



LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Erev Shabbos Parashas Acharei Mos - Kedoshim 5783

Dear Parents,

We are in the midst of the time of year when our focus is on peace and harmony. Last week's and this week's *Parshiyos* highlight the consequences of straying from peace; as in – *Tzora'as*, and the imperative to love each other – () ... ואהבת לרעך כמוך *Vayikra 19:18*). In addition, we are almost halfway through the *Sefira* period where we emphasize the need to imbibe the lessons of brotherly love, which were somehow lacking among the 24,000 great students of *Rabi Akiva* and brought about a catastrophic outcome.

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With unity and harmony so prominent at this time, it is imperative for us to learn lessons as to how it came about that the strong bonds between us in our Yeshiva community were so seriously frayed this past week. (If you missed the ruckus, consider yourself blessed!) With so much in common, the spotlight was inadvertently laser focused on one area where we have an assortment of views and opinions. Deep seated and disparate beliefs were suddenly exposed and highlighted.

In truth, the hallmark of a healthy family and community is the ability to disagree on occasion, and even passionately held beliefs and values can be discussed and debated respectfully. So far so good. For some parts of our Yeshiva family, however, the differences turned into too strong words, harsh condemnations and bad feelings. Gone was the sense of common purpose, camaraderie and a feeling of family.

The situation escalated very quickly and emotions were ignited. With the passage of a couple of days, the emotions have relaxed and those who stoked the fires of controversy are a drop less upset about others' disagreeing with their position. We are hopefully back to considering those values that unite us rather than the small area of divergence.

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What are lessons we can take from this week's flare-up? Firstly, the Yeshiva acknowledges that communication with parents needs to always be timely, consistent, clear and in sync with our mission. Coordination and consistency are key.

A lesson for all of us is to consider how word spread. Had this occurred fifteen years ago, the Yeshiva's email would have engendered a few phone calls or emails to administrators, and friends may have checked with each other for clarity. A few people may have engaged in some heated discussions and the vast majority of parents would not have been involved in responding, judging, debating or otherwise perseverating over the matter.

What is different about today? I suggest it is the world of social media. Instantaneous access to a vast number of people is a potent mechanism for good or not so good. Great amounts of *Tzedakah*, *Chesed*, *Torah* and *Tefilla* are generated through technology. At the same time, it is a potent weapon of mass disrespect, discord, disillusionment and destructiveness. Without our realizing, our instinctive reactions are not thoughts and feelings that will be toned-down, modified and translated into a well thought-through letter or phone call. Our instinctive, impulsive reaction is immediately broadcast at warp speed to dozens, perhaps hundreds of people before we realize what we've done.

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Technology may be here to stay, but we risk being as foolish as the masses who, without hesitation, euphorically welcomed the Industrial Revolution in the 1840s, including the toxic pollution and dangerous and unreliable machines that were being introduced. We cannot remain oblivious to the very real downsides of technology. The amount of potential *Lashon Hara*, *Motzei Shem Ra*, *sowing discord* and *Sinas Chinam* that we could potentially be guilty of in one key stroke needs to be a very sobering thought constantly in our minds.

Let our takeaway be to focus on what unites us and to think deeply about our relationship with, reliance on and comfort with social media usage. We owe it to ourselves, our spouse and most importantly to our children.

Best wishes for a wonderful *Shabbos* of peace, quiet and unity,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann

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Principal