

Two sides of the coin

By: Dr. Leah Adams

We've had a relatively mild winter. That's good, right? Well, it depends on who you are. If you are the snow plow guy then this lack of snow is a disaster. If you are the homeowner who didn't have to pay the snow plow guy then this is great. If you are the kids who like to ride bikes then this is the season for you. If you are the kids who like to go sledding, then this isn't such a good deal. Let's say you're the hotelier in Florida or the airlines. There's a good chance that business is down because who needs to go south for the winter if the winter isn't all that bad up here? On the other hand, if you are the restaurateur up north then some of those people who might have vacationed in Florida are vacationing at home by eating out. The family that owns a hardware store might be breaking even. They sure aren't doing much in snow shovel sales, but maybe people are still doing outside home repairs. Even last month's power outage had its positives and negatives. Being without heat was no picnic, but filling the house with candlelight was actually quite lovely. (Freeing ourselves from our slavery to electrical gadgets was also a positive experience but we'll save that for another article.) Sometimes the same item can be wonderful and not so wonderful at the same time. When it snows, I look out at it and dread the effort required in shoveling but at the same time I marvel at how beautiful it is.

People can be understood in a similar way. My husband often says that a person's Maalos (good character traits) are often the same as their Chesronos (not such good character traits). Let's say, for example, that you live with a "neat freak" who organizes everything in the house. On the one hand, you resent having to hang your coat and put your belongings in a designated spot. On the other hand, you always know that you'll be able to find the cereal and nosh that you want because it is lined up neatly in the cabinet! Just because the "neat freak's" agenda is an inconvenience at times, doesn't remove its inherent value. In Yiddish there is an expression, 'Ales in einem is nisht do by kainim'. The translation of the phrase is, everything together is not in anyone. This means that

you don't find every positive trait in one person and not every trait is positive in every person at all times.

Think of examples in your own lives. Think about the people that you deal with, live with, admire and even resent. Can you see how this applies in your own life? How often do you hear of couples where one resents that the other won't take off time from work to be with them, yet that sense of financial responsibility is exactly what this person respects in their spouse. In the children's book "King for a Moment: Meyer's Secret" by B.D. & Company we see an interesting switch on what we would assume. Meyer and Max, business partners, travel the world in search of wealth. They stumble across a town where, oddly enough, the fact that they are strangers does not only not get them thrown in jail, but rather gets them appointed to the positions of Kings! What would have been an undesirable trait in many places was actually the same characteristic that brought them riches. The book is based on a Moshol (parable) from Chovos Halivavos (Duties of the Heart). It takes Max and Meyer, as well as the reader, on many interesting travels that often challenge our preconceived notions about situations. The same quality, in the context of different situations or as seen by different observers seems to take on a different value yet really remains the same.

Consistency is the key here. My mother worked for many years in an out-of-town public school system. She found that she did not have difficulty taking off time for Pesach. Why? Because this same woman who was using religion to get extra time off, was also the same woman who was respected for her religiosity when she refused the treif delicacies offered to her at office celebrations. Just because my mother's religious needs were an inconvenience to the school at Pesach time, didn't remove their inherent value. I find in working with couples that religion sometimes becomes an issue. Minyan attendance is one that that comes to mind. I am certainly no Posek but raise these examples as food for thought. You might hear your neighbor complain that her choice of vacation spots is limited because her husband insists on only going somewhere where there is a minyan. This same woman would very likely proudly describe her husband as a good from Jew because of his convictions in other areas. Just because his religious commitment is an inconvenience to her right now, doesn't remove its inherent value.

Perhaps you've wondered about the title of the article. Well, here's the logic to it. When we flip a coin, whether we're betting on heads or tails, and whether or not we win on this bet, the coin itself still has the same inherent value. When we're dealing with others, and whether their traits are an inconvenience to us right now or not, perhaps we should remember the other side of the coin.

Leah Adams, PsyD is a Psychologist in Private Practice in the Monsey area. She participates in some insurance plans and can be reached for appointments or speaking engagements at 845-661-8741. She loves to hear about your side of the coin and you can write to her at drleahadams@gmail.com.

This article appeared in "The Front Page Magazine" on January 4, 2012.