



נְעִימוֹת הַחַיִּים
Ne'imas HaChaim Project
In memory of Naama Markovits A"H
לע"נ נעמה חנה ע"ה ב"ר יהודה איסר נ"י



No. 001 August 14, 2010

ד' אלול תש"ע

שבת פרשת שופטים

Lesson #1: Sharing

(Prepared by Rabbi Azriel Bodner)

How often do we find ourselves telling our children: “Please give some to your brother” or “You have so much, why can’t you share some”. And then there is the classic: “I didn’t get it just for you”. Even still the battle will rage, and it will seem as if nobody is satisfied. Sometimes, the child who controls the candy, game, ball, etc. will give a morsel or a small turn to at least take off the pressure being placed upon them to share.

The parents may stand there wondering, “why is this child so selfish, why doesn’t he want to share, he wasn’t much more deserving than the other child”. It is especially difficult to see a child who is not willing to part with any of their treasure, even though they didn’t need it and it came to them as a gift.

We therefore assume that adults are models of sharing, to the point where it’s not even a challenge. I initially thought to divide this topic into sub-topics, to deal with different scenarios independently; necessities as opposed to luxuries, items that you have as opposed to items that have not yet come. However, an experience that I had while preparing my thoughts enlightened me as to how difficult sharing really can be.

A friend of mine who is in the catering industry dropped by my place of work with a significant amount of Shabbos food that he did not need for his business. It was enough for my family for several weeks, and I began calculating how much freezer space I had available. As my coworkers entered and noticed my jackpot, I was quick to offer them the opportunity to take for themselves, as it was of no loss to me if they took some. I found it humorous and humiliating to notice how concerned I was that they not take too much, secretly hoping that they would realize on their own that this stuff was mine. As the day progressed I had to fight my inclination and offer to others to take, rather than to take “some”. What a hypocrite.

Clearly what makes sharing so challenging is that there is almost nothing that we don’t “need” or that we can’t find a use for. To be able to give up what is ours would only be possible if we were able to make the needs of others just as important to us. That may sound easy, but how many people are ready to part with half of their wealth, the way that we expect children to.

Ultimately, if we were able to see each person as a *Tzelem Elokim* we would not need to work on the challenge of sharing. That was true in the generation of Rabbi Yehuda bar Ilai, famous for the capability of six students to share one blanket. Until we reach that point, however, we must find another tool that is more practical for our generation.

Chaza”l provided us with this tool as well, the tool that enables us to view the needs of others as greater than ours. Rabbi Akiva and his wife Rachel, having been cut off from her affluent father, were living in abject poverty. Their home was a stable and their only possession was some straw. In the middle of the night came a knock on their door, a poor man whose wife had just given birth needed their straw. Rabbi Akiva enlightened us and showed that we can even part with items we view as necessities for the sake of others, by recognizing the needs of others as greater than our own. Rabbi Akiva did not merely give up the straw or act as if he had no use for it, rather he said to his wife: “Do you see, there is someone who needs this straw even more than we do.”

That is our task, to find a way that even though we have needs, we can share by viewing the needs of others as greater. This is true not only of possessions but of all commodities that we control. We can share our time, giving up those few precious minutes of relaxing on the couch to help our spouses and our children. We can share secret recipes and we can encourage our children to share their notes, or to donate some of their free time to help their friends. We can change our entire perspective of what constitutes a necessity just by realizing or even convincing ourselves that there is someone out there who needs it more.

The Mesillas Yesharim counts sharing the gifts that Hashem bestows upon a person as one of the highest links on the chain of Avodas Hashem. We can begin at the basic level, asking ourselves to do no less than we expect from our children.