

Jewish Responsibility

Dear Parents,

As we desperately wait for some good news to come out of the war against Hamas, there is cause for encouragement in the reaction of Acheinu Bnei Yisrael to the suffering and danger of others. In addition to a muting of the voices of discord and hostility, the sincere outpouring of love and material and moral support of Jews around the world for our brethren in harm's way is inspiring. A person's essence is revealed in times of stress and we are seeing deep seated love and yearning for a connection to Yiddishkeit on the part of many. Concurrently, from unexpected quarters, there is real Mesiras Nefesh to help others with whom there is seemingly no connection

From where does this deep caring for others come?

In this week's Parsha we see clearly how our forefather Avraham embodied this beautiful Midah. Not only did he take responsibility for his own actions, not only did he not blame others for whatever he endured, but he was known in his generation as one who would go to great lengths to help another out of a situation the other brought upon himself. Consider the following: In the war between the four kings and the five kings, the locals in Eretz Canaan were roundly defeated. This included Sodom, and its citizen Lot.

We are familiar with the story. Lot was captured. The Torah relates (Bereishis 14:12-14) how the "survivor" came to tell Avraham that Lot was a captive. Rashi quotes the Medrash that says the "survivor" was Og, who came with evil intent - he wanted to take Sarah for himself, so sure was he that Avraham would go off to try and save Lot and undoubtedly not return. By preying on Avraham's goodness, he schemed to get Sarah. It was apparently well known that Avraham was such a righteous, kind and responsible individual, that he would endanger himself to save Lot. This is the same Lot who abandoned Avraham and Hashem and attached himself to the wicked people of Sodom (Rashi 13:11).

The extent of Avraham's attitude and behavior toward others is understood on a whole new level by the Seforno. The Seforno states (Pasuk 13) that Og was actually unaware that Lot was a relative of Avraham. Nevertheless, because they were co-religionists, that was enough to give Og the confidence that Avraham would be willing to risk his life to save a fellow believer in the teachings of Ever (Great grandson of Shem, head of the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever). Such was Avraham's reputation! What a standard to aspire to! How many among us would endanger our very life to enter into battle against overwhelming forces to attempt to save someone who turned his back on us, despite everything we had done for him, and is now assimilated into a degenerate community?!

Avraham remains a model for us for eternity in all aspects of his greatness. How easy it would have been to rationalize that helping Lot in these circumstances was completely not his problem. The reasons to justify inaction in the situation should be obvious. Lot was an

ingrate, Lot took unfair advantage of his relationship with Avraham, Lot was dishonest, Lot went off the 'Derech', Lot would not have done the same for Avraham. Furthermore, he had no means to fight a war against mighty Kings, chances of saving Lot were slim and chances of being killed were great.

Despite all this, Og, for one, counted on the fact that Avraham would endanger himself on behalf of Lot. **Avraham Avinu personified the extreme sense of responsibility that is so missing from today's world.** Avraham took ownership of problems, Avraham confronted a challenge and looked inward for a solution. The blame game was the furthest thing from his mind.

We are sensitive to the need to minimize our children's exposure to the evil that has reared its ugly head. At the same time, we must be attuned to the opportunity to share with our children this bedrock value of feeling responsible to care about and tangibly help others, even when it may be hard. When we reassure young children that the danger is far away from us, we need to also emphasize the need to do what we can to help. Distance does not diminish our connection and concern.

There are currently so many role models of individual Jews who have risen to the occasion and are acting with great self-sacrifice to protect and support Am Yisrael. From reserve soldiers who have returned from far-away places to stand alongside their comrades in battle, to residents of Meah Shearim who have gathered food from neighbors and traveled to far away army bases near the frontlines to bring joy and hearty nourishment to young soldiers who look nothing like them.

Many fellow South Floridians have gone to Eretz Yisrael to give chizuk to adults and children, Hatzolah members have gone to help staff emergency services on the home front, and we are proud to count our own alumni in the ranks of the courageous soldiers and devoted volunteers. **Our children need to hear about these heroes and understand that this is how a Jew acts when a fellow Jew is in need.**

In the zechus of our teaching the eternal lesson of Avraham Avinu to the young generation, and internalizing it ourselves, may our heartfelt Tefillos be accepted in Shomayim to bring peace and security to all of Klal Yisroel.

Have a rejuvenating Shabbos,



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