בס״ד

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Parshat Vayera

יט׳ בחשון ה׳תשפ״ז

With All His Heart

This past week, on the night of Reb Shlomo Carlebach's zt”l yahrtzeit, I went to his kever. I saw Jews from every part of the community: ranging from Jews in t-shirts and shorts, to religious Zionists, to chareidim in black hats and long black coats, men and women together. There was crying, singing, and dancing. Everyone celebrating the life of an amazing Tzadik.

Reb Shlomo was known for loving every Jew. He was known for having such radical empathy, that he hugged everyone no matter what and made even a stranger feel like they were the closest of friends. As he said, “I don’t tell people what to do; I want them first to get a taste of Yiddishkeit. And I want them to love it so much that they will want to do it.” He didn’t begin by telling people what they were doing wrong. He spread the love of Judaism.

That love also reached people he disagreed with. Two days after his yahrtzeit is the yahrtzeit of Rav Meir Kahane hy”d, a controversial Rabbi who was assassinated in 1990 by an Egyptian-American terrorist. Rav Kahane, whether everyone agrees or disagrees with his views, was a man who clearly had a deep love for the Jewish people and the state of Israel. Rav Shlomo Katz wrote many years ago in the *Times of Israel* that at a concert a few nights after Rav Kahane’s assassination, Reb Shlomo Carlebach said, “Friends, I knew Reb Meir Kahane since I’m very young. We never learned in the same yeshiva, but our paths always crossed. When I began my humble career singing, he began his career in a different way. And as much as somehow I never agreed with the way he was doing what he was doing, I always knew – he mamesh truly loved Israel with all his heart… Everybody knew that Reb Meir and I don’t really agree on a few things, but somehow we are the best friends.” In the same article, it also says Rav Kahane often said “I don’t hate Arabs. I love Jews.” The two Rabbis even worked together in the 1980s to run the first Noahide conferences for

non-Jews wishing to accept the 7 Noahide laws. Two people who disagreed, but whose paths kept crossing, and were able to be friends despite their disagreements.

This idea of love appears in this week's parsha as well. At the opening of the parsha, Avraham is sitting at the entrance of his tent. He is recovering from his circumcision when Hashem appears to him. Then three strangers walk by, and Avraham asks Hashem to wait and runs to greet them. The Gemara in Masechet Shabbat learns from this that welcoming guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence.

Look at who these guests are. Rashi says Avraham thought they were idolaters who bow to the dust at their feet. He knew they were different from him, yet he welcomed them anyway. Rashi also says that after his guests had eaten and drunk, he would tell them to bless Hashem, the One whose food they had eaten.

But Avraham's love went even further. When Hashem tells him that Sedom will be destroyed, he argues with Hashem about the number of righteous people in the city: fifty, then forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, and finally ten. He never says Sedom is good. He looks for the good in them, and fights for it. In the end there weren't ten, but he tried.

If Avraham, at a time when almost no one else believed in one G-d, was able to welcome those whom he suspected of idolatry, and even argued with Hashem for Sedom, how much more should we welcome a fellow Jew, even one we disagree with. That's what I saw at Reb Shlomo's kever, and what he did with so many others. Avraham and Reb Shlomo both teach that you reach people by loving them first.

As Reb Shlomo once said, "Friday night, when I go to the Holy Wall, I see the non-religious. They want so much for something to happen to them. They want so much for someone to say 'Gut Shabbos' to them." So from now on, say Shabbat Shalom to a Jew you wouldn't usually, or even invite someone for a meal, and just be kind and look for the best in them.

Shabbat Shalom!

P.S. Thank you to my Rav, Rav Shlomo Chayen, for reviewing the dvar this week before I sent it out.