



MAINTAINING PEACE

Dear Parents,

Erev Shabbos Tazria-Metzora 5781

“She likes me more than you.” “He told me he’s not really your friend anymore.” “___ won’t be my friend if I play with you.” When it is our own children’s mouths that these words are coming from, we may tend to regard these hurtful comments as just so much childish cluelessness. We’re not very concerned that our children will take such crass, insensitive interpersonal behaviors into adulthood. Sorry to say, our optimism may not be so well founded.

There are behaviors of children, such as walking on furniture, that are clearly a function of immaturity. Your 18 year old will not be walking on your furniture, despite any other issues he or she may be facing. But other facets of childhood behavior, such as truth and honesty, are reflections of their inner character. Left without redirection and guidance, a pre-teen who has trouble saying the truth will probably grow up to become a dishonest person.

Where do the above friend-busting comments come out on the spectrum of childhood behavior? We have every indication from this week’s *Parsha*, that such comments are cause for serious alarm, now and for the long-term. The *Parsha* of *Metzora* speaks of one who is stricken with *Tzoraas*, a ‘spiritual’ form of leprosy. The *Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 16:1)* lists the various behaviors that cause one to be stricken with *Tzoraas* and states that the very worst *Aveira* (sin) that leads to being afflicted is *Mishloach Medanim bein HoAchim* – to sow discord among brothers. In fact, the *Midrash* considers it ‘*K’neged Kulam*’ – it outweighs all the other bad behaviors and traits, which include haughtiness, falsehood, *Lashon Hora*, contemplating sin, running to sin and (indirectly) causing the death of innocent people.

This begs a question. Sowing discord is something done by two people. Even if one makes remarks like the ones above, the discord depends on both people distancing themselves from each other. If the one hearing the negative comments would just follow the *Halacha* and not believe the *Lashon Hara* he’s been told, the discord would never take place. So, a person making demeaning comments about others can’t make the separation by him or herself. It can happen only if the other person gets into the act. If the recipient of the original comment reacts with vengeful words or acts of his own, why does he not share in the culpability of the original perpetrator? The question therefore is – why is the “*Mishloach Medanim*” viewed so harshly?

We see from here the incredible importance *Hashem* attaches to keeping people close. So much so that if a person goes and speaks negatively, he’s already responsible for causing a separation, even though that split is, in some cases, dependent upon the other person not following *Halacha*. That dependence on the other’s bad behavior does not exonerate the original speaker of the *Lashon Hara* or hurtful words. Creating a separation and distance between people is so terrible, that going through the steps of sowing discord makes one guilty, even if in the end his words alone did not result in a separation between people.

The lesson should be clear. Whenever we become aware of our children causing strains in their or others’ relationships, our ears should perk up. This is a potential character flaw that must be uprooted. It must be addressed. It cannot be ignored. Our children’s ability to function properly, successfully and happily in the adult world depends on their ability to promote peace, and not destroy peace.

May our homes and children’s lives be filled with peace and harmony, this *Shabbos* and throughout the year,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann

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