

Yom Kippur 5781 2020

Civility in Un-Civil Times: Asking for Forgiveness

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1. What is Civility in the language of the Rabbis? It is called DERECH ERETZ and it's interpreted in many ways during the period between the 2nd and 6th centuries in the Talmud. We'll examine these core texts and define Derech Eretz.

Babylonian Talmud, Sota 44a

The Torah taught us *derekh erez*: A person should first build a house, then plant a vineyard, and afterward marry a woman.

לימדה תורה דרך ארץ שיבנה אדם בית, ויטע כרם, ואחר כך ישא אישה.

Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 4b

The Torah taught us *derekh erez*: A person should not speak to another, unless he calls his name first.

לימדה תורה דרך ארץ, שלא יאמר אדם דבר לחבירו אלא אם כן קורוהו.

Genesis Rabbah, Parashat Vayetze, Parasha 70

The Torah taught us *derekh erez*: Do not stay as a guest with your relatives for more than a month.

Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia 87a

The Torah taught us *derekh erez*: A man must enquire regarding (the wellbeing) of his host's wife. Did not Shmuel teach that one should never enquire regarding a woman? Asking her husband is different.

לימדה תורה דרך ארץ שישאל אדם באכסניא שלו. והאמר שמואל: אין שואלין בשלום אישה כלל! – על ידי בעלה שאני.

Midrash Tanhuma, Parashat Hukat

The Torah taught us *derekh erez*: That a person who travels to a foreign country and has his own provisions should not eat from them but should rather leave them and buy from the local shopkeepers.

Midrash Tanhuma, Parashat Vayishlach

The Torah taught us *derekh erez*: That one must be respectful toward the government (Malkut as those in power; however Melech as another name for God).

לימדה תורה דרך ארץ לחלוק כבוד למלכות.

Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 10a

Those hooligans who were in R. Meir's neighborhood, and were paining him greatly, he would pray for mercy that they would die. His wife Beruriah said to him: What do you think – because Scripture reads: "Let the sinners cease" (Tehillim 104:35)? But does it say those who err should cease?! No, it says sinners/sins! Moreover, go to the end of the verse – "and the wicked shall be no more." Since the sins cease, there will be no wicked people. Rather, pray for mercy on them that they should repent, and then there will be no more wicked people. He prayed for them, and they repented.

Devontae Torriente, "I Don't Owe You My Tolerance: How "Civil Discourse" Functions to Uphold Systems of Oppression," *The Blackprint*, 6/17/17

It's time for us to do away with the idea that we must be respectful or courteous to be entitled to our rights. Politeness isn't a requirement when we are confronting anyone who uses their political and social power to further disenfranchise us. We are now charged with ushering in a new era of normalized discomfort in which people in positions of power know that in this fight for our humanity, we will not concede the raw power of our indignation. In this age of entitlement by those with problematic or seemingly unpopular views, remember this: I don't owe you my tolerance, especially not when my life is at stake.

2. If people *do not behave* in civil ways, how can you / should you forgive them? Now, look to the Code of Jewish law, the Shulchan Aruch for guidelines and then three modern interpretations on asking forgiveness.

**Shulchan Aruch Orah Hayyim 606 Key Jewish Forgiveness Text
(Code of Jewish Law,
Joseph Karo, 1565,
Safed and Venice, Italy)**

Sins; between one person and another are not released by Yom Kippur prayer unless the offender apologizes to the victim (the hurt person). Even if one person hurt another through words alone, the apology is necessary. If one cannot 'make forgiveness' at first, return to the offended person and ask forgiveness twice or even three times, and bring 10 people along (as witnesses). If the hurt person will not forgive the offender even after 3 requests to apologize, the offender can stop asking for forgiveness.

(Rema, Rabbi Moses Isserles, Poland adds: Afterward, the offender can tell 10 people that he tried to ask forgiveness 3 times and it was not accepted.)

If he (the offended one) is one's Rabbi, the offender must go to the Rabbi several times until the Rabbi is satisfied (with the apology).

(Rema, Rabbi Moses Isserles, adds: One should not be especially cruel and withhold forgiveness, unless it benefits the one asking forgiveness.)

If one was a victim of slander, one need not forgive.

Harriet Lerner, Why Won't you Apologize? (Touchstone, Simon and Schuster, NY NY,2017) pp. 114-115.

Apologizing for our part is a good thing to do, when we know what our part is. It's not a real apology to say, "I'm sorry for my part" if we have zero motivation to observe and change our contribution and we think our behavior is justified because we're giving that person what they deserve. even slight acknowledgement and modification in behavior can make a big difference.

Jack Kornfield The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness and Peace (Bantam, 2008), p. 29.

Forgiveness sees wisely. It willingly acknowledges what is unjust, harmful and wrong. It bravely recognizes the sufferings of the past and understands the conditions that brought them about. There is a strength to forgiveness. When we forgive, we can also say, "Never again will I allow these things to happen." We may resolve never again to permit such harm to come to ourselves or another."

Rabbi Harold Kushner, When Bad Things Happen to Good People (Penguin-Random House, 2004) :

Forgiveness represents letting go of the role of victim. What you did was despicable, BUT I REFUSE TO GIVE YOU THE POWER TO DEFINE ME AS A VICTIM.

3. How can YOU ask for forgiveness? How can you forgive--- to lighten your load in life?

Wishing you a Gmar Chatimah Tovah ---May you hold yourself and others with *Chesed/* Kindness- in the Sealing of this Year 5781.

KLF

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