

APPENDIX

STORIES ILLUSTRATING HOW WE VIOLATE THE COMMANDMENT

“B’TZEDEK TISHPOT AMITECHA” (“WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS SHALL YOU JUDGE YOUR FELLOW”)

FIRST STORY

This story was written by a Rabbi who gave it to me for inclusion in this book. It’s a true story. What’s described happened to him, which is why he wrote it in the first person.

Several years ago, I attended a conference for Jewish professionals at which we were asked not to engage in social conversation or chit chat - the gathering was to be devoted to meditation and prayer.

The first morning as we gathered for *shachrit*, I watched as one man - not so different from me - put on his tefillin and then, part way through the *tefillah*, took them off and put on Rabbeinu Tam’s Tefillin. I was astounded! The only time I had seen someone wear both Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam tefillin was at the Western Wall, and then it was someone who was Haredi, deeply pious. Regular people didn’t do that! From day to day I watched as this fellow put on his tefillin, davened, and then put on the second pair of tefillin. And from day to day I became more and more annoyed and indignant. Who did this person think he was? Was he putting on airs by wearing two pairs of tefillin?

On the last day of the conference, we were finally told we could greet one another. I immediately walked over to the individual who wore both Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam's tefillin and asked, "Hi! Could you tell me why you wear Rabbeinu Tam's tefillin?"

He explained, "My wife and I have been trying to have children with no success for some years. A little over a year ago, someone suggested I talk to a certain Rabbi from Israel who could help. The Rabbi instructed me to start putting on Rabbeinu Tam's tefillin in addition to my regular tefillin. Last week we celebrated our daughter's first birthday..."

"At that moment, I felt very small. I had invented a narrative for this soul, not knowing what was in his heart. I had judged him - without really knowing him."

That was the most important lesson I took away from that conference. We think we know another person's story - we are quick to judge - but we ought to have the humility to judge all people *l'kaf zechut*, favorably.

SECOND STORY

This story is also a true story. I extracted it from an article entitled "Letting Go" published by Rabbi Yonason Rosenblum (Yated Ne'eman July 28, 2017). I must disclose that in that same article Rabbi Rosenblum wrote an evaluation of my first book on sinat chinam ("Baseless Hatred: What It Is and What You Can Do About It" published by Gefen Publishing).

While I cannot think of anyone whom I know personally for whom the term “hate” is not grossly excessive, I must admit that there was one fellow in the neighborhood for whom I managed to develop a healthy distate. He once mentioned –loudly—how much he had disliked that week’s column, which he pronounced to be “stupidity, like everything you write.”

And not so long ago, I received a tongue–lashing from him for inadvertently sitting in a seat in *shul* that he had been occupying until he stepped out of the *minyana*—seat that was not his makom kavanah and bore, as far as I can remember, no indication that it was already occupied.

On a Shabbos walk with my wife a few months after the incident in *shul*, I notice him standing on the sidewalk in front of us looking at one of the announcements of a *levaya*,^a and quickly directed my wife from the sidewalk into the street to avoid passing by him.

A few days later, as I was entering the doctor’s office to pick up a prescription, I happened to notice him exiting a cab looking very badly shaken and being assisted to the curb by the cabdriver. When I exited a few minutes later, he was sitting on the base of a fence in front of the office. At that point, I had a choice: Pretend that I had noticed nothing amiss and just walk by or to engage him in a conversation.

I chose the latter and asked him what had happened and whether there was anything I could do to help. He told me that his wife had been called and would be there shortly.

In the meantime, we discussed his fall, the range of possible injuries, and various rehabilitative therapies depending on the diagnostic. We kept this up for five or ten minutes until his wife arrived. As I was walking away, he called out after me, “I’m sorry about what happened in *shul*.”

For a very small investment of time and energy, I had reduced my “enemies list” to zero. In fact, since that time we have had a number of pleasant exchanges, albeit nothing rising to the level of a conversation.

The process of letting go of my negative emotions and trying to get to another place in a very tangential relationship was deliciously liberating, and hopefully will serve as an example for me to emulate if I find myself again experiencing excessive negativity.

May we all be *zoche* to experience many such moments of liberation from negative feelings about our fellow Jews, and thereby hasten the rebuilding of the *Bais Hamikdosh*. It is not that hard.

THIRD STORY

I extracted this story from an article entitled “The Inner Enemy” written by Sarah Chana Radcliffe. She writes a weekly column in Mishpacha Magazine (online) entitled “Family Reflections.”

Words can hurt, especially when they come from someone who’s supposed to love us, respect us, or otherwise be on our side.

“My brother made a sarcastic remark about me at the dinner table. I’m used to that kind of stuff coming from him. What threw me off completely was that my sister-in-law said nothing in

my defense. That really hurt. She obviously didn't disagree, but wouldn't have made the remark to my face like he did. Why didn't I see this before? She's clearly never been a true friend," says Bracha.

Did the sister-in-law really reject her friend?

"Is there another explanation for my sister-in-law's behavior?"

.. [I]s it possible that the sister-in-law remained silent because she knows from past history that correcting or contradicting her husband in public would lead to marital conflict?

The destructive critic in the scenario above leads a sister-in-law to the worst possible conclusions, which bring about the worst possible feelings.

Whether we feel overwhelming guilt, or assume we're being mistreated, we need to ask ourselves for another possible perspective. Could there be another interpretation, perspective, or explanation? Just ask.
