

I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt. (5:6)

In his *Bais Elokim* (*Shaar Hayesodos* 12), the *Mabit* observes that the first five *Dibros* /Commandments, which were on the right side of the *Luchos*, address *mitzvos* which are *bein adam laMakom*, between man and Hashem. The five commandments on the left side address *mitzvos bein adam la'chaveiro*, between man and fellow man. Interestingly, the commandments which relate to *mitzvos* between man and G-d are textually much longer than those which are *bein adam la'chaveiro*. Three of these are comprised of two words. He explains that, while each letter of the commandments has great cosmic significance [there are 620 letters in the *Aseres HaDibros*], the mere fact that the second set of commandments is less verbose indicates their overriding importance. The mere “few” letters which comprise *bein adam la'chaveiro* are equal to those which represent *bein adam laMakom*.

The fact that *bein adam la'chaveiro* has such great consequence is underscored by the following story, which *Horav Meir, zl, m'Premishlan*, would relate on *Shavuuous* before the reading of the *Aseres HaDibros* (as related by *Horav Elimelech Biderman, Shlita*). Vienna was home to an influential Jew, *Reb Shimshon Wertheimer*, a *tzaddik*, righteous and virtuous man, who had a close relationship with the Austrian monarch. One day, the king asked *Reb Shimshon* why the Jews are hounded and oppressed more so than any other nation. *Reb Shimshon* replied, “It is retribution for their hatred and jealousy of one another.” [This does not mean that all Jews hate and that all Jews are envious of one another. It just shows that Hashem's standard for the Jewish people is higher than it is for others. Thus, even if a minute group of Jews sins, it represents a large stain on our collective, spiritual persona.] The king was (obviously) not satisfied with this reply, so that he expressed his aversion, “I will give you three days to reveal to me the real reason for your troubles, or else I will banish every Jew from Vienna.”

Reb Shimshon asked a *sheilas chalom* (he prayed to have Heaven respond to his request for an explanation via a dream). He was told, “Do not retract your position. The Jews suffer in exile as a result of petty hatred and jealousy. Soon the king will be made aware of this verity.”

It was the beginning of the winter and, as all bored noblemen, the king went with his ministers to the forest to hunt wild game. The king was intense about his hunting and would get so worked up and involved that he would often lose all concept of time and place. By the time the sun had set, he realized that he must have wandered off from his entourage, and now he was lost. His ministers thought that the king had finished early and had left for the palace. In the meantime, it was cold and dark, and the king's anxiety level was creeping higher by the hour.

Finally, after hours of groping around in the darkness, the king came upon a river which separated the edge of the forest from what seemed to be a small village. He parted with his horse, removed his royal clothes, and swam across the river. The village was inhabited by peasants who were clueless as to the identity of the king (they knew nothing about royalty; their primary concern was their few animals and their own next meal). He knocked on a couple of doors, but the townspeople,

seeing a man in his underclothes, sopping wet and disheveled, imagined him to be a demon. They promptly slammed the door in his face.

The king decided to look for a house with a *mezuzah*. Jews are a compassionate and benevolent people. They would let him into their homes. He found such a home where he was immediately (no questions asked) given dry clothes and hot food. The king was still cold, so the Jewish homeowner lent him his fur coat. His action was not countenanced by his wife, who suspected the “king” of being nothing more than a petty thief (the king had never revealed his true identity, because no one in his right mind would have believed him). She insisted that he send their “guest” packing before he robbed them of everything. The husband disagreed, and he informed his wife that he would remain awake all night to keep an eye on their guest.

The next morning, the king asked his Jewish host how far it was to the capital (Vienna), and how much it would cost to hire a wagon and driver. The host said that he would gladly provide transportation for a competitive price. The king agreed to travel with his host. He asked for one more favor: Could he borrow his fur coat until he reached his destination? He still felt under the weather. (The truth was that it would not look very good for the king of Austria to arrive at his palace without any clothes.) Once again, the host’s wife maintained her negativity, claiming that enroute the guest would kill her husband and escape with the fur coat, using his wagon and horse for transportation. The host thought nothing of it. He was a full-service *baal chesed*, and he would provide his guest with the kindness he required.

The host became somewhat nervous when the king instructed him to “drive” up to the doors of the palace. The host feared that he would be violating some security rules by bringing his old, broken - down wagon right up to the gates of the palace. (He, of course, was unaware that he was transporting the king, who feared being recognized dressed in nothing more than a fur coat). “Do not worry,” said the king. “I will take care of everything.”

When they arrived, the king jumped out of the wagon and disappeared behind the palace gates. The Jew was now worried. His wife had been right. He no longer had his fur coat. He was on the palace grounds without permission. His payback for all the intended good would be a life sentence in the king’s jail. A few minutes went by, and a guard came out and asked him to follow him inside the palace. This was it, the Jew thought. He was being led to prison. Why had he not listened to his wife?

Before he knew it, he was standing face to face with the king, but, due to his anxiety coupled with the king’s new wardrobe, he did not recognize the king as the guest who had spent the night in his home and whom he had transported to the palace. The king began to describe the Jew’s home, even the dinner that he had had the night before. (The Jew still did not recognize the king. Anxiety will do that to a person. Furthermore, the Jew was probably not the most astute of men.) The king said, “I am the king of Austria, and you saved me last night. I am greatly in your debt. I want to reward you for helping me. Nothing that you may ask is too much. I will be more than happy to

oblige.”

The Jew stood there silently – no response. The king countered, “I will give you a forest, a farm, horses – anything!” The Jew continued to stand there quietly, not uttering a word. “If you do not tell me what you want, I will be obliged to give you the wages that you requested – nothing more. Do you really want to settle for that?” asked the king.

Finally, the Jew spoke. “My king, I am a traveling salesman. I have been doing well until recently, when a fellow Jew began to infringe upon my territory. I would ask the king to decree that my competitor not be allowed to go to the cities that I have heretofore been serving.”

The king said, “Your request is granted, but I must say that I have never in my life met a greater fool than you. Here I am promising to give you anything that you want. Yet, all you seem to care about is to make sure that your competition should not earn money! You are more concerned with assuaging your envy than helping yourself.”

The king immediately called for *Reb Shimshon Wertheimer* to concede his error, “You were so right. Jewish People are punished because of the jealousy they have one for another.”

The Torah was given to *Klal Yisrael* as they stood together *k'ish echad b'lev echad*, “like one man with one heart.” The unity that permeated the Jewish People at that auspicious moment was palpable. This is the only way that we can accept Torah – through harmony among Jews. When we are *echad*, together as one, Hashem rests His Presence upon us. As long as discord is not an anathema to us, we will not be worthy of experiencing the *Geulah Sheleimah*, complete ultimate Redemption, in our time.