

# Let it Go

Toward the middle of Ki Teitze's Mitzvah-laden verses, Moshe delivers, what has to be, one of the most generous statements in the entire Torah: "Do not hate the Edomite for he is your brother; do not hate the Egyptian for you were a stranger in his land." (Deut 23:8) Rashi's comment on those words announces our own surprise at this injunction. 'Do not hate the Edomite,' to which Rashi comments: Do not hate them entirely, though by rights we might despise Edom for meeting our peaceful overture [to pass through Edom's land, promising to leave the soil unmolested] with aggression. And Rashi continues, 'do not hate the Egyptian,' means: Do not hate them through and through; even though they threw our children into the Nile, they hosted the Hebrews when we were in need.

Rashi's reading is realistic. 'Do not hate' means we must not hate absolutely, but we may hate, a little. In the recesses of our heart, we can never forget the wrongs Edom and Egypt committed against Israel. It would be unnatural to forgive.

Rashi's conservative reading is problematic when we look at the next verse in the Torah which allows for third generation Egyptian and Edomite converts to enter the community of God and join the Jewish people as full members. If Rashi's reading were correct, then we might reserve hate for those converts. And that old hate would contravene another mitzvah of the Torah: 'You shall love the stranger.' Further, the positive command to love the stranger, the convert for our purpose, is a compounded love - loving your fellow [your fellow Jew] as yourself and loving the stranger are one in the same. (See Rambam, Hilchot Deot, 6:4)

Rather, 'Do not hate' is a phrase that suggests an unqualified idealistic expression of releasing the hate in our hearts. Yes, Edom was an aggressor and, yes, Egypt committed terrible atrocities against us. Nevertheless, we must not hate them. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks delivered a talk wherein he used this command to demonstrate the national psychic transformation that the former slaves would need to undergo as they were to become citizens of a free society. The Hebrews needed to let go of their - justified - hate in order to build life anew.

As we approach the High Holidays, we might suggest applying this type of attitude to our interpersonal relationships. While the essence of the day of Yom Kippur atones, that is only with regards to failure in relationship between man and God. However, between man and fellow man, atonement does not proceed unless one apologizes and the other forgives.

But letting go of hate is easier said than done. Someone who feels wronged may be too proud to allow for the reparation. He may even treasure his wound, carrying it, even protecting it, as it reminds him of a special leverage in his relationship. The Talmud denounces one who refuses to forgive as cruel. (TB BK, 92a; see also Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva, 2:10) Cruelty is synonymous with violence and rage. When hate detonates within us, there's no telling where the shrapnel will land.

Returning to the verse is helpful. Moshe encourages Israel to release our hate by recalling our past relationships. Do not hate because you are brothers. Israel is a community of families; the bonds of

family must transcend ill-feeling. Do not hate because you were taken in as strangers - and the dignity we profess to show toward our own stranger and to the vulnerable in society was shown to us. If we allow our hate to overwhelm our sense of family and sense of communal responsibility, we will be forever doomed. Perhaps, if we can look beyond our immediate hurt and find something of the eternal in every relationship, we can fully let go of our anger.

Shabbat Shalom Umevorach,  
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