

CARRY THAT BURDEN

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

The Torah is filled with many details regarding how we are supposed to live our lives, and what we are supposed to strive to become. No mitzvah sums this up more than one found in this week's parsha. It commands us to walk in "His" way (Devarim 8:6).

Simply, we must emulate God, at least with respect to those traits that make us more like Him, not less like Him. HE can show anger in the proper way. People rarely do.

It is not hard to list many of God's traits, especially since the Torah has already done this for us (Shemos 34:6). Nevertheless, one of the most important traits of God to inculcate is not one that most people even think about. In Hebrew it is, "noseh b'ohl im chaveiro," which translates as, "carry the burden with your friend."

In fact, it is first middah—trait—of God to which Moshe Rabbeinu is introduced when he happens upon the Burning Bush. Rashi points this out:

An angel of God appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the thorn bush, and behold, the thorn bush was burning with fire, but the thorn bush was not being consumed. (Shemos 3:2)

From within the thorn bush: But not from any other tree, because of "I am with him in distress" (Tehillim 91:5). (Rashi)

God could have appeared to Moshe Rabbeinu in many ways. He could have easily revealed Himself as a non-consuming burning tree, which might have been more regal. Instead, God chose a lowly bush because He wanted to convey an additional message to Moshe Rabbeinu: "Even though I have only come to redeem the Jewish people now, I have been with them the entire time and have felt their suffering. I have shared their burden."

Not only did God transmit this important message to the Jewish people while they were still suffering. He repeated it after they were already free:

... and they perceived the God of Israel, and beneath His feet was like the forming of a sapphire brick and like the appearance of the heavens for clarity. (Shemos 24:10)

Like the forming of a sapphire brick: that was before Him at the time of the bondage, to remember the Jewish people's straits [i.e.,] that they were enslaved in the making of bricks. (Rashi)

Once again, the same message:

I am with you, even when it seems as if I am not.

It is the difference between sympathy and empathy. A sympathetic person feels bad for someone suffering, but not what it feels like to suffer. It limits how much they can feel for the other person, which the suffering person can usually pick up. They do not feel any less alone as a result.

Empathy puts a person, albeit temporarily, in the shoes of the suffering person. It invokes feelings that the suffering person is dealing with, and that comes out by the way they connect to the sufferer. The latter picks that up, and is comforted by the fact that they do not carry their burden alone.

It is understandable why such a trait is so important to God. God made this world for relationships, between man and God and between man and man. The measure of the depth of any relationship is the extent to which the parties become one. Being *noseh b'ohl im chaveiro* is an important key to accomplishing this.

If you think about it, it is the reverse of the story of *Kamtza and Bar Kamtza* which, the Talmud says, led to the destruction of the Second Temple (*Gittin 55b*). *Bar Kamtza*, mistakenly invited to the party of his enemy, begged not to be humiliated by being thrown out. Rather than be *noseh b'ohl im chaveiro*, the host threw him out, humiliated a fellow Jew and, incredibly, contributed to the destruction of the Temple.

The impact of being *noseh b'ohl im chaveiro* has its benefits too. According to the *Ba'al HaTurim*, the tribe of *Yosef* was blessed with the most fertile part of *Eretz Yisroel* because *Yosef* only had children until the famine began. *Yosef* did not want to have a normal life, though he could have in the palace of *Pharaoh*, while his "fellow" Egyptians suffered.

This is also the reason why *Tu B'Av* follows on the heels of *Tisha B'Av*. The Talmud says that the two happiest days of the year for the Jewish people are *Yom Kippur* and *Tu B'Av*. *Yom Kippur* provides greatly needed atonement, a reason for much joy. *Tu B'Av*, however, is a happy day for a couple of reasons, one being that it was a day of making *shidduchim*.

True, but perhaps the most important aspect of *Tu B'Av* is overlooked and considered to be incidental. It is not. The Talmud says:

Our Rabbis have taught: The daughter of the king borrows [the garments] from the daughter of the *Kohen Gadol*, the daughter of the *Kohen Gadol* from the daughter of the deputy *Kohen Gadol*, and the daughter of the deputy *Kohen Gadol* from the daughter of the Anointed for Battle, and the daughter of the Anointed for Battle from the daughter of an ordinary *kohen*. All Israel borrow from one another, so as not to put to shame any one who may not possess [white garments]. (*Ta'anis 31a*)

It is not usually such a national concern. It is not unusual for the neighbors of a woman who lacks decent clothing to start dating to help her out. It is unusual to make such help a national event. Yet that is exactly what happened on *Tu B'Av*. EVERYONE was *noseh b'ohl im chaveiro* on this one day of the year.

It was the opposite of how the host treated Bar Kamtza. He did not empathize at all, but rather let his own personal wants direct his actions. The rabbis who did not stand up for Bar Kamtza also seemed to lack enough empathy to right the wrong in action,. It was a trait which seemed to run through the Jewish people at the time. It led, ultimately, to the destruction of the Second Temple.

Thus Tu B'Av is a day of "noseh b'ohl im chaveiro." As such, it is a great day of rectification, of individuals and of the nation. When we, in our our own generation, will get it right as well, b"H, it is will lead to the biggest blessing of all: the Final Redemption, may it come quickly in our time.