



Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ ר ש ת ק ד ש י ם

לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך:

The wording of the posuk is somewhat awkward. If the Torah is merely instructing us not to feel hatred towards our fellow Jews, it should have said "es achicha lo sisna bilvavecha". Since "bilvavecha" (in your heart) qualifies the prohibition of "lo sisna" (not to hate), in loshon hakodesh it would have been more appropriate to juxtapose the two rather than interrupt with "achicha", the object of the hatred. Why then does the posuk insert "es achicha" (your brother) in the middle?

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin zt"l suggests the following: It is natural for some people to hate each other. This is human nature. Indeed, Chazal tell us that it is assumed that two competitors hate each other, and although we know that we shouldn't, we all encounter people who are difficult to get along with and have a difficult time befriending. To this end, the Torah commands us not to hate any other Jew - "lo sisna". But how are we to overcome these natural tendencies? The Torah offers us an approach: "es achicha bvavecha" - deep down in your heart, he is your brother! You don't feel he is "achicha"? Bilvavecha - its in your heart! Normal sibling rivalry aside, brothers and sisters naturally love each other. The Torah is reminding us that all Jews are brothers and sisters. If we don't realize it, we must do some self introspection as deep down in our hearts we realize this to be true.



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We are in the midst of a national period of mourning; in the days of sefiras ha'omer and as we approach matan Torah, we mourn the deaths of R' Akiva's 24,000 students who died during this short time period. Chazal tell us that this was a punishment for not according each other with proper respect. Clearly, they did not hate each other in the classic sense of the term. Rather, as the gemara's wording indicates, they did not accord each other the honor and respect due to them. Their greatness in Torah should have sensitized them to the point that they would go the extra mile to honor their friends. They didn't and were punished for not fine tuning their sensitivity and acting upon it. Then, R' Akiva had to begin again and found five new students to help disseminate Torah throughout k'lal Yisroel. As their teacher, he is often quoted as saying "love your friend like yourself – this is a great Torah principle". If we think about it, "v'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocho" is actually a posuk in the Torah. What then, was R' Akiva telling us? Perhaps he was letting us know the error of his 24,000 students: They failed to realize their friends were an extension of themselves as we are all brothers and sisters. Deep in our hearts, we know this to be true.

לא תקם ולא תטר וכו':

We are forbidden to take revenge or bear a grudge. To illustrate what exactly this means, Chazal give the example of Reuvein who asked Shimon if he could borrow his ladder. Although he had one, Shimon refused to



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help his friend and refused to lend him a ladder. A short while later, Shimon couldn't find his hammer. When he asked Reuvein if he could use his, Reuvein replied "Why should I? After all, you wouldn't help me when I needed a ladder a few weeks ago!" This, say Chazal, is revenge that the Torah forbids. If Reuvein replies in the affirmative, but adds "of course! I am not like you who wouldn't lend me his ladder", then Shimon is guilty of bearing a grudge. Although we tend to understand taking revenge or bearing a grudge as a response to malicious behavior or other wrongdoing, Chazal's examples clearly involve matters involving lending items of monetary value or the withholding thereof. Indeed, according to most opinions, although it is discouraged, one is permitted to take revenge or bear a grudge against someone who acted in a cruel or demeaning fashion. Why is this so?

The Sefer Yad HaKetana explains that although chesed is to be encouraged, since one is under no obligation to lend his property to others, he cannot be faulted for his refusal. Therefore Reuvein's refusal to do a similar chesed only because Shimon refused a similar request, demonstrates that he demands more from others than does the Torah itself. Also, his "in your face" agreement carries similar connotations. If the Torah does not require Shimon to lend a ladder, then what gives Reuvein the right to be offended? Whatever Shimon's reasons were should not be cause for Reuvein to bestow chesed to his fellow Jew willingly, and with a smile. Indeed, if Shimon's actions were



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malicious, such conduct is forbidden by the Torah and Reuvein has every right to have hard feelings until Shimon apologizes for his actions.

ואיש אשר ינאף את אשת איש וכו':

Parshas Acharei Mos ends with the Torah's prohibition of the arayos (forbidden relationships). Some of them are punishable by death. For others, those who transgress are liable for kareis. Our parsha concludes with a listing of the respective punishment for each forbidden relationship. The fact that the Torah devotes an entire set of pesukim to relate this information is of no surprise. This follows with the general rule that the Torah can only demand punishment after first warning us that an act is forbidden. What is peculiar however, is that the Torah "interrupted" the parsha of arayos with several other matters. Since the two appear in relatively close proximity to each other (i.e. parshas kedoshim follows immediately after acharei mos, and are not in two separate chumashim), it would seem logical to put them right next to each other. Why then, are they separated by several seemingly unrelated pesukim?

HaRav Moshe Feinstein zt"l explains that our question stems from our lack of understanding and appreciation of the Torah's approach to punishment and how it differs from the approach of the rest of the world. The purpose of punishment in secular law is to act as a deterrent. Often punishments may



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exceed the gravity of the crime in order to stop people from flouting the law. Indeed, this is also what the Torah expects from the nations of the world and creating penal systems is a fulfillment of the Noahide obligation of setting up courts. While this may also be a secondary function of beis din - in order to maintain law and order - the Torah's view of reward and punishment is quite different. When a person disobeys Hakadosh Boruch Hu's command, he is not just sinning against G-d. If he steals, he is doing more than taking his neighbor's property from him. Every wrong doing and misdeed leaves a blemish on the soul of its perpetrator. The role of punishment is to remove this blemish and cleanse the soul. Therefore, explains Reb Moshe, there is no need to juxtapose the Torah's prohibitions to their respective punishments. Perhaps the Torah deliberated "waited" in order to convey this message. In the goal of punishment is to discourage sin, then there is room for a statute of limitations as indeed the person is no longer the criminal he once was. However, since the Torah views punishment as a means of cleansing the neshama, the need for it remains as long as the blemish is still there even if a lot has happened since the crime.

There is a lesson here for all of us. No one is perfect and each of us have points in our lives that have left their mark on our neshamos. While we should not dwell on the past as moving forward is far more important, there comes a time when we must look back and clean up any spills we left behind. Not that



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we should inflict ourselves with punishments; there are other ways to cleanse ourselves of the past - through Torah and tefilah.