

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Reflections on Respect

One of the most amazing realizations that I have had in my journey through Torah and mitzvohs is learning about all the different types of Jews, their minhagim and their chumros. For a people who all together make up only 3% of the world population (97% of the world is not Jewish, and of the 15 million Jews, if 1 million are Torah observant - .0016% of the world population-which means that Torah observant Jewish people are statistically insignificant), within our .0016% of the world population we are hardly homogenous. As a person who found Torah and mitzvahs as an adult, the numerous variations and strongly held opinions came as a surprise.

If you speak to non-Torah and mitzvah Jewish people, you are likely to hear within their language when talking about Torah and mitzvah observant people a negativity, a criticism that I attribute to cognitive dissonance. At some level, non-observant people know there is something that they are not doing and they have rationalized it and they hit hard to make it seem to themselves as though they have a good reason. By making an emotional issue out of it, they can safely take their position within their opinion and close the book to discussion. Don't confuse me with the facts – I feel emotional about this! What can a person say? Nothing. Yet we know that it is a psychological truth that when we speak negatively about an authority, we not only undermine what we are speaking about but we also undermine our own authority. How? By utilizing harsh words as tactics to distinguish our position, we actually teach this method to those listening. By discrediting the authority of Torah, we teach that it is okay to use these tactics to discredit what we do believe in! Which part of any ideology cannot be scrutinized and criticized and made an emotional issue? When we attach negative emotions to any level of Torah and mitzvohs, we undermine the whole religion.

It comes the need to instill in ourselves respect. We are viewed in Shemayim as one people. We all need each other. One is not right and the other wrong. We are one and we are viewed that way, as a whole. There is halacha. Then there are people who choose to take a step above halacha. And there are those who might go further still. It is best for each one of us to see every Jew as following a positive path in his or her relationship to Hashem.

What are we really? From young to old we are skeletons at different stages of getting there. Our physicality is a shell into which Hashem gives strength and intelligence. The only thing I am completely sure of is that Hashem did not give us strength or intelligence so that we could judge others, claim we are deserving of respect, or deny His existence. Hashem gave us strength and intelligence to serve Him. If each Jew accepts this, then the manner of another Jew's observance does not affect him. Each Jew is on his own path in reaching closeness to Hashem.

There is the halacha. Then there are those who wish to take a step above the halacha. We do not need to judge either ourselves or others as right or wrong in comparison to each other. One's practices do not impact on another's. Each forges his or her own relationship with Hashem and together, we are one. Yaakov had 12 different children. We are one. We can be who we are without emotionally or verbally condemning those who do things differently.

And in this merit, may we bring shelamos to our people and may Hashem redeem us.