

Forget about it. . .

By: Dr. Leah Adams

A friend sent me a beautiful story one day. (While I like to quote items Bshaim Omrom, in the name of the author, my research came up with "author unknown".) It tells of two friends traveling in the desert. When one hurts the other, the second writes in the sand 'my friend hurt me'. When the first later saves the other, the second etches on a stone, 'my friend saved me'. The first one questioned his friend about this strange choice of 'notes'. The second responded that we should write our offenses in the sand so that the 'winds of forgiveness' blow them away, but the kindnesses done to us, and those who have done them, should be remembered always.

All too often people have these concepts backwards and spend an enormous amount of emotional energy maintaining their anger at the world. When people ask me if I am insulted when something particular is done to me, I always respond that I am too stupid to get insulted. "Stupid" people forget things. People that are too "smart" are always reading into things and remember their hurt forever. Sometimes we hear them rationalize their reactions by proclaiming that their anger is Lishaym Shamayim, for the sake of a higher cause. Some machlokisim are actually Lishaim Shamayim, but a person would need to consult a halachic authority to ascertain whether this specific argument, in which they are entrenched, is legitimately Lishaym Shamayim. We are taught that the machlokesim between Hillel and Shamai were of the few considered to be on this level. Personal aggrandizement was absent from their religious discourses and, we are told, these discussions were purely for the sake of clarifying halacha. How many of us can honestly say that our personal feelings of pride and/or insecurity, have no part in our disagreements?

Another religious concept that is sometimes used in relation to arguments is, "It's not Sinas Chinam (baseless hatred), after all, that guy really did something terrible to me." Rabbi Doniel Frank gives a weekly thought provoking shiur on the Tomer Devorah. Recently he quoted his Rebbe, Reb Yochanan Zweig in his explanation of Sinas Chinam. Sinas Chinam is not baseless at its start. It is a hatred that transcends the original reason. The flavor of it brews until it's power takes over the person or even a whole community. We need to ensure that that once having tasted machlokes, we do not develop a hunger for it. We need to be sure that it does not grow and take on a life of its own in other situations.

The negative impact of anger is discussed in both religious and secular literature. It's physiological affects on blood pressure and sugar metabolism are well known. In his classic work "Anger: The Inner Teacher" by Rabbi Zelig

Pliskin, he spends time discussing some of the physiological effects of anger. One in particular, is the recognition that a person who is angry, is not able to think things out clearly. Why would a Rav working on our spiritual growth focus on our physiological reactions? Without an understating of the negative impact of anger on our bodies, we might just think it is a "midas chasiddus" to improve our manner. When we understand that our anger is actually hurting us, we view the idea of change as necessary. Rabbi Pliskin quotes a passage in Berachot (29b) where Eliyahu Hanavi explains, "don't become angry and you won't sin." If our clarity of thinking becomes clouded with anger, not only does our relationship with other people suffer, but our relationship with Hashem suffers as well. The Rambam in Mishna Torah, expounds on anger. He seems to say that we should not be explosive yet should not be emotionally dead. While most of the time anger is not warranted, there are times of great importance that require it. Rav Yosef Kapach explains the Rambam further. He specifies that even when a display of anger is appropriate, it can only be an external display and is not to really be experienced by the one expressing it.

How in the world do we accomplish not getting, internalizing or spreading our anger? While tomes have been written on the subject, I tried to come up with a shorthand type of list. One biggie is not to judge situations based on hearsay. The 'word on the street' is often dragged through the mud by the time we hear it. Another one to remember is that Lashon Hara is often almost delicious in its temptation but, once out, it is like the broken safety seal on a bottle that allows all types of germs to contaminate the content. In "Can you hear me now?" (last week's The Front Page) by The Observant Jew, AKA Rabbi Jonathan Gewirtz he promotes the positive skill of listening. Sometimes others are upset and just want to be heard. This can allow the anger to dissipate. Remember, however, that your job is listener, not yenta. Be sure that you don't publicize the other person's issues. Just because they wanted an intimate opportunity to express themselves, doesn't mean that they want their feelings advertised. Here's another pointer. When someone approaches you with a machlokes "Lishaym Shamayim" be wary. Check out if it meets the required specifications to stay afloat. If not then you will sink along with it. Another idea to remember is that Sinas Chinam, left unchecked, takes over families, neighborhoods and whole communities. Treat it as you would nuclear waste. It affects everyone, not just those to whom it was originally directed. Perhaps the handiest rule of all is to be humble enough to realize that you never know all of the details of any given situation. Be satisfied enough to use that ignorance to remove yourself from the judge's bench.

We began in the sands of the desert and end under an umbrella on a rainy day. The story of "Sharing a Sunshine Umbrella" by Yaffa Ganz is a story of two best friends, Mimmy and Simmy. Pride is at stake when one misses a step in jump rope and the two blame each other for either being a bad jumper or

bad rope-turner. The sadness of each of them, as they allow this argument to get in the way of everything they used to enjoy, is heart wrenching. In the end, they make up outside in the rain (You'll want to read the book to get more details.) Interestingly, the original fight is never addressed. It is allowed to blow away like the sand in our first story. By letting it go, and not using any of the above rationalizations to keep the fight going, they both win.

Dr. Leah Adams is a Psychologist in

Private Practice in the Monsey area.

She can be reached at 845-661-8741 for appointments and speaking engagements and participates in some insurance plans, including Medicare.

She loves to receive readers' feedback at

drleahadams@gmail.com.

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