

Well, at least he tried to, until he realized that he began to harbor negative feelings towards this person he barely knows. "True, he may be deliberately breaking a halachah," he told himself, "but why is that the basis to harbor negative feelings towards him? It isn't as if he is rebelling against God, or as if I'm not lenient in other areas of halachah myself!"

His intellectual evaluation of the person, my friend realized, may have been correct, but his emotional reaction to him was all wrong. He found this even more disturbing than his neighbor's blatant disregard for the halachah, so he decided to give it some serious thought, and that's when he began to discuss it with me.

It is right to passionately hate evil people, such as Amalek and all those who consciously follow in his ways. It is also right to hate the evil within us and others, in whatever amount it occurs. But, it is not right at all to hate ourselves for our mistakes or spiritual weaknesses, or those of our fellow Jews who clearly are, for the most part, good people who mean well. How much more so is this true for a fellow Jew who clearly makes a concerted effort to live a Torah lifestyle.

Healthy people look to increase their friends and acquaintances, not to reduce them. Furthermore, we have to always recall, there are so many people in this world who do not like the Jewish people. Should we join their ranks by hating our own fellow Jews as well? And, while we're remembering that, we should also realize that, experience teaches, should a crisis arise affecting all Jews, we would have little difficulty in banding together and fighting alongside one another, as if we are the best of friends, or better yet, brothers.

Indeed, look what happened to Yosef's own brothers in last week's parshah once they stand accused of being spies and thieves. Immediately, they looked at Yosef differently, and finally begin

to feel remorse, and the mercy for him that they should have felt 22 years earlier. Rather than justify their behavior at the time and rationalize it away, they instead became selfcritical, showing that they were in the process of doing teshuvah for the error they had committed decades before.

Not only this, but look at Yosef's reaction to the situation. Though he could have sat back and enjoyed watching them squirm in their new and very uncomfortable position, finally getting revenge for the cruelty they had shown him years before, he instead felt mercy. He felt bad for them, and took no pleasure from any aspect of what they were going through. He had probably even hoped it would end soon, so that the family reunion could finally begin.

In fact, once he did finally reveal himself, he went to great lengths to assure his brothers that he meant them no harm, telling them:

Yosef said to his brothers, "Please, approach me," and they approached. He said, "I am Yosef your brother that you sold into Egypt. Don't be sad, and don't let it bother you that you sold me. Clearly God sent me before you to preserve life, because [of] these two years of famine in the midst of the land, and another five years during which there will be no plowing or harvesting. God sent me before you to make a [way] for you to remain in the land, and to assure that you survive." (Bereishis 45:4-7)

How did Yosef HaTzaddik overcome such incredibly, warranted, negative feelings? Could we have in a similar position? Was Yosef simply a great individual, or is he also a great teacher, sharing with us something from his own experience from which we can learn in order to help us overcome our negativity towards one another, and make shalom instead?

The answer is in his words:

Clearly God sent me before you to preserve life .

In other words, Yosef learned to look past the people who perpetrated bad against him, to see the hand of God behind it all. True, a person has to ask himself, "Why was I the instrument for bad against another?", but the person who was victimized, ultimately, has to realize that he was no victim at all, as far as Divine Providence is concerned. Everything that happens to us does so for a reason, a Divine reason, and ultimately, it is for the good as well, even if, at the time of the hurt, we can't see that good.

Yes, we have a mitzvah to point out the errors of others, and yes they have a mitzvah to be sorry for the wrong they have caused us. But, at the end of the day, everyone has to make shalom, once we all realize that we are all really just actors performing in God's play, the master plan for Creation, and that whatever we do, or is done to us, is directly related to what we have made of ourselves, and how we live our lives.

In God's world, there really are no victims. If you want to find out more about how this is true and how to work with it, check out my new, "No Such Victim: A book about Divine Providence and how to work with it," available from my online bookstore. It will change your approach to life. It certainly did mine.

Text

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