



Sefirat Haomer



English version

THINKING about ME.org

MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL

King Solomon's famous life mantra seems a little strange. **במים הפנים לפנים כן לב-האדם לאדם**
As water reflects one's face, so too, the heart of one man reflects the heart of another. (Mishlei 27; 19) If someone is not being nice to you, he is reflecting you in some way. Try to be nice to him, and you will see a change in his heart as well.

Why did King Solomon use water in his parable of reflection? Were there no mirrors in his time? Didn't the women of the desert give their copper that they used as mirrors in Egypt for making the basin in the Mishkan?

The Baal Shem Tov gave a brilliant answer, one that can change your whole social life. The uniqueness of the reflection of water is that you need to bend over to see it clearly. If King Solomon had used a mirror on the wall as the parallel, you would not have to lower yourself to see the relationship reflection. Only the reflection of water requires you to kneel and bring down your inflated ego to a healthy place. And this is the secret of **ואהבת לרעך כמוך**. *And you shall love to your friend as you love yourself.* Why does the Torah add the letter ל, "to" your friend? Just say, "And you shall love your friend, like yourself"? The answer is if you want to begin to love your friend, you must come closer to him. What does this mean?

There is another uniqueness in the reflection of water that is paralleled in relationships. This reflection parallel is mindboggling. When you are far from the water, your reflection is bigger than life, out of proportion. When you bend over, when you get close, your reflection gets smaller; it becomes more real. What is the lesson of size dependent on distance in the reflection of water? And what is its relevance to relationships?

When you are far from people, it is because you are arrogant in some way, shape or form. When you are close to people, it is because you are humble with those people. If you find that other people are being haughty, it might be because you, yourself, are too far from them. If only you would humble yourself, if only you would get closer, you would see their humble side as well. As your reflection gets smaller, so does theirs. If you wish to improve a certain relationship, find the humility you need to fix it. It takes soul searching, but it really works.

Arrogant people aren't well-liked. After fifty years of corporate experience, Aldo Papone, senior advisor to American Express, wrote the following: *Arrogance, at its worst, creates a momentum that insists on your downfall and cannot be appeased. We've all seen the bloodlust that occurs when the public senses a weakness in the high and mighty – a*



corporation, a candidate, or a multimillion-dollar athlete. Arrogance must be punished, and only a display of remorse and humility will get you off the hook. (Aldo Papone)

Arrogant people are arrogant because they do not realize that they are arrogant. Arrogance is not having your nose in the air. It is much more subtle. It's a false perception of G-d's blessings. If you were blessed with amazing parents. If you were gifted with a great mind. If you were lucky to find a Rebbi/ mentor/ coach. If G-d granted you wealth and its perks/ looks/ voice/ height/ wit/focus/ patience/ self-discipline/optimism/ sensitivity/ social savvy/ etc., it does not mean you are better. It means G-d holds you more responsible. *With great strength comes great responsibility.*

The question everyone wants an answer to during Sefirat Haomer is, how could 24,000 students be sentenced to paying with their lives for a sin so commonly transgressed, for failing to show one another mutual respect?

R Boruch Mordechai Ezrachi explains that being the students of R Akiva, they were held responsible to emulate him. Being R Akiva's student was not a matter of social status. It was not just about getting in to his Yeshiva. If you were his student, you had a certain strength, and therefore, you were held responsible for living his values. R Akiva's students were unable to pass his Torah on to the next generation, because they were missing the pivotal trait of their great teacher.

Why specifically was this idea of respect, of humility, the essence of R Akiva's greatness?

Rachel gave up everything she had to marry Akiva the shepherd. After 24 years of learning, R' Akiva returned with 24-thousand students.

Rachel came out to greet her husband in ragged clothing; she came and kissed his toes. Not knowing who she was and thinking that she was not mentally balanced, R Akiva's students started to push her away. R Akiva told them, "All of my Torah learning and yours is in her merit". Real Torah learning follows humility. This was R' Akiva's message to his students, but they just did not get it. R Akiva's humility was his greatest strength. That is how he surpassed, with a 40-year late start, all the great Rabbis of history. Because the Torah, which is similar to water, goes into the low places. Just like it only fits into an Ark that had all "half-measurements".

With great strength comes great responsibility. If you have something great about you, you are held responsible to use your greatness for great things. The reason why G-d allowed Isabel, the wife of Achab, to kill Navot for not giving them his family- inheritance vineyard (as found in Melachim) was that Navot sinned by not using his beautiful voice, the gift that G-d gave him, to sing on the Holiday in the Bet Hamikdash. כבוד ה' מהונך We read this to mean that if G-d blessed you with a beautiful voice, you should use it to honor G-d.(Rashi Mishlei 3;9)(Yalkut Shimoni Ki Tisa 404) It is your responsibility to serve G-d with the gifts He gives you. Not to be haughty because of your strengths.

As we get ready to accept the Torah, achieving humility is the first step. ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה G-d, Make my soul like the dust of the earth before all. *And then* open my heart in Your Torah. To accept the Torah we need to become one, a united people. ויהן שם ישראל נגד ההר. And there is no greater way than becoming one nation than by using your greatness to make others great.

Love vs. Respect

Sefirat Haomer is a time of character refinement. 12,000 pairs, 24,000 students of R Akiva, all died at this time for not honoring each other. (Yevamot 62b) The main Avodah during the Omer is to correct that Middah of respect.

There are three questions one can ask. R' Akiva taught that the main rule of the entire Torah is to love your friend as you love yourself. (Sifra Kedoshim, Yerushalmi 9 Nedarim) How could R Akiva's own students transgress the main teaching of their mentor? And why did this happen, specifically, between Pesach and Shavuoth? Also, isn't it strange that R Akiva's students are referred to as 12,000 "pairs", and not 24,000 disciples?

The Shem Mishmuel answers with a beautiful twist. But first, he writes a lesson about respect. Respecting another is only possible if you recognize that the other person has a strength that you, yourself, don't have, or if he is superior to you in some way. Respect usually stems from recognizing that the other person is greater than oneself in a certain aspect of his personality.

However, in your own body, your right hand will not show respect to your left hand. Your toe will not show respect for your ear, for both are part of one body. Respect is not applicable here; no one part is greater than another, for they are all part of the same "one". The students of R' Akiva learned the importance of loving one another, *but they took their Rabbi's teaching of love to the extreme*. Each one felt that the others were a part of himself. They failed to accord to one another individual identity. As if they were all one. And this was their mistake. Love has no boundaries. But respect does. They loved each other with boundless love, in a way that they all felt one.

That is why they are referred to as "pairs", for no one had an identity or a boundary.

Heimish is a good thing, as long as it is not too heimish. Because when there are no boundaries, there is no respect. Aharon's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, died because of this. They got too close to G-d. Their sin was *ה בקרבתם לפני ה*. They did not realize their boundaries. And this is the reason why R Akiva's students died during the Sefirah. The Sefirah is a time where we count days and we count weeks. Where we give value to both: collectivity for weeks and individuality for days. The students of R' Akiva were on such a high level that they were expected to notice this lesson of balancing individuality with unity and learn from it.

This is a lesson for all areas of life. The best way to treat your wife is how you treated her before she became your wife. The best way to treat your children is as if they are guests, even though they are your guests for 20+ years. Treat them with no less respect than you would treat your neighbor's children. Once you perceive the kids as part of a family, part of a whole, and with no individuality, identities become blurred. The formula to the successful family is found in the balance between individuality and collectiveness. As the Haggadah mentions *אחד חכם אחד רשע וכו* One the wise, one the wicked, one the simpleton, one that doesn't know how to ask. Why one, one, one, one? Because in order for your family to function with harmony, you have to respect each child for what he is, with his own individuality and identity.

The Mishna teaches, *רבי אומר, איזוהי דרך ישרה, כל שהיא תפארת לעושיה ותפארת לו מן שיבור לו האדם, כל שהיא תפארת לעושיה ותפארת לו מן האדם*. (Avot 2;1) A successful relationship, a lifelong relationship, is a balanced one. I once



saw a refrigerator magnet that said, “Love is not looking into each other’s eyes. Love is looking in the same direction”. I would like to take the theory that love is about going in the “same direction” a step further. Love and relationships are like driving a car. A good driver, a smooth driver, knows how to efficiently balance two crucial elements in his car: the gas pedal and the brakes. If you overuse or underuse either of these, no one will want to be your passenger.

In the journey of relationships, there are also two pedals. There is the pedal of love. You push that pedal each time you give of your time, money, effort or soul. Saying yes. No boundaries. What is mine is yours. That is the pedal of love.

And then, there is the brake pedal. Knowing when to say no. How to say no. How to stand up for yourself. How to respect yourself and your boundaries, so that you can also respect others and their boundaries. Although the gas pedal is very important to get you where you want to go, if there are no brakes, do not get into that car!

All relationships have two main factors. Dos and Don’ts. The do’s of a relationship do not carry as much weight as the don’ts. You can give all your money, all your time, your whole Neshama, all the “do’s”, but if you are not

careful to refrain from the things that you are not supposed to do, the “don’ts”, the whole relationship can come crashing down.

A common misinterpretation many Orthodox Jews have is that a Mitzvah means a good deed. A mitzvah is a commandment. The root of the word is, צוה which means command. Or, on a deeper level, a Mitzvah is a way of building a bond between the Jew and His Creator, from the word, צוותא, together.

There are positive commandments and there are negative commandments. And, just as the negative commandments are much more severe than the positive commandments, relationship issues are usually problems with Don’ts more than they are with Do’s. My experience in helping people improve socially tells me the following. Those who are doing great with the do’s but not with the don’ts have much rockier relationships than those who are good with the don’ts, but not with the do’s.

Jackie Robinson, the first African American baseball player said something I can’t forget. “I’m not concerned with your liking or disliking me... All I ask is that you respect me as a human being”. Respect is not earned through achievement. It is insignificant what another person has accomplished. Respect is because the other person is a human being, and because he is created in the image of G-d.

To support this publication, or receive it by e-mail, please email me at rabbiyoseffarhi@gmail.com.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A”H





FREE!!!

Women's Phone Chabura

- *Interactive, not just a lecture
- *Based on Parsha
- *Learn the Selfie-Steps to transform
- *Walk away with concrete tools to improve the quality of your life
- *Inviting and nurturing environment

yoseffarhi.com/women-live-teleoconference-chaburah/

