



FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER

OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

**ORTHODOX
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Enhancing Jewish Life

We Are All Family

It is your business.

We are appropriately cautious about becoming overly involved in the lives of others, but we can also mistakenly remain distant. Too much can be intrusive and meddlesome, and too little can be apathetic and uncaring. How do we thread the needle and do it just right? While there are no easy and uniform answers, this critical question

deserves serious consideration.

We can gain insight from the parshiyot that we read this week and next, where we find that as Moshe winds down his communications to Klal Yisrael, he focuses on the extent of our responsibility to mind other people's business. In Ki Tavo (Devarim 27:11-26), Moshe lists the curses which we were commanded to formally declare upon entry to Eretz Yisrael, all of which focus on private and secret failures (see Rashbam and Chizkuni 27:15). Then again in Nitzavim (29:17), Moshe references the hidden thoughts of the individual as an apparent cause for tragedy for the masses and concludes (29:28) with the memorable formulation, *hanistarot laHashem Elokeinu*, hidden matters belong with G-d while the overt are our responsibility.

Specifically then, as we were preparing to leave the desert for Eretz Yisrael, that our responsibility for each other's hidden issues was elevated. The Talmud even suggests that we accepted that responsibility – *areivut* – precisely as we were crossing through the Jordan river into Israel (see Sanhedrin 43b, Yerushalmi Sotah 7:5). Indeed, during our very first act of conquest in Eretz Yisrael, the entire Jewish people were held collectively accountable for the crime of one man – Achan – who secretly partook of the consecrated spoils of Jericho.

What changed so fundamentally when we entered the land? Why is it specifically then that it became our business to mind other people's business?

In memory of

**משה מרדכי בן
חנוך העניך הלוי סג"ל ז"ל
MARTIN M. SEGAL ז"ל**

On his second Yahrzeit - כ"ג אלול

**Beloved Husband of 71 years
to Beverly**

**Father to
Yosef & Orit Segal
Ellen-Toby & Daniel Kaufman
Robert & Suzanne Segal**

Grandfather & great-grandfather

*He was a beautiful human being
who brought love & joy to us all*

In the desert, there was no need for charity. Our food fell from the heavens, our clothing stayed fresh and usable, and we were sheltered by the divine clouds representing G-d, the *ananei hakavod*. G-d took care of each of us. Hashem, completely aware of the issues on our minds and our hearts and Who knows our every need, addressed those issues and fulfilled those needs. But that situation would end when we left those desert clouds, crossed the Jordan river, and landed on earth; when we needed to use our own hands to build homes and till the soil to produce our bread from the ground, wearing out our clothing in the process.

As G-d stepped back, we needed to step forward, not only for ourselves but for each other. In the words of Rav Yisrael Salanter, when it comes to the needs of others we must not rely on G-d.

And yet, we are at a serious handicap. G-d knows the innermost thoughts of each of us and the intimate details of our lives. He can help. How can we humans assume responsibility for others when we are unaware of their *nistarot*, their private material needs and spiritual and emotional challenges?

It is for this reason that Pirkei Avot taught us to welcome others into our homes as family. Family members must respect each other's boundaries, but they always know how we are really doing as they can gauge the level of brightness in our eyes and are attuned to the energy in our voices. Indeed, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 44a) notes that we can be certain that Achan's family knew of his hidden crime and were his inner circle of awareness and responsibility for his spiritual wellbeing.

We as a community must realize that not

everyone lives with family and not everyone will have those immediately able to be all-knowing, to realize when things are going well for them or when they are struggling. That is why our prophets (Yeshayahu 58:7) and sages (Avot 1:5) guided us to not just feed the hungry but make them part of our households, making our homes into places where they feel like members of the family. This approach extends to anyone who does not have the blessing of a whole and supportive family to come home to, as we can make them feel valued and at home in our homes, extending the boundaries of our families to let others in. We must step forward, open our doors and our hearts, always respectful of boundaries yet open and willing to be part of that circle of family for those within our communities who are hidden in plain sight.

As we approach the Yom Tov season of umpteen festive meals, we need to recognize that this period is dreaded by many in our community – the divorced, widowed, unmarried, and orphaned – without a family table of their own. **How mutually rewarding would it be for us to make them part of ours**, welcoming them for a meal or for many, **having them feel as part of our family and that our home is in some measure theirs.** ■



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