

Kol Mevasser

PARASHAT BEHAR

12 Iyar 5768

May 17, 2008

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Giving Timely Help: Parashat Behar

We are all familiar with the phrase “too little, too late.” When we have the opportunity to help, we should take the opportunity when it comes and not wait until the situation deteriorates to the point that any help that we can give would be “too little, too late.” This applies with helping others as well as with helping oneself. Do not wait to see if the problem gets worse before seeking to improve it.

To provide timely help means being very aware of the condition of the people around you. Does your friend look upset? Is he going through some difficult times? Do you notice an abrupt change in behavior that could indicate that the person can use a little help, but is not yet ready to ask? Being aware of our own periods of sliding and how we can help ourselves before we hit bottom, will make us more aware of this situation in others. Sometimes even an encouraging word or description of the situation can help a person pull himself up.

Text

*Now when your brother sinks down and his hand falters beside you, then shall you strengthen him, as (though) a sojourner and resident-settler, and he is to live beside you. Do not take from him biting-interest or profit, but hold your God in awe, so that your brother may live beside you. Your silver you are not to give him at interest, for profit you are not to give him your food; I Hashem am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, to be for you a God. **Vayiqra 25:35-38***

Context and Analysis

The perasha that we read this week discusses the laws relating to the shemittah and yobel years. In the yobel year (every fifty years), all land returns to its original owners. In this context, the Torah

mentions the person who must sell his land, the person who must take a loan, the person who must sell himself and the ramifications of the yobel for these situations. The section above, is the middle of three sections in this perasha that begin with the words, “now when your brother sinks down.” The section preceding this one describes a person who had to sell off some of his inherited land. The section following this one describes a person has to sell himself as a slave. Our section describes a person who has to take a loan just in order to eat. The Torah commands first that we should “strengthen him” and not try to take interest from him. Do not try to profit from his neediness. Rather, help him to get back on his feet so that he won’t slip all the way down to the point of having to sell himself.

Our sages have expressed the idea as follows: “*Now when your brother sinks down and his hand falters beside you...*”—do not let him go down. What can this be compared to? —To a load that is upon a donkey. When it is still in its place, one can catch it and put in its place. However, if it falls, even five people cannot return it. From where do we learn that if you have strengthened him even four or five times, you must continue to hold onto him? Scripture teaches: “hold onto him” (another meaning of the Hebrew word “to strengthen”). Our sages teach us to help the person before he falls, so that it will be easier and more effective to help him. If we let him fall, we might not be able to pick him up at all.

Discussion

How can we know when someone is about to “fall”? We must be aware of how our friends and acquaintances are feeling. Do they look depressed? Are they keeping unusually quiet? These might be warning signs of someone ready about to fall. How can we help them? First, we might get them to talk about what is bothering them.

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Sometimes, just getting the person to talk out his problem can allow him to see his problem from a different perspective. Other times, we might actually be able to help them directly.

Describing the situation in ways that are not so bleak can be the first step towards stopping the person's slide. A friend might develop negative ways of thinking about himself and describe his situation as worse than it is. At those times, make him aware of the limited nature of his problems. For example, instead of letting him say in exasperation, "I don't understand anything in Gemara," try to identify the specific point at which he is having difficulty. Stopping the sweeping negative statement and specifying the point of difficulty is the first step towards overcoming the difficulty.

We can apply this to ourselves as well. Occasionally, we let a few bad moments color our whole day black. At those times, we can help by putting things into perspective. Instead of thinking, "I had a terrible day," think about the parts of the day that went well, specify the difficult things that happened and put them in perspective.

Our Sages, displaying their characteristic insight and honesty were well aware of situations where helping a person time and time again could lead to him continuing in self-destructive behavior. They said that if helping the person would allow him to continue in such behavior, then there is no obligation to help him. In the continuation of the above-quoted Midrash, our Sages teach:

Could it be that we should also help him even when helping him would lead him to destroy himself [by adopting] bad behavior? Scripture teaches: "with you." Rabbenu Hillel (commentary on the Sifra) explains that if your constant helping of the person leads him to adopt bad behaviors, you are not obligated to do so. The Torah says, "with you" as long as he is within the norms of behavior with which you can associate.

In certain addictive behavior patterns, there is often a person who is known as "the facilitator." He thinks he is helping, but, in effect, he is allowing

the person to continue his self-destructive behavior without suffering its consequences Paradoxically, the best way to help a person who is continuing in this behavior is to stop covering up for him, and to let him experience some of the dire consequences of his behavior.

Shabbat Shalom

TORAH READINGS
Parashat Behar p. 531
Haftara p. 539



Congratulations
Norma & Sam Dabby
Talmud Torah Class
5768 / 2008
on your upcoming Graduation
June 1, 2008

If you would like to register for next year, please contact our office at 310.474.0559.



Shabbat
Kids & Teens Program
Meet your friends at Kahal Joseph!

Kids (ages 2 to 9)
9 am until end of Tefillah
with Madrihim Ilan, Rachel & Asnat
in the upstairs playroom

Teens (ages 10 and up)
10:15 until 12:00 noon
with Madriha Esther
in the upstairs library

*Shabbat Kiddush
is sponsored by
Gerald Meyers
in memory of
his mother
Rachel bat Tifaha, z"l
Rachel Judah, z"l*

*Congratulations
Joseph Abraham Isaac
on your Bar Mitzvah*

*Mazal Tov
to your parents, Lorraine & Eli Isaac
your brother David, grandmother
Flossie Jacob, and your entire family*

Refuah Shlemah

Please include these people in your prayers for health.

Yaheskel ben Regina
Khayah Noa bat Sara • Matilda Louisa
Victor ben Pauline • Haim ben Mordechai
Shaul Chai Gavriel ben Sara • Pnina bat Esther
Shamuel Eliyahu ben Hannah

**Adult Volunteers Wanted
for Shabbat Teen Program**

We are looking for individuals 21 and older to work with the teen program on an occasional basis. Be a Guest Speaker, assist with prayers, teach a song, lead an activity, or just visit. For information leave a message for Esther at 310.474.0559.

In Memoriam

These anniversaries occur from Shabbat, the Shabbat, the 12th of Iyar (May 17, 2008) to Shabbat, the 19th of Iyar (May 24, 2008). It is customary to light a memorial candle in the evening and donate tzedakah. Family members are encouraged to attend services .

Shabbat / 12 Iyar

Sarah bat Sarah
Mesuda bat Aziza
Rabbee Shadi
Aharon ben Elisha

Sunday / 13 Iyar

Devorah bat Aharon
Joseph Robert Saul
Violet Aziza Sheeri

Monday / 14 Iyar

Salha Matana bat Matooka
Tala bat Javaher
Saliman ben Kadoori Shaby
Eliyahu Hai ben Avraham Shamash

Tuesday / 15 Iyar

Rvika Matana bat Miriam
Rahel bat Chana

Wednesday / 16 Iyar

Albert Abraham Gazal Sassoon
Yoseph ben Yehudah

Friday / 18 Iyar

Rachel bat Tifaha
Seemah Sofaer bat Hanna

Shabbat / 19 Iyar

Habiba bat Lulu
Sulman Haroun

*We offer our deepest condolences
to the family of Meir Kohen, z"l*

*To his wife, Yocheved
To his sister, Ora Ezran & siblings Yossi,
Ashira, Devorah, Penina, Shlomi, and Avi
To his children, Hadasa, Moshe, Tzipora,
Shraga, Shmaryahu, Shmuel, Chana,
Haim Ze'ev, Esther & Nechama
and his nieces & nephews who include
Dafna, Ayelet, & Shmuel Ezran*