

Stand Strong

Dear Parents,

A few weeks back we addressed the obligations of bystanders to come to the defense of victims. When bystanders do not attempt to right the wrong and don't act to protect the victim, their shortcomings may very well stem from the same inadequacies that plague victims. It's not that they don't care about others, rather they have not yet developed the fortitude and courage necessary to do what they know is required at the moment. **Standing up for what's right in the face of opposition, is not something that one can accomplish easily**, but it is a goal that everyone should strive for.

One of the most vexing circumstances that can confront a parent occurs when a child feels victimized by his or her peers. While always showing empathy and concern for the child's feelings, there are two approaches that can be taken to minimize or solve the problem. A parent can either take measures to protect the child, or the parent can train the child to be able to stand up for himself and thereby shed his victim status. The correct approach varies with the child, the surrounding circumstances, the one victimizing, etc. As in all cases of *chinuch*, no one solution fits all.

There is one constant, however, that applies in all cases of bullying, victimization and inappropriate behavior in general. In this week's *Parsha*, perhaps the greatest calamity to strike the Jewish People took place, the sin of the *Eigel HaZahav*, the *Golden Calf*. While the actual sin was committed by a relatively small minority of the people, the *Erev Rav*, (the mixed multitudes of Egyptians who left Egypt along with the Jews) all the Jews were punished. The *Ohr HaChaim Hakodosh* spells out why that was so.

The *Ohr HaChaim* points out that the description of the actions that took place seem to be partially in the wrong order. The *pasuk* (*Shemos 32:8*) tells us "...they made for themselves a molten image, ... and they bowed down to it, and they said "Israel, this is your god...."" The *Ohr HaChaim* asks, the actual chronology was that they started off by making verbal claims and afterwards actually performed *avodah zara*? (Pesukim 4-6)

The *Ohr HaChaim* explains that while the order does not make sense when viewed from the perspective of the few who actually made and served the *Eigel*, it does make sense from the vantage point of the rest of *Klal Yisroel*. He explains - the *Erev Rav* made the *Eigel* for themselves, and none of the Jews protested. The *Erev Rav* then proceeded to worship the calf, and the Jews did not complain about it. Ultimately, the *Erev Rav* addressed the Jews directly to blaspheme

Hashem and the Jews were silent. When their earlier acquiescence culminated in their not standing up to defend their own beliefs, they were found truly guilty of a lack of belief in *Hashem*.

From the consequences the Jewish People suffer until today, we see the enormity of standing quietly by while someone, anyone, even the *Erev Rav*, does something wrong. We bear ultimate responsibility for the misdeeds or cruelty of others, if there is anything we can do to improve or relieve the situation even slightly. Bystanders, through no fault of their own, are thrust into a situation that requires them to act, to come to the defense of what's right and to protect a victim.

How does this answer the dilemma we started with? From the fact that every single Jew suffered the consequences of not trying to stop the *Erev Rav*, we see everyone is obligated. That means everyone could and should develop the means, no matter how slight, to influence and attempt to stop the improper actions of others. **Everyone has an obligation to lift themselves out of victimhood**, if only because they also are expected to be a protesting bystander when warranted. A child who never learns to stand up for himself may not only suffer terribly throughout life, but he will not be able to do the right thing when witnessing or confronting evil.

Even if a parent is always available to protect the child, ultimately the child has an obligation to learn to be one who can stand up for the honor of Hashem even in the face of ridicule and negative peer pressure. Every child must learn to protect those who are weak and being victimized. Even in the privacy of one's home, one must forthrightly and resolutely keep *Mitzvos* that are hard and possibly uncomfortable and inconvenient. **Victims will always react to difficulty and adversity by blaming others, non-victims will proactively make sure to do the right thing.**

If we keep this long-range goal for our children in mind, we will do the minimum protecting necessary in the moment, and devote most of our efforts towards strengthening our child's backbone and assertiveness to do what Hashem requires in our service of Him and our obligations towards our fellow man. We can do it and so can they.

Have a strong, wonderful *Shabbos*,



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