

Nourishment for the Neshama

<http://lvracha.com>

Tuesday, January 04, 2011

Reflections while healing from a broken foot

***Please see addendum added Jan 10 2011 below

For the past month I have had to depend on people like I have not had to since I was five years old...for meals, for showers, for shopping, for rides. So many people have been so very kind and I feel very fortunate that there are reliable, giving people in my world.

Yet as I sit here, so dependent, it stirs feelings from the past. I believe that part of the refuah for my foot is also an opportunity to effect a refuah on faulty beliefs that were developed in childhood when I was dependent. Without going into the personal details of that, I would like to share a few insights.

The area of the insight is: the power of chastisement and blaming, and the importance to and impact upon a person's ability to act appropriately when someone is utilizing such tactics to dominate.

Everyone has dependency needs, whether we are little children or adults. As adults, our dependency needs are reduced, but all adults have interdependency needs – for family, for community, for workplace and more. For this reason, the insights here are relevant universally.

Rabbi Avraham Twerski in a DVD made for the Tiferes Program of the Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation shares that although parents may find shouting and expressing anger to seemingly be effective in raising children, it really destroys relationships from the inside out. He cautions against this, offering calm, investigative and educational alternatives.

In today's world, it seems as though the effectiveness of screaming, blaming and even killing for the sake of one's emotions is shaping mankind, yet I think we all feel that our relationships with each other and with Hashem are being eroded and destroyed.

What is the underpinnings of this? How has the focus of the ME generation, on how "I feel vs how you feel" de-evolving civilization and bringing us back into the Stone Age (pun intended) instead of into a Utopian society of brotherly love and tolerance?

Let's start with a simple halacha, taken from the Code of Jewish Conduct by Rabbi Silver:

We are not allowed to harbor hatred in our hearts. In addition to the issur of lo sisna, feeling hatred in one's heart for a Jew (without halachic justification) constitutes a violation of the mitzva to love our fellow Jew (Vayikra 19: 19). However, if we release that hatred in an unharnessed manner and express it by striking a person whether physically or with words, or even deny him a favor because of our hatred, then according to many poskim we are all the more guilty of transgressing the issur of lo sisna, in addition to whatever other aveiros we committed along the way (such as lashon hara).

On the other hand, in the case of a ba'al aveira (one who knowingly and intentionally violates Torah commandments) whom we are allowed to hate, according to some opinions we are not permitted to hate him secretly while making an outward show of friendliness to him. Rather, we should show him our hatred openly.

So, what are we to do – show hatred or keep it under wraps? The answer emerges when we note how the issur of lo sisna is linked to the mitzva that follows in the same passuk: the obligation to rebuke our fellow Jew. If someone does us a bad turn, the Torah advises us, we should not pretend to be his friend while hating him in our heart. Instead, we should go over to the fellow and tell him our grievances,

privately, so as not to embarrass him, and in a pleasant tone of voice: "Tell me, why did you do X to me?"

If this "rebuke" is presented properly, one of two things will likely happen: Either we will find out that he was justified in what he did, or, he will admit his mistake and apologize, and we will be able to forgive him. Either way, the hatred will be effectively drained and peace will be restored.

But we must proceed with great caution, because a wrong word or tone may initiate a full blown feud. Sometimes the person may be better approached through a letter or an emissary; in many cases it is best to seek rabbinical advice before proceeding.

Sometimes, when the risks appear too great and the chances of success too slim, the best choice is to forgo the tochacha and instead work on uprooting the hatred by forgiving the person completely in our hearts.

According to the Chofetz Chaim and others, once we have informed the individual of the reason for our hatred and brought the issue out into the open, we are no longer liable for violating the mitzva of lo s'nisna. Of course, until things are patched up, we would still be guilty of other transgressions, if, for example, we spoke lashon hara or if we held a grudge. But, as the Chofetz Chaim states, "hatred in the heart is the most potent of all" - both because of its intensity and because the object of someone's hatred is unaware of the other's feelings and can not defend himself. (Mishpetei Hashalom 2: 4-7)

(Excerpts from The Code of Jewish Conduct by Rabbi Yitzchok Silver)

The power of chastisement and blaming and the importance to and impact upon a person's ability to act appropriately when someone is utilizing such tactics to dominate

People view themselves as basically good. I don't know anyone really who recognizes a fault that they have, a bad habit, an unpleasant trait who, if they could buy a pill that would remove it, would not do so, preferring the bad characteristic to an improved self. As children, we desire the approval of the parents, who are our entire universe in our eyes. Carrying this idea forward to adulthood and having developed a healthy conscience, we desire being able to look in the mirror and see someone we feel Gd is pleased with. This is the root of good self-esteem, to know that we are connected to Gd and can bring His Goodness into the world. When we make mistakes and others bring this matter to our attention in blaming, hurtful and chastising ways, somehow, hopefully with apologies we are able to work it out. However, what if we do something we think is good and it is mis-interpreted or twisted and we receive chastisement and blaming? This is prevalent in today's Middle East politics, to give one example.

Often we are a bit paralyzed. What words are there to counter? The force of chastisement and condemnation are so overwhelmingly influential. The political power of words of this kind cannot be underestimated. We are all affected by it, because deep down, we are constructed to believe a little bit of everything we hear, even if it is not true. Once spoken, the words do their damage – even if the person finds out it is not true, the negative emotions first generated caused a bit of destruction to trust and to the relationship. And, in the spiritual realms, the words and the destruction operate in ways we cannot fully comprehend.

It is crucial that when we see someone utilizing the tactic of outright chastisement, verbal blaming, use of negative words to defame someone, that they may very well be doing this deliberately for political goals and their own political agenda rather than out of a search for the truth. More subtly, a person may become involved in a terrible machlokes without realizing it if those with such an agenda instead hide behind ideological principles to justify their making certain statements.

Whenever exceptionally negative images are being transferred from one person to another, RED FLAGS should be going off in any person who has in mind the above halacha of Do Not Hate:

1. If there is truly something wrong, the speaker should be talking directly to the person they have a complaint against. In this way the person has the ability to defend themselves and clear up any misunderstandings. (*"The answer emerges when we note how the issur of lo s'nisna is linked to the mitzva*

that follows in the same passuk: the obligation to rebuke our fellow Jew. If someone does us a bad turn, the Torah advises us, we should not pretend to be his friend while hating him in our heart. Instead, we should go over to the fellow and tell him our grievances, privately, so as not to embarrass him, and in a pleasant tone of voice: "Tell me, why did you do X to me?"

If this "rebuke" is presented properly, one of two things will likely happen: Either we will find out that he was justified in what he did, or, he will admit his mistake and apologize, and we will be able to forgive him. Either way, the hatred will be effectively drained and peace will be restored.")

In my words, if someone is speaking about a third party to me with any type of derogatory information or negative portrayal, I plan to now say to the person, "Does so and so know you believe this to be true? What did they answer you when you inquired of them regarding this?" If they say they did not share this information directly with the person, I see no reason to see them as sincerely interested in to'eles for the other person and have no interest in listening further.

2.If the person says yes I spoke it out with him but we didn't come to an understanding, then it becomes incumbent upon me to ask "why are you sharing this with me?" If it is a request to make peace and I can be helpful, I can decide yes or no to become involved. But if it is to persuade me regarding the way I think about the third party, it may be incumbent upon me to remind the person speaking that she is accountable in shemayim for every word spoken and that I am accountable for listening and I choose not to.

What does this have to do with being dependent? Good question. If we fall into thinking and defending our own will, using our Gd-given energy and resources to assert our agenda, who can trust each other? * (see addendum at bottom). Everyone is out for themselves. Without people recognizing themselves as part of a caring civilization where trust in each other and in the civilization's systems is paramount, it becomes a jungle, and soon thereafter, a Stone Age. Did we not all read this in Lord of the Flies?

It is my insight that the impact of chastisement and blaming words stems from the time when our dependency needs were first being met. Regardless of whether we were discipline using these tactics, I have come in touch with how when they (chastisement and blaming words) are used, even as adults, it is an immediate threat to our dependency needs. Everyone has a need to belong, have a good reputation, feel supported and appreciated. Those who wield words are doing so to shape and build along the lines of their political goals. There is great power in it. Our normal dependency needs threatened, we bow to those wielding powerful words instead of remembering that Hashem is the only one upon Whom we are to depend. It may seem to us that our help comes from aligning ourselves with the strong word-wielding ones, but that is just a sign that we need to take our fear of not having our dependency needs met or viewed by the powers that be as "not a player," and instead, take the energy wrapped up in the fear and through growing in emunah, increase our devekus (clinging) to Hashem. What we should NOT do is abandon His Will to be viewed and approved of by those we THINK have power. We see this theme throughout Tehillim. I recommend tehillim to anyone who finds themselves frightened by the power plays of other people, for it is Hashem alone to Whom we put our trust. Also see Kitzur Shulchan Aruch Chapter 29:20 below ** regarding avoiding even a suspicion of wrongdoing

Most crucial is, that as parents ourselves, we must find a way to discipline without anger, chastisement and blaming, which destroy rather than build, a child. Simply, these tactics leave too many scars and are too harsh to allow the child to develop middos properly. It could take the child a lifetime to comprehend the impact on their own behavior that being treated so had on them, and it could cost them the ability to form loving, trusting relationships.

This blog is filled with many constructive approaches including Dr. Miriam Adahan; Rabbi Twerski recommended "How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk" in his Tiferes lecture.

*Addendum:

We all depend only on Hashem, in Whose eyes we wish to be pleasing. He is sending us everything. Imagine that you inherit \$10 million! You would sit and decide how to invest and spend the money in good ways. Now imagine you find yourself in Las Vegas gambling away \$1 million! OY! You don't know what happened...something got the better of you, it seemed like a good idea at the time, you weren't

careful, etc. It is that exact same way with the intelligence and resources that Hashem sends us each moment. We cannot afford to take the goodness He sends us and invest it in anything less than what would be good and right in His eyes, truly. When we have a society that values the idea of doing what is good and right in the eyes of Hashem, then we have respect for each other and our civilization contains higher values and qualities conducive to pleasant existence rather than a civilization where everyone is out for ME

** Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 29:20

"A person should be careful not to do anything which might cause people to suspect that he committed a sin, even though he is not actually committing a sin, as we find that the kohen who removed the coins from the chamber did not enter the chamber in a garment that was fashioned in a way that something could be hidden in it, for a person must answer for his actions to his fellow man as he must answer to the Almighty blessed is He, as it is said "You will be innocent before Gd and Israel" And it is also said "And find favor and good understanding in the eyes of Gd and man." (The garment the kohen wore had no pockets, so as not to arouse suspicion that he had taken some coins for himself).

***Addendum Jan 20 2011

Upon reflection certain terms required my further thought. In our day, this generation is considered the soul of the foot of the history of the Jewish people, the last generation before Moshiach (may he come speedily). It is said that the people will fall to the 50th level of impurity. In other words, that the soul of the foot generation will fall below the 49th level of impurity at which we were redeemed from Egypt.

As I sit here with instructions to elevate my foot for 90% of the day, I realize it is because a bone at the soul of my foot is broken. I have to elevate my foot, because the soul of my foot has a broken bone.

These words jump out at me as I realize what I wrote above regarding dependency needs and the terrible impact that chastisement and blame have on our relationship with Hashem Yisborach.

My simple conclusion is that in order to elevate ourselves (the soul of the foot of the Jewish people) we must remember that our dependency needs are filled by Hashem, that our societies must be rooted in a mutual understanding of that spiritual reality (religious freedom not pre-empting that - the founders of America allowed for freedom of religion but they themselves were Gd-fearing) - by that spiritual reality I mean specifically an awareness that we are infused by life force because of the will of a Higher Being Who made us in His Image and that it is the duty and purpose of mankind to acknowledge and to strive to bring that Image into the world - forgiveness, patience, kindness, overlooking faults, mercy and more. Ultimately this is the message - elevate ourselves by remembering that we can bring holiness into the world, a goodness that only people can bring. To do so, we have to bow our hearts and say NO to our human nature, the side of us that is built to pursue our own goals for our own sake. Why sacrifice some of our own goals for this? If everyone does, we re-build a civilization whose values include a concept that people can be more in Gd's image. Then there is respect, kindness, and peace. If we do not, we go back to the Stone Ages, Heaven help us!

May we be zocheh to see the coming of the redemption speedily in our days.