

Freedom from Resentment

Category: Bamidbar, Chukas

All too often, families and friendships are torn apart by conflicts which linger for many years. This week's parsha tells us how to overcome them.

Impatient in Line

Good Shabbos!

Sunday was the Yahrzeit of the Rebbe, and thousands of people came to New York to visit the Ohel. Often, on Gimel Tammuz, people stand in line for hours in the heat, just to get the chance to spend two minutes at the Ohel.

And as always, there are people who try to jump the line or skip their turn, whether because they have a flight to catch or because it's just too hard for them to stand in line.

A group of Chasidim once stood in line waiting for an audience with a certain Rebbe. Among them was an individual who had been waiting there for three days. Obviously, he was very stressed out.

As they were standing there, the aide came up and told him that he wouldn't be able to see the Rebbe today either. The Chosid got very angry and started arguing with the aide. In the heat of the moment, he got physical and actually attacked the aide, and chaos erupted.

The Rebbe, who had been sitting in his office this entire time, heard the commotion and immediately called the aide in to ask him what was going on out there. At first, the aide didn't want to tell the Rebbe—but when the Rebbe insisted, he informed the Rebbe that a Chosid had hit him.

The Rebbe became very upset and told the aide: "Tell him that a Jew who resorts to violence and who raises his hand against his fellow Jew is not a Jew that I am interested in meeting at all!" So the aide went out and gave the Chosid the news.

Now, that particular Chosid had traveled weeks so that he could meet with the Rebbe. He had been married at that point for over ten years and had not yet been

blessed with children, and so he had come to ask for the Rebbe's holy blessing for kids. But now, when he heard that the Rebbe didn't want to see him at all, he burst out in bitter sobbing, feeling like his whole world had been destroyed. He had hung all his hopes on the Rebbe's blessing, and now he was left with nothing.

The Chosid's sobs deeply touched the aide's heart and he felt very sorry for him. So he came up to him and said: "Listen—even though the Rebbe said that he's not interested in seeing you, I want to help you get the Rebbe's blessing. That's why I'll be bold and take the risk of letting you in to the Rebbe, and I'll come in with you, and I hope that G-d will help."

So the aide entered the Rebbe's office together with the Chosid. He then addressed the Rebbe, saying that he was prepared to forgive the Chosid with a full heart—but only on one condition: that the Rebbe give him a blessing for children.

When the Rebbe heard these words, he smiled broadly and happily blessed the Chosid that he should have children.

This kind of thing happened more than once in Jewish history. As a matter of fact, we find a very similar situation in the Torah— where a person who was attacked not only forgave his attacker but even prayed for him.

The Victim's Prayer

In Sefer Bereishis, the Book of Genesis, we learn about Avraham, the first Jew. Bereishis tells us that when Avraham came to live in a place called Grar, he declared that his wife Sarah was his sister because she was beautiful and he was afraid that they'd kill him and take her if they found out she was his wife.

Only problem was, it didn't quite work out. Sarah was taken away to the palace of Avimelech, the king of Grar, to be his consort. Avimelech essentially figured, "Hey, she's only his sister, so what's the big deal?" But then, Avimelech was punished by G-d for taking a married woman: He suddenly lost all waste function and was unable to void his body properly, which can be quite painful.

That very night, G-d came to him in a dream and said that he was going to die because he had taken a married woman—and that he should return Sarah to

Avraham immediately so that Avraham would pray for him and he would thus live.

And indeed, Avimelech quickly returned Sarah to Avraham—and not only did Avraham forgive him, but he even prayed for him, and Avimelech was healed.

And in this week's parshah, we read about a similar occurrence, but on a higher level.

In the Torah portion of Chukas, we read that at the end of the 40 years of wandering in the desert, after the Jews had eaten the Manna for 40 years, "the people became disheartened because of the way," and, as a result, "The people spoke against G-d and against Moshe: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in this desert, for there is no bread and no water, and we are disgusted with this rotten bread.'"

In other words, they were sick of traveling, sick of manna, and tired of the whole journey! Their complaint was really against Moshe. A sharp rebuke from G-d was not short in coming: G-d sent venomous snakes, "and they bit the people, and many people of Israel died."

As a result of that, the people immediately did teshuvah. They repented. As the verse states, "The people came to Moshe and said, 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against G-d and against you. Pray to G-d that He remove the snakes from us.'"

In other words, they came to ask forgiveness from the one whom they had slighted, from Moshe Rabbeinu, and not only that, but to also ask him to pray to remove the snakes from among them.

So the Torah continues: "And Moshe prayed on behalf of the people." Moshe Rabbeinu, the great leader of the Jewish Nation, didn't hesitate for a moment to pray for the people who had attacked him like that.

The Ultimate Cure

And here, my friends, we come to something very interesting.

G-d listened to Moshe's prayer and said to him, "Make yourself a serpent and put

it on a pole, and let whoever is bitten look at it and live.” G-d told him to fashion a copper snake and put it up on a tall stick—and that whoever would physically look at it would be miraculously healed from their venomous snakebite.

But here, the Rebbe points out an amazing detail.

G-d tells Moshe, “Make yourself a serpent.” But the precise wording “Make yourself” is an expression that appears earlier in the Torah when G-d tells Moshe, “Make yourself two trumpets,” which Rashi explains: “Make yourself—from your own property.” In other words, Moshe was to make the trumpets with his own money, not public funds.

In a similar manner, the Rebbe points out, Moshe was to make the snake out of his own personal money, not public monies, when G-d told him, “Make yourself a serpent.” (The same thing happened when G-d told Noach, “Make yourself an ark...”— meaning, out of your own materials.)

Why did G-d consider it so important that Moshe make the Saraf, the bronze statue of the venomous snake, out of his own personal funds? It was the Jewish Nation that had attacked him, and he had even forgiven them. So why was it his responsibility to make the snake using his money? It should have been the opposite—since the community was the guilty party, they should have been the ones who had to pay for the snake out of their collective funds as part of their atonement!

The answer, the Rebbe tells us, is that the way to prove that a person has truly forgiven the other is not to see whether he prays for the other, but more than that—to see whether he gives of his own money to pay for the cure that will heal those who attacked him and hurt him.

Many times, people bear a grudge or resentment against a friend or family member that carries on for years or even decades. They know that it’s not healthy. They know that they need to forgive him. And eventually, they truly do. But still, the anger finds a way to back.

The Torah gives us the tools on dealing with this anger—how to really get to the point where you truly forgive your friend and are freed from this powerful feeling of resentment:

It is through actually coming to that person's aid. When you hear that the person you resent is not succeeding in business, pray for him and ask G-d to grant him success. And even more so— help him in a physical manner. Refer customers to him and spend your own money on him.

This behavior, my friends, is the best cure for freeing yourself of resentment, and truly turning a new chapter.