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OU ISRAEL FACULTY

Torat Imecha
NACH YOMI

בס"ד

Friendship, Community & Redemption

Hazal said of the friends of Iyov: או חבֿראּ - Either a person has friends like the friends of Iyov, or death.¹ What was it about the friends of Iyov that qualified them as the ultimate paradigm of friendship? After all, not only do they seem to have failed in their mission of comforting Iyov, in the final event they are even accused of incriminating him! How could such friends serve as a model for us to emulate, friends without whom death would be preferable to life?

The teaching of Hazal cited above comes at the conclusion of a discussion regarding the arrival of Iyov's friends to comfort him. The friends are described in the text as arriving jointly to console him, even though each had left from his own home in a location remote from the others. While today arranging such a meeting is as simple as sending a quick text message, in biblical times this was no small feat. The gemara explains that the friends had a system whereby they could remain aware of any change in the welfare of the others; some say they each had a crown on which the faces of the three others were engraved, and any change in their well-being was reflected in the face of the affected one, while others suggest

that each had three trees, each representing one of the friends, and if one withered they knew who was suffering. At any such sign, the friends gathered to offer support to the afflicted one. Thus Iyov's friends were able to assemble and arrive together to console him.

The Maharal explains the two opinions of the Sages to indicate that the bond among these four friends was all-encompassing. The suggestion of the crown reflects a bond that supersedes the physical realm, while the suggestion of the trees represents that the friends were united in the natural world, by the earth in which they were planted.² This friendship, which existed in both the upper and lower realms, is the type of friendship we can't live without - peers who not only sympathize but empathize, and are willing to drop everything at a moment's notice to be physically, intellectually and emotionally present in one's time of need.

The midrash teaches that in consequence of their willingness to drop everything to comfort Iyov in his state of mourning, Iyov's friends were spared from the places in *Gehinom* that had been designated for them, merited to have *Ruach HaKodesh* rest upon them

1. Bava Batra 16b

2. Chiddushei Aggadot Bava Batra 16b

and to have their names commemorated in Tanach.³ Rav Chaim Shmulevitz explains that the quality of bearing the burden of someone else's suffering as Iyov's friends did is an especially worthy character trait, one that is shared by none other than Mashiach himself. The gemara relates that Mashiach is to be found among those suffering from disease, doing all within his power to ease their pain. The Redeemer of the Jewish people must identify with their suffering.⁴

Although the friends of Iyov were not able to comfort him with their philosophical arguments, they remained present and shared his pain. At the climax of the sefer, Hashem commanded the friends to offer an 'Olah to atone for their erroneous arguments, and asserted that Iyov would pray on their behalf, despite their having wronged him. Rav Soloveitchik sees this prayer as evidence of the change wrought upon Iyov by his suffering - at the outset, Iyov's concern was only for his own family, reflected in the 'Olah offering he brought to atone for his children. Through his experiences, Iyov learned to rise above his individual concerns and identify with the pain and anguish of the community, to look outward and experience a sense of true communion with those in need. We, who pray in the plural form, learn from Iyov's transformation.⁵

May we merit to have and to be friends such as the friends of Iyov, and hasten the coming of Mashiach as we identify and show solidarity with the suffering of those in our community, offering our heartfelt prayers

on their behalf in this season of repentance, prayer and charity. ■

Mrs. Leah Feinberg is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi program

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