

You may not discontinue the salt of your G-d's covenant from upon your meal offering. (2:13)

Rashi teaches that a covenant was enacted during the *Sheishes Yemei Bereishis*, Six Days of Creation, that ensured the lower waters (the waters of our earth) that they would be offered on the *Mizbayach*. This is executed through the induction of salt on the *Mizbayach* and the water libation. Apparently, the waters were appeased for a reason. What was it?

In the beginning of *Sefer Bereishis*, *Rashi* comments concerning the creation of Heaven and earth which was preceded by the spirit of G-d hovering over the water. This would seem to indicate that the creation of the waters preceded the creation of the world! Furthermore, it seems that the water was “there” without any function or purpose. On the second day, the *rakia*, sky, was created, thereby serving as a divider between the upper waters (clouds) and lower waters (oceans). Still, the lower water had no function – yet. Finally, on day three, the lower waters descended and gathered in various places, forming oceans, rivers, seas, etc. Now, the land was revealed in contrast to the waters. Hashem saw that this portion of His labor was complete, and He saw that it was good. We wonder why the creation of water had to endure for days before it was deemed good. After all, it had been around before the rest of the world was created. Last, why would Hashem create something that had no function for two days, a creation concerning which He could not say that it was *tov*, good?

Horav Zaidel Epstein, zl, explains that on the first day of Creation, Hashem sought to teach us the significance of caring about one's fellow man. *Bein adam lachaveiro* plays a critical role in the life of a Jew. Prior to Creation, there was no idea of *bein adam lachaveiro*, because there was no *chaveir*. Each and every creation was obligated solely to Hashem. It was only after Hashem added to His portfolio of creations that the idea of sensitivity toward others came into vogue.

The *Mashgiach* compares this to a *Rosh Yeshivah* in whose *yeshivah* many students studied. Every grade had two parallel classes taught by two individual *rebbeim* who maintained equal status. As a result of a diminishing student population, it was now prudent to close down one of the classes. They now required the services of only one *rebbe*. One would remain in his position, while the other one would be relegated to teaching a lower class. Understandably, the *Rosh Yeshivah* was confronted with a difficult decision. Who should he “demote”? Veritably, the *rebbe* who would be compelled to teach a lower class might be offended. The *Rosh Yeshivah* ruminated over his problem and arrived at what he felt was the most amenable decision for all concerned – *rebbe*, student and *yeshivah*.

During *Maasei Bereishis*, Creation, Hashem taught us how to think, how to make different decisions concerning people. Hashem found a “painless” way to allow the lower waters to descend to their rightful place. At first, He did not say, “Descend”! Rather, He insisted the upper waters remain in their present place in the Heavens. Hashem then split the heaven from the earth,

whereby the earth took up its designated place. What benefit was gained by this approach? The lower waters were acutely aware that they were going to be located in the lower part of the hemisphere. In order to ease and assuage its “feelings,” Hashem did not lower it; rather, He sort of elevated the upper water. Hashem did not do this immediately, in order to allow the change in status to take place in the most sensitive manner. Furthermore, now that change was made, Hashem added a fringe benefit, the covenant of salt and water libation. That sweetened the pot – and taught us a lesson in human interaction: always be sensitive to another person’s emotions. Those who feel it is best to be brutally honest, and cut quickly and deeply, have severe *bein adam l’chaveiro* issues – or perhaps they are deficient in the area of being an *adam, mentch*; period.

It all boils down to one word: care. Do we care about others, or are we the center of our focus of caring? *Kavod ha'briyos*, the respect that we accord others, goes hand in hand with empathy. When we respect our fellow man, we find ways to care for and about him. I wrote a story many years ago which sadly rings true today – as pertinent today as it was then.

On a visit to America shortly before *Rosh Hashanah* in 1939, **Horav Yitzchak Aizik Sher, zl**, was asked to deliver a *shmuess*, ethical discourse, to a group of senior rabbis. He addressed the august group with a question: “Why did you ask me to speak *dvrei mussar*, words of ethical reproach? What are you worried about? Is it the *Yom HaDin*, Day of Judgment, which is rapidly approaching? You observe *Shabbos, kashrus*; your integrity is impeccable; *lashon hora* is an anathema to you, so what is it that worries you?”

After a lengthy discourse, the *Rosh Yeshivah* arrived at his response, “My friends, you are all fine, upstanding Jews, and you do not sin. Yet, you pick up the New York Times in the morning, read that a man was killed, and you continue to drink your coffee! How can you drink coffee when you have read that a woman just became a widow and children lost their father? You should faint in anguish. Yet, you do not. Why? Because you do not care how death affects others. As long as it is not you or yours, you can simply continue with your coffee. Yes, you have something to fear on the *Yom HaDin*, because Hashem is stricter with the righteous than He is with ordinary people. On the Day of Judgment – you must be careful!”

The message is timeless, because our attitude has not changed. We hear of *korbanos* in *Eretz Yisrael*, in America, in our communities, but as long as it does not reach home – it does not hit home. We are too involved with ourselves to allow room for others. Perhaps this might be a wakeup call. Life is not only about us; we are all part of one large family. What happens “there” really happens “here.”