

It's Contagious

Now that Tisha B'av has passed, let us not lose the momentum of the inspiration that we have gained. Come join me on a literary review of a most unusual nature. We will begin with the sophisticated writing of the Me'Am Loez of the 18th century and end in the juvenile section of the library. We will see the impact of others on the affairs of the world, its demise and its promising future.

The Me'Am Loez was written in 1773 by Rav Yaakov Culi and Rav Yitzchak Bakhor Agruti. To prepare for our review today, I have relied upon the translation of Rav Aryeh Kaplan, ZT”L titled “The story of Tisha B'Av” published in 1981. Hyrkanus and Aristobolus were brothers, sons of a King. The King's orders were that his Queen succeed him and Hyrkanus should become the Kohain Gadol. After the Queen's death, a disagreement between the brothers occurred. It was settled that Hyrkanus remain Kohain Gadol and Aristobolus become king. Hyrkanus' pride and inability to accept his own exalted position as satisfying, led him to do the unthinkable—he joined forces with the Roman Emperor who besieged Yerushalayim and trapped Aristobolus. The fire of Sinas Chinam not only destroyed the relationship of 2 brothers, but the Bais HaMikdosh, and many Jewish brothers, as well.

Rav Dovid Povarski, ZT”L, a Ponovitch Rosh Yeshiva of this century, discusses the depth of the sin of Sinas Chinam. He is quoted by his students in a Sefer titled “Yishmiru Da’as, Rishimos HaTalmidim”. At the time of Bayis Rishon we learn that destruction came to Klal Yisroel because of immorality, idol worship and murder. The Navi Yirmiyahu, however, says that it was destroyed because of lack of involvement in Torah learning. Rav Dovid quotes the Alter of Kelm who explains that despite the nation's involvement in the cardinal sins, Torah heals, and would have protected the Jews from the extremity of the punishment. Rav Dovid continues that during the Second Bayis, however, the people were engaged in Torah study. Why then were they destroyed? He explains that Torah tainted with Sinas Chinam does not have this same protective power.

Our neighbor and editor of the Yated, Rabbi Pinny Lipschutz, publishes a Sefer in honor of each of his children's simchas. In his volume “Tefillah L'Dovid” published in honor of his son's Bar Mitzvah, he writes a piece about this time period using a psychoanalytical bend. The Sinas

Chinam that we are told preceded and led to the destruction of the Bayis Sheini is, in itself, a destructive force. Let us say that I see what you have or have accomplished in terms of mitzvos. This resentment then leads to a sense of personal emptiness. I now have two choices-to strive to emulate it or try to minimize its importance, by belittling it. The former requires introspection, the Gevura to overcome my Yetzer and Ameilus, effort, to accomplish it. The latter requires the mere slip of a tongue.

Rabbi Lipschutz posits that the belittling, whether with words or gestures diminishes not only the importance of the doer but of the act as well. When others see that “doers of good deeds” as they are called in the Wizard of Oz, are scoffed, they are less likely to do good themselves. Eventually, even the good act is seen as meaningless or worse yet, undesirable. He cites the example of a philanthropist whose Tzedaka earns him a title on a building. One resentful soul, whose wallet was not affected in the least by this generous endeavor, chides the good one about having his name on the building. This not only makes the philanthropist think twice about doing this again, but causes others to think this way. This, in turn can chas vishalom lead to inadequate support for the needy, Limud Torah or other important endeavors. Here we see again how the Sinas Chinam of one individual can destroy many.

Now we have arrived at our turning point, our shift from the Lo Saaseh to the Aaseh. From the dismal future awaiting us for following the evil-doers to the redemption available to us by leading the do-gooders. The same way that unfortunately we are tempted to follow the crowd in perpetuating Sinas Chinam, we can be swayed to help others. If our friends are involved in Loshon Hora, for example, how easily are we tempted by this sin. When our friends are involved in acts of kindness, this too can be contagious.

We now continue our literary analysis by turning to the children's literature section. Chazal teach us that we learn from everyone. “Umitalmidai yoser michulam”, 'and from my students, in this case my children, I learn the most of all'. I beg your indulgence as I quote from “Dov's Mitzvah” by Risa Rotman, illustrated by Ariel Bauer. In it the impact of the one on the many is so simply and poignantly displayed that I feel compelled to share it with you. In the story a young boy named Dov moves a stone out of the way of passersby to avoid there being an accident. Mrs. Steingreen witnesses this and says “This is my chance to help someone,

too.” When she then helps an elderly relative, a passerby, the baker, witnesses this and he too is motivated to do chesed. A witness to the baker's kindness prompts him to help a neighbor. This prompts a school girl who is watching to befriend a shy girl. Rabbi Gladstone, who witnesses that act of kindness, then offers to give a shiur. All along the characters chant “I won't push it off 'till I get around to it, a mitzvah's just waiting for me to do it!” Chesed is contagious. Think now about your own life. Think of the time when you let that one word that wasn't too complimentary slip out. Think of the next comment of the person next to you and the one next to them. Now, think of the time that you opened your wallet to the neighbor's child collecting Tzedaka. Think of the reaction of the person next to you. Chesed need not be grandiose to have an impact.

Here we veer off track momentarily. In Parshas Pinchas we learn of the plea of the daughters of Tzlafchad to Moshe to grant them, as women, inheritance rights to the Land of Israel since their father had no sons. In teaching us the Halacha the Torah writes “Ken Bnos Tzlafchad Dovros”, 'the daughters of Tzlafchad have spoken correctly'. Why is this accolade written in the Torah? What does this add to the Halacha? Rabbi Zev Leff of Moshav Matityahu quotes his Rosh HaYeshiva Rav Gifter, ZT”L with the following explanation. The Torah is teaching us that when someone does something right, it is proper to publicly commend them. It is in this vein we now return to our regularly scheduled program.

I am fortunate to live in a neighborhood in Monsey where I witness the domino affect of chesed firsthand. There are neighbors who cook whole meals for the sick who influence others to make the deliveries. There are neighbors who house disabled children for Shabbos leading others to befriend these children at shul. Other neighbors daven so beautifully that, unbeknownst to them, others are inspired to answer a fervent “Amen”. Still others organize activities for the local children, influencing the next generation in their performance of Mitzvos. There are neighbors who open their homes regularly to those seeking Judaism, who impact others to do kiruv on the phone. Some lend out chairs, prompting others to lend out tablecloths. One works in a bridal gown gemach, thus influencing other to give to hachnosas kallah. Others pack huge deliveries for Tomchei Shabbos, encouraging others to donate one item. There are the Hatzolah members who devote hours of their time in filling medical needs that influence others to drive a patient to a doctor's appointment. Some of the chesed is public, such as the neighbor's organization that provides household help for families with

a sick family member, and some is private, such as those involved in the Chevra Kadisha. Some women in the neighborhood have even organized a Chaburah to find out where more Chesed is needed! Join the doers. Bring redemption. Even the “little” Mitzvas help in a “BIG” way!

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