

Parshas Acharei Mos - Kedoshim 5772

A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

This week's *parshah* contains that classic credo, which is considered an encapsulation of the entire Torah — “Love your neighbor as yourself” (*Vayikra 19:18 with Rashi, Sifsei Chachamim; cf. Shabbos 31a*). The extent and parameters of the “as yourself” aspect of this commandment are spelled out by the *Sefer Chareidim* in his description of this mitzvah:

“One must relate his fellow’s praise and be as careful with his possessions as he is with his own; he should be desirous that his friend’s prestige be preserved as much as his own; he should display as much love and compassion for his fellow as he does for himself; he should seek out his welfare and rejoice when he achieves happiness and be pained by his troubles...” (*Sefer Chareidim 9:24*).

The Satmar Rav was an individual who excelled in this trait to a most remarkable degree. It once happened that — at a time when his main attendant was temporarily out of the house — a certain man came calling on the Rebbe. The visitor began unfolding his tale of woe: his wife was seriously ill, his children were handicapped, and he was therefore reeling under the burden of crushing medical expenses. The Rebbe was so moved by the petitioner’s story that tears sprang to his eyes. He immediately took all of the money in his possession and gave it to the unfortunate man. In order to increase the size of the donation even further, he took loans from the other people then in attendance and presented this gift to the supplicant.

Later on, the Rebbe’s main assistant returned to the

house and was briefed on the occurrence. With no small measure of consternation, he turned to the Rebbe to relate some pertinent information. “You should know,” he told the Rebbe, “that this man is a practiced trickster and has deceived you as well. In truth, his wife and children are perfectly healthy and are quite comfortable.”

We can only imagine what the reaction would have been had such fraud been perpetrated on the likes of you or me. But the Rebbe’s response to the situation was quite revealing. Upon hearing the news, his demeanor underwent an immediate transformation — from one of great pain and empathy to one of pure joy. “Oh, that is indeed great news!” he exclaimed. “You don’t know how upset I was to hear that his family was not well. I am so glad that they are alright!” (*Bemechitzasam, vol. III, p. 242-3*).

“And he should... rejoice when he achieves happiness, and be pained by his troubles...”

INTERRELATIONSHIP OF PATIENCE AND RESPECT

How was the Satmar Rav able to achieve such a level of empathy? He was so relieved to hear that his fellow’s welfare was intact that he was effectively impervious to the wrongdoing accorded him by that same individual! The key to the Rebbe’s mastery in this area may be found in the following Mishnah (*Avos 2:10*), which states:

רבי אליעזר אומר, יהי כבוד חברך חביב עליך כששלה, ואל תהי נוח לבעוס.

“R’ Eliezer says: Your friend’s honor should be as dear to

לז"נ מרדכי ב"ר ברוך שלום הי"ד

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of זיסל בת אשר אנשיל ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her neshamah.

you as your own; and you should not be easily angered.”

At first glance, these statements of R' Eliezer seem to be two essential but distinct pieces of instruction, the first dealing with interpersonal relations, the second a comment on fostering patience.

But the commentaries find an important link between these two concepts. If one person is struck by another, the injured party will immediately feel temptation to return the blow. But if through some careless act an individual strikes himself with his own hand, no anger will well up within him. He certainly will not entertain thoughts of getting back at his right hand with his left one. A Jew who inculcates within himself the sentiment of “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” — to the extent that he views his friend’s joy as his own and his friend’s honor as his own — will likewise be spared from feelings of malice.

Since he sees his fellow as a part of himself — another limb of that single body that is Klal Yisrael — his ire won’t be raised when “stricken” or wronged by his “other hand” (*Medrash Shmuel*).

Such sentiment was achieved by the Satmar Rav. He did not see his petitioners as separate entities from himself, but as part of the same whole. Thus, his main concern was not whether he was unfairly misled but that all of his “limbs” were in order. In this way, he did not react with malice toward the fraudulent beggar but was concerned for and rejoiced in his wellbeing.

BORN NEEDY

In a somewhat related vein, it bears mentioning here how other luminaries applied their clear vision to situations that others viewed much less favorably. The Chofetz Chaim’s view of paupers is particularly enlightening.

People sometimes tend to grow weary of the frequent requests made by those looking for handouts. A prevalent sentiment may go something along the lines of: “Instead of relying on the public dole, why don’t you go out and get a job!”

But the Chofetz Chaim reminds us of a certain teaching of Chazal (*Niddah 16a*). Before a person enters the world, his future status is preordained and announced Above: Will this individual be wealthy or needy? And so, one about whom it was decreed to be rich is imbued by Hashem with an abundance of alacrity and resourcefulness, tools that will facilitate his rise to wealth throughout his life. But one who is destined for poverty receives a much different set of inborn characteristics. Hashem “fills him with lead,” as it were. A needy individual searching for handouts may simply be utilizing his tailor-made nature. Instead of contempt and bright ideas, he may need only a kind word — and a few coins (*Chofetz Chaim al Hatorah, Ma’asei Hamelech, parshas Beshalach*).



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