

And Avram said to Lot, “Let there be no discord, please, between me and you....” (13:8)

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, teaches an important lesson concerning the grammatical syntax of the above *pasuk*. He explains that the word *beineinu*, between us, is used when the separation or union is not necessarily mutual. However, when the Torah repeats the *bein*, between, such as here, *beini u’beinecha*, between me and you, the union or separation is mutual. It is as if Avraham *Avinu* was intimating to Lot: “If we have discord, there can be no relationship between us. Our quarrel is mutual. There are things about you which do not please me, and I am certain that there are aspects of my life and endeavor which do not conform to your way of thinking. In other words, apparently neither of us sees eye to eye with the other. This is causing strife between us and our people. We should separate, because separation engenders peace.”

In order to protect his people from the bad example of Lot’s ménage, it was critical for Avraham to demand complete separation. Furthermore, Avraham could not just go anywhere in which there was a surplus of pasturage. He required a sheltered, isolated environment, distant from the people who viewed corruption and moral profligacy as a way of life. Lot, however, having rejected Avraham’s way of life, could live anywhere that grass was aplenty. His herds required feeding. This was Lot’s sole criteria when he was seeking a neighborhood in which to live.

Understanding this distinction between a single *bein* and a repetitive *bein*, *Rav Hirsch* goes on to teach an important lesson with regard to the *mitzvah* of *Shabbos*. Concerning *Shabbos* observance, the Torah writes (*Shemos* 31:17), *Beini u’vein Bnei Yisrael*, “Between Me and (between) *Bnei Yisrael*” (it is a sign forever). This phrase uses a double repetition, a double sign of recognition. As long as *Klal Yisrael* adheres to this *mitzvah*, as long as we observe *Shabbos*, we thereby recognize and acknowledge that we belong to Hashem, and Hashem acknowledges us as His. It is a dual, reciprocal relationship. If *chas v’shalom*, Heaven forbid, one desecrates *Shabbos*, he tears asunder this double bond in both directions! We break with Hashem and, concomitantly, He breaks with us.

I have written about *Shabbos* numerous times, but never did a *p’shat*, exposition, strike home with such pertinent meaning. A Jew who profanes *Shabbos*, who does so knowingly, willingly, and with complete awareness of what *Shabbos* means to the Jewish People, ergo severs his relationship with Hashem – and Hashem does likewise. This is a most frightening lesson, which presents *shemiras Shabbos*, *Shabbos* observance, in a different light. *Shabbos* is not a “regular” *mitzvah*. It is the primary Jewish observance that rises above the rest. It is the only ritual mentioned in the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments. The penalty for violating the *Shabbos* (during the time of the *Bais Hamikdash* when capital punishment was administered) was stoning – the same punishment that is meted out to one who abandons Judaism for another religion. *Shabbos* is the most important institution of Judaism. It is the touchstone of our faith. *Shabbos* is our identity. *Shabbos* affirms our belief in Hashem as the Creator of all things.

For the Jew, belief in Hashem is more than a mere creed or catechism. It is the foundation of all meaning in life. Without a Creator, there can be no possible meaning to existence. There is no purpose, no morality, no ethics, no life worth living. Thus, *Shabbos* is the focus of Jewish belief; for, without *Shabbos*, there is no Creator, and, without belief in Hashem, there is no life.

I could go on, but I think the reader conceptualizes the picture. We now understand the repetition of *bein*, between. When we make the conscious decision to violate the institution of *Shabbos*, we break our bond with Hashem. This is a dual relationship. Thus, one can expect Divine reciprocity. Need we say more? [I must add that this thesis applies to one who was raised with the institution of *Shabbos* – not a *tinok she'nishbah*, child captured by gentiles, a *halachic* term which applies to one who was raised in an unobservant milieu, with little or no education in Torah and *mitzvos*.]