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THE WISDOM AND PRACTICE OF FORGIVENESS

WEXNER HERITAGE PROGRAM
MADREGOT SUMMER INSTITUTE

JULY 8 - 13, 2018
SNOWBIRD, UTAH

Approach 1: Hakpada – Letting go

The following are three excerpts from different parts of the Talmud

“Rav Ada bar Ahava’s students asked him for the secret to a long life. He told them, ‘In all my days (לא הקפדתי) I was not Makpid in my home.’ (Talmud Bavli Ta’anit 20b)

What would it mean for you not to have Hakpada in your home? Isn’t this just a set up to get walked all over? Why would this be a key to a long life?

“Rava said: Anyone who let’s go of keeping precise track of how he has been wronged [המעביר על מדותיו], the heavenly tribunal lets go of keeping track of all his wrongdoing [מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו]. As it is stated ‘God pardons/carries transgression and overlooks sin[נושא עון ועובר על פשע].’ Whose transgression does God pardon? One who overlooks sins [committed against himself].

(Talmud Bavli Rosh Hashana 17a)

This teaching seems to be based on the idea that what is true in interpersonal relations is also true in human-divine relations. How do you think this works?

The following statement introduces a story about the sages Hillel and Shammai. Hillel was famous for his patience. Two students made a bet that they could make Hillel Angry. On Friday afternoon, close to Shabbat, the student repeatedly came to Hillel’s house and asked him nonsense questions. Each time Hillel responded with patience causing the student to lose the bet. The Gemara then goes on to tell the famous story of the Gentile who asked Shammai and Hillel to teach him the Torah while standing on one foot. Shammai drives the Gentile away with his building tool while Hillel accepts the Gentile and converts him.

“Our rabbis taught that one should be humble like Hillel and not a Kapdan like Shammai

What do you think the connection is between humility and not being a Kapdan?

Approach 2: The Art of Rebuke – Tochecha

Leviticus 19:17-18

לֹא־תִשְׂנֵא אֶת־אֲחִיךָ בְּלִבְּךָ הֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת־עַמִּיתְךָ וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חַטָּא

You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Rebuke your kinsman but incur no guilt because of him.

לֹא־תִקַּם וְלֹא־תִטֵּר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמְךָ וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כַּמוֹךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the LORD.

Maimonides (d. 1204, Egypt), Laws of Ethics, Chapter 6:7-8

A. One who sees his friend do the wrong thing or go along a bad path – is obligated to return him to the “good” and to notify him that he is making himself a wrongdoer with his bad deeds, as it says, “You shall surely rebuke your fellow (Leviticus 19:17).”

B. The one who rebukes his fellow, whether about matters between them or between him and God, needs to give the rebuke one to one and speaks to him in a calm voice and with gentle words and notifies him that he is only speaking for his own good and to bring him to eternal life.

C. If he accepts it from him – good. If not he rebukes a second and a third time.

D. Similarly a person is always obligated to rebuke until the sinner strikes him and says to him “I don’t hear.”

E. Whenever it is possible for one to protest and one doesn’t protest – he is liable for this wrongdoing since it was possible for him to have protested.

F. One who rebukes his fellow at first should not speak such harsh words that he is shamed, as it says, “Do not carry sin on his behalf.” Thus our rabbis said, “is it possible that you will rebuke and his face will turn colors? The Torah teaches us “do not carry sin on his behalf.” From here we learn that it is forbidden to shame a Jew, and all the more so in public...

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (d. 1810, Ukraine)

When someone criticizes or attacks you with words, those words either have nothing to do with you or they are offering you valuable information.