

## A tale of two brothers

By: Dr. Leah R Adams

Several weeks ago we spoke of steering clear of machlokes and head on collisions with other's attitudes. Besides for the religious implications, a person's psychological well-being relies on this as well. Since then I heard a poignant vort from Rabbi Chaim Zev Levitan that is so on target to our discussion that I am compelled to share it. Rabbi Levitan spoke of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik who was known to be a Kanai, one whose disagreements with others was only fueled by his zealousness for Torah and Kavod Shamayim. One day a man came to Rav Chaim hoping to have Rav Chaim join in his cause. When Rav Chaim refused, the man, rather perplexed, commented, "But I thought you are a Kanai!?" Rav Chaim replied with the following Mashal. He said, 'The difference between us is like the difference between the homeowner and the cat when it comes to mice. The homeowner wishes that he never had the problem while the cat looks forward to the infestation.' The opportunity for Machlokes is not difficult to come upon. The key is establishing a resistance to its temptation.

Rabbi Doniel Frank gives a weekly shiur in Tomer Devorah. The Sefer was penned by the Kabbalist Rav Moshe Cordovero centuries ago and teaches us the ageless lesson that the proper way to conduct ourselves is to emulate the One Above. He explains that when Bnei Yisroel are referred to as "She'eris Nachalaso", the word "She'eris" is being used in its meaning of She'er Basaar, a flesh relation. Because of the fact that we are all connected to Hashem (literally) and he is connected to all of us, in reality, all of us have a part of each other in each other. That means that when we say that Kol Yisroel Areivim ze Baze, all Jews are 'responsible' for one another this is not just a sweet idea but a description of our existence. If I have a part of you in me, I am responsible to keep it pure just as you are responsible with the part of me that we share. And, if I have a part of you in me and me in you, I have a vested interest in not harming or degrading you in any way. This idea that we share in the greatness of Hashem and in the marvelous strengths of our fellow man, is so empowering and so important to our sense of self-worth. This connectedness may be hard to understand with a total stranger, but is easier to understand when we think of our own blood relatives such as brothers.

In the past few weeks' parshiyos we read about Moshe and Aaron. Moshe was concerned that Aaron would be insulted that he, Moshe, the younger brother, was stepping in to lead Klal Yisroel after Aaron had been their leader for so many years. We are taught, in Shmos 4,14 that, in fact, "Vira'acha visamach bilibo", he (Aaron) saw his brother (coming to lead klal yisroel) and was truly happy (inwardly and out). Rav Dovid Povarsky's discussion of this topic is written in the sefer called, Yishmiru Daas Reshimos Talmidim, a collection of shiurim compiled by the Rav's students. Rav Povarsky explains that if the Torah says that Aaron was happy, then it means that every fiber of Aaron's body felt this happiness, without any impediment that could have been presented by the human frailties of the soul. What could have been fodder for jealousy and divisiveness was seen as an opportunity for pride and rejoicing. As it says in

Yiddish, “A barg mit a barg kennen zich nisht tsuzamen kumen, ober, a mensch mit a mensch kennen”. This means mountains (or men standing on ceremony) cannot meet but men (human beings with hearts), can. This connection, this ability to actually feel not just for each but AS each other, reflects one of the highest forms of emulating Hashem.

This concept is illustrated as well in the famous story of two brothers who inherited land from their father. Each feels the pain of the other, one of his brother who has many children and who therefore has to support them with his share of the earnings and the other, of his brother who is childless and therefore has no one with whom to share his workload. In the cover of night they each secretly place extra grain in the storehouse of the other. After several nights they bump into each other on their mission. They rejoice in each other’s sensitivity.

Oftentimes this idea of the interdependent relationship between people is expressed as “Birds of a feather flock together.” Esther Baila Schwartz raises an interesting point in discussing this phrase. When this idea leads to *inclusion* is it positive, but, it can also be used as an excuse for *exclusion*. The example she sites is the small, out of town community with few religious Jews. In a situation like that, the few Orthodox Jews flock together, regardless of specific philosophical differences, and the concept leads to inclusion of all Jews who would attend a synagogue service. In a community replete with Orthodox Jews, a veritable Jewish ghetto, this tendency to stick with your own kind usually ends up limiting your interactions to those of your own philosophy, your own shul, synagogue or shteibel. In this second case the “areivus” or connectedness is limiting.

I recently read the book “Yes I Can”, the story of the life of Chaya Pitter Tolwinski Friedman. The book is jam packed with valuable life lessons and a must read for many reasons but for the purpose of this article let’s discuss one particular point. When asked how she managed to function so “normally” despite her obvious physical differences, Chaya responded that she was accepted by her family and friends as a regular person. In other words, while, in fact, many surface things differentiated her from them, her gait, her shyness, her learning disabilities and her medical issues, this indifference to her differences and acceptance of her as one of them was one of the important keys to her success.

The only way to avoid the entrapment of ill-will is to see others as an extension of ourselves. When I view your weaknesses as mine, I tend to view them as an incidental part of you, not as a defining characteristic. When I view your successes as mine, how they can make both of us shine with your pride. This concept of interdependence exists in the Monsey community not only amongst family and neighbors, but amongst “competitors” as well. Years ago, Monsey Glatt lent space (free of charge) to another butcher who temporarily needed a place to work. Mr. Moshe Mendlowitz of Monsey Glatt related to me that even today, there is an undercurrent of cooperation between several of the local kosher groceries. Rather than vying for the demise of their fellow grocers, when one runs low on an item, the others pitch in. While in the office at Monsey Glatt I noticed this quip posted on the wall, “Stupid mistakes are always

made by others, we only make unavoidable errors”. (I know from the history of the store related above that they don’t really believe this.) If we believe that “we” and “others” are truly interconnected as we learn in the Tomer Devorah, then we would never sit in judgment of, or enjoy, the others’ mistakes, and would view all as merely errors. And, after all, since “To err is human (and to really mess up you need a computer”), and none of us (in anyone’s eyes) are perfect, we might as well smile for our family portrait with our brotherhood of humanity.

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