

קדושים

SHALOM

The greatest gift that can possibly be bestowed upon mankind is peace:

לא מצא הקדוש ברוך הוא כלי מחזיק ברכה לישראל אלא השלום

The Holy One, blessed be He, found no better container of blessing for Israel than peace (*Uktzin* 3:12).

Without peace it would be impossible for the other blessings to manifest themselves (*Anaf Yosef*, *ibid.*). The establishment of peace was always paramount in the minds of *Chazal*:

כל התורה כולה נמי מפני דרכי שלום היא

The whole of the Torah is also for the purpose of promoting peace (*Gittin* 59:).

There were many edicts decreed by *Chazal* for the express purpose of maintaining peace.

מפרנסים עניים נכרים... ומבקרין חולי נכרים... וקוברין מתי נכרים... מפני דרכי שלום

“We support the poor of the heathen... visit the sick of the heathen... and bury the poor of the heathen... in the interests of peace” (*Gittin* 61.).

We find many instances in which *Chazal* permitted themselves “to be made fools of” or to even suffer outright humiliation just for the sake of peace.

A man once said to his wife... “You may not derive any benefit from me until you make Rabbi Yehudah ... taste of your cooking.” Rabbi Yehudah consented to taste it, observing, “It follows logically that I should do so: If in order to make peace between husband and wife, the Torah commanded: Let My Name, written in sanctity, be dissolved in ‘the waters that curse,’ although her guilt was doubtful, how much more so I.” (*Nedarim* 66:).

The same *Gemara* relates how Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel permitted himself to be spat upon, fully cognizant of the intended insult, just for the sake of peace. A similar story is told about Rabbi Meir (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:9). Baba ben Buta publicly permitted a woman to break two candles over his head, just for the sake of pursuing peace (*Nedarim* 66:). Rashi (*Devarim* 34:8) tells us that Aharon *Hakohein* was more beloved by the Jewish people than Moshe *Rabbeinu* because Aharon pursued peace. It is thus perplexing to find the *Gemara* (*Yoma* 23.) state:

כל תלמיד חכם שאינו נוקם ונוטר כנחש אינו תלמיד חכם

Any scholar who does not avenge himself and retain anger like a serpent, is no real scholar.

The *Gemara* intimates that the *pasuk*:

לא תקם ולא תטר

You shall not take vengeance nor bear any grudge (*Vayikra* 19:18)

refers to monetary affairs, but not to *personal* affliction. This is especially difficult to comprehend in light of the *Gemara* (*Berachos* 64.) which proclaims that:

תלמידי חכמים מרבים שלום בעולם

Scholars are the purveyors of peace in this world.

The Maharal (*Chidushei Aggados, Gittin* 62.) interprets the *Gemara* in *Berachos* to mean that scholars are responsible for their own peace and the peace of the world. How can scholars possibly discharge this duty when they “take vengeance and harbor grudges”?

The Rambam (*Hilchos TalmudTorah* 7:13) explains that the proper conduct for a scholar is to immediately forgive a personal insult. In fact, the Rambam continues, a scholar should “close his ears” when insulted and pay no attention to it. However, the Rambam points out that if the scholar is insulted publicly, then he has no right to forgive, and the dictum of the *Gemara* (*Yoma*) applies.

The *Kesef Mishneh* contrasts the last statement of the Rambam with the *Gemara* (*Kedushin* 32.):

הרב שמחל על כבודו כבודו מחול

A teacher is permitted to forgive his honor.

The *Gemara* (*Kedushin*) is referring to an insult without shame (such as not rising for the teacher). However, were he shamed in public, the Rambam’s conclusion would still stand.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh Dei’ah* 243:9) states that it is not to the credit of a scholar to bear a grudge on being insulted privately; however, if publicly shamed, the scholar has no right to forgive until the sinner repents.

The *Minchas Shai* (3945 quoting *Rabbeinu Bechaya*) states:

אם אין משפט בעולם אין שלום בעולם

There cannot be peace, unless there is justice.

The implication is that in a system of strict justice, an injustice must be avenged. However, reality dictates that society is incapable of living within the standard of *Midas Hadin* — strict justice — therefore forbearance is indicated.

The *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 63.) quotes a precept similar to that of the *Gemara Yoma*, but interprets it differently:

אם תלמיד חכם נוקם ונוטר כנחש חגריהו על מתניך

Even if a scholar is vengeful and bears malice like a serpent, gird him unto your loins.

The Maharal (*ibid.*) explains that a scholar should act piously and be forgiving. However, if he exhibits the improper character traits of bearing a grudge and seeking vengeance, it should not be held against him. It is evident from the Maharal that it is preferable to be forbearing (see Maharal, *Nesivas Olam, Nesiv Hateshuvah* 7; Maharal, *Derech Chaim* 6:2).

The *Gemara* (*Ta'anis* 25:) relates that Rabbi Eliezer's prayer for rain went unanswered, while Rabbi Akiva's was answered.

לא מפני שזה גדול מזה, אלא שזה מעביר על מדותיו וזה אינו מעביר על מדותיו

Not because he is greater than the other man, but because he is ever forbearing and the other is not.

The *Gemara* (*Kidushin* 71.) teaches:

שם בן ארבעים ושתים אותיות אין מוסרין אותו אלא למי שצנוע... ואינו מעמיד על מדותיו

The forty-two lettered Name is entrusted only to he who is pious... and not insistent on his rights.

Another *Gemara* (*Gittin* 7.) states:

כל שיש לו קנאה על חבירו ודומם, שוכן עדי עד עושה לו דין

Whoever has cause for indignation against his neighbor and yet holds his peace, He that abides for all eternity shall espouse his cause.

The Maharsha (*Yoma* 23.) offers a different interpretation for the *Gemara* in *Yoma* (23.), by declaring that the metaphor of the snake refers to the primordial snake. Although man seeks to crush the snake's head in an attempt to kill it, the snake only seeks to bite man on his heel. Similarly the scholar's vengeance should be confined and limited. Hence, the passage (*Yoma* 23.) is to be understood as follows:

Any scholar who avenges himself and exhibits anger, in more than the limited fashion of a snake, is no real scholar.

Moreover, a scholar who does bear vengeance may only do so for the sake of Heaven, and not for personal satisfaction. Hence, the scholar must be very certain of his motives. Regarding the serpent, the *Gemara* (*Ta'anis* 8•) relates:

לעתיד לבא מתקבצות כל החיות אצל הנחש ואומרים לו: ארי דורס ואוכל, זאב טורף ואוכל, אתה מה הנאה יש לך

In the future all animals will assemble and come to the serpent and say to him, "The lion claws (his victim) and devours him, the wolf tears him and devours him, but as for you what benefit do you derive?"

Just as the serpent derives no satisfaction from his prey, so too the avenging scholar may derive no personal pleasure from his actions. The ideal practice is to be forgiving and not stand on ceremony. It would be advisable to follow the custom of Rabbi Nechonya ben Hakana and Mar Zutra the *Chasid* — pious one — of never going to bed at night without forgiving the transgressions of their fellow man (*Megillah* 28.).

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