

But against all Bnei Yisrael, no dog shall whet his tongue. (11:7)

A number of years ago, I wrote of an incident which took place in Brisk, when the city was under the leadership of its *Rav*, **Horav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zl**, popularly known by his *sefer*, *Bais HaLevi*. A dispute had broken out in the city among its movers and shakers, the most prominent and wealthy members of the community. The issue was concerning the direction of the community and how it should be led. They brought up the matter to the *Rav*, asking him to render a decision. In an attempt to discern in which direction the “wind” was blowing and how to best resolve the issues, the *Bais HaLevi* invited the community’s finest and most influential laymen to render their opinions concerning which position was best for the community. Once the *Rav* had developed a consensus of opinion and had absorbed all of the factors concerning the issues on the table, he could better make an intelligent decision.

The response from these laymen was something to which the Jewish communities have become quite familiar: “We do not want to get involved. We would rather remain neutral. We do not want to take a stand, lest it offend someone.” The diplomatic “cop out” is regrettably the response we hear when we have a sensitive issue involving difficult parties. It is so much easier to remain neutral. In one’s myopic mind he even begins to believe that, by staying out of the fray, he is helping those who need him.

The *Rav* was visibly irritated by their response. “Remaining neutral was the position for which the dogs in Egypt opted the night that Hashem slayed the Egyptian firstborn.” He continued with an explanation, “In the *Talmud Bava Kamma* 60b, *Chazal* maintain that, when dogs are ‘playing,’ it is an indication that Eliyahu *HaNavi* has come to town. Apparently, quite the opposite occurs when the *Malach HaMaves*, Angel of Death, pays a visit. Then, the dogs wail. On the night of *Makkas Bechoros*, slaying of the firstborn, the dogs were in a quandary. Egypt was visited by both Eliyahu *HaNavi* and the *Malach HaMaves*! What were the dogs to do? Cry or play? The Torah informs us of the dogs’ decision: No dog shall whet his tongue. They remained neutral, neither crying nor playing. The dogs refused to take a stand.” The *Brisker Rav* effectively conveyed his message.

Chazal tell us that in the End of Days, *P’nei hador k’p’nei ha’kelev*, “The face of the generation will be like the face of a dog.” This means that the generation’s leadership will appear to behave in a manner similar to, or acceptable to, the dog. The commentators explain that, although a dog runs before his master, it always turns around and looks back to assure itself that its master is following. Likewise, Jewish leadership in the End of Days will always “turn around” to assure themselves that the community is acquiescing with the position that they have taken.

Once again, we see that neutrality, refusing to take a stand on issues that go to the very core of *Klal Yisrael*, bespeaks the weakness and indifference displayed by leadership who refuse to tackle issues that are hurting the Jewish community. We concede that the issues are varied and sensitive,

and not all of them will necessarily be resolved by taking a stand. This is certainly true if the stand is taken only by a small group of individuals, but, when a prominent group of leaders takes a position and issues a call to arms, people will begin to listen.

There is no question that issues, such as dysfunctional families, children at risk, recalcitrant husbands who employ their *halachic* dispensation to withhold a *get* from their wives while they extort them for all they and their parents are worth, are not going to disappear overnight. If we continue our indifference by maintaining neutral, however, these problems will only deepen.