



A RETURN TO INNOCENCE

THE CHALLENGE OF CLOSENESS, WITH G-D AND MAN BY LEONARD CARR

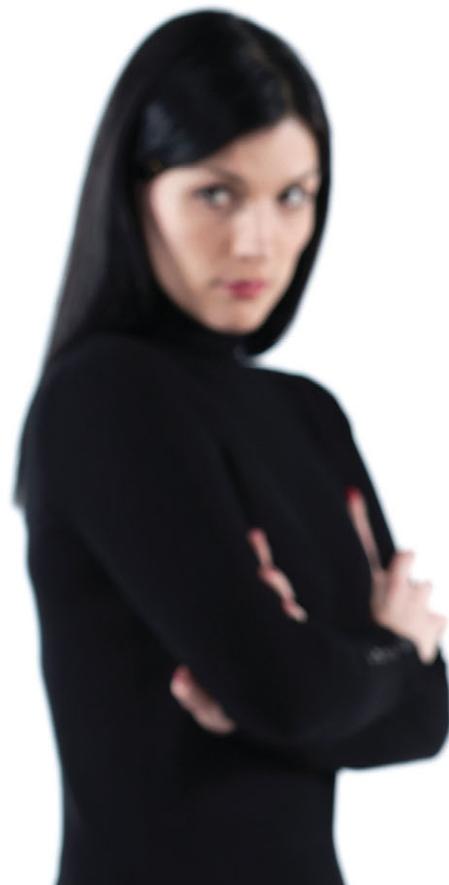
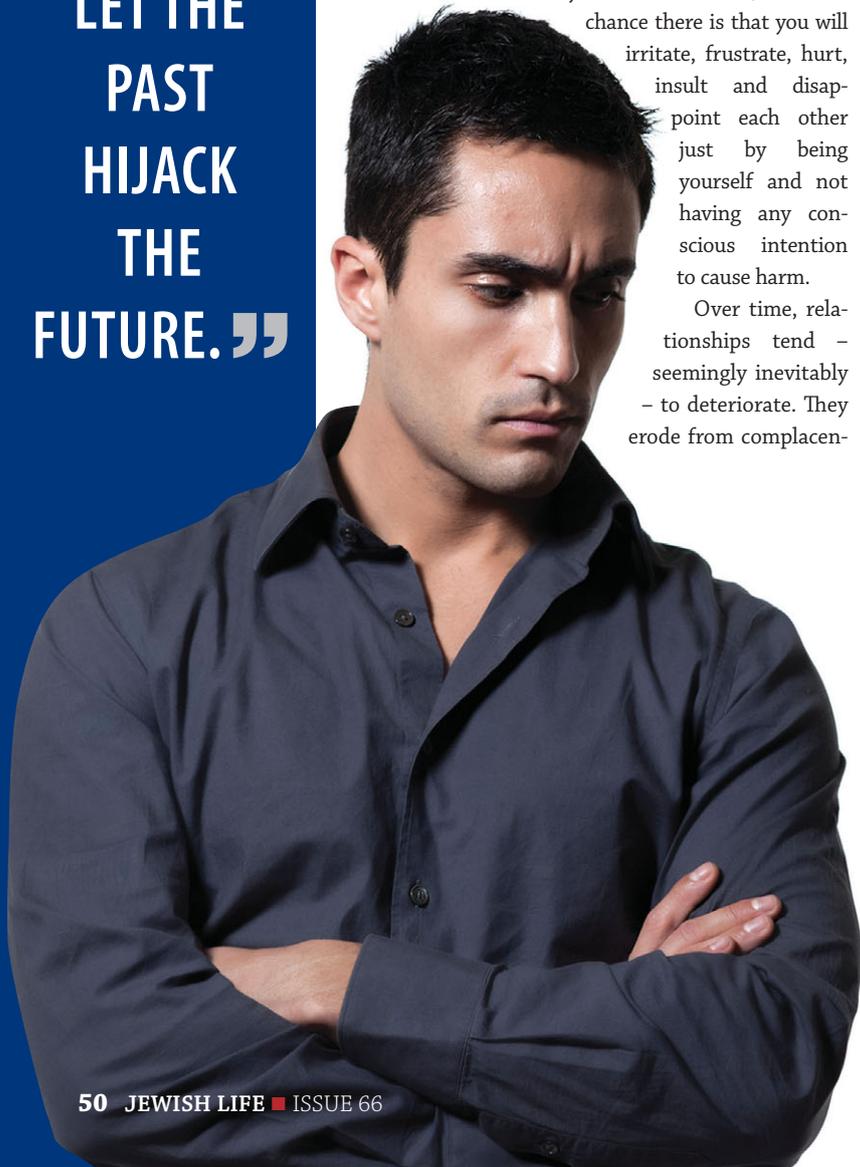
“NEVER LET THE PAST HIJACK THE FUTURE.”

EVERY PERSON, WHETHER AWARE OF IT OR NOT, seeks to have meaningful and close relationships with the people who are important to them. Oftentimes, the harder you try to achieve closeness, the more elusive it seems. The closer you are to someone, the more chance there is that you will irritate, frustrate, hurt, insult and disappoint each other just by being yourself and not having any conscious intention to cause harm.

Over time, relationships tend – seemingly inevitably – to deteriorate. They erode from complac-

cy, neglect, fatigue, disillusionment, boredom and hurt that is collected over time. Sometimes they go into crisis because of big mistakes or assaults made on the integrity of the relationship. That is why the Torah tells us that peace and harmony need to be actively pursued. Actively pursuing peace means constantly looking for fresh and novel opportunities to strengthen and preserve peace. It also means being very determined, tenacious and proactive in restoring peace when it is lost or under threat.

The closeness that you can get to another is where your will and the will of the other are in perfect alignment. This perfection of relationship is embodied in the



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concept of Shalom. Shalom describes a state of harmony that arises out of creating wholeness and oneness by bringing two opposites together in perfect counterpoint.

This means your values, aspirations, ideals and goals are in sync with each other. It means sacrificing your selfish wants and expectations in service of the greater good of the relationship. Perfection in closeness means having an intellectual and emotional understanding of the other and of what being truly devoted to the relationship would entail on a practical level. The same applies to the concept of closeness to Hashem, which we try to restore in the weeks through Elul, Rosh Hashanah and leading up to Yom Kippur.

RETURNING TO INNOCENCE

Close relationships in whatever context they occur start in a state of innocence. The term innocence is used to describe the state of relationship when you thought it was perfect, before you became aware of any lacking or flaws in the relationship. In-

nocence is based on trust and hope and the willingness to give the benefit of the doubt and overlook potential sources of discomfort, disappointment or dislike.

When you embark on a relationship journey with someone, your hope is that this state of perfection and purity will last forever. In reality, close relationships are tension-filled complex webs of love and hate, attraction and disgust, attraction and envy, longing and fear, sacrifice and betrayal. People are different and cannot possibly be everything to each other all the time, because your needs, feelings, values and responses inevitably will clash much of the time, if not most of the time. Sometimes those differences manifest in ways that cause deep hurt and tear at the very fabric of the relationship. The small tears cause erosion over time. Sometimes there is a betrayal that rips the fabric so dramatically that it seems irreparable. All of these issues create distance in the relationship, based on mistrust and resentment.

Every insult to the relationship, whether

deliberate or unintentional, creates distance and weakens the bond between you and the other person. Even if the other party does not know you have wronged them, you feel the shame, embarrassment, guilt and consequent lack of worthiness to be allowed back into the closeness. When you cause harm to another, therefore, you inevitably cause damage to yourself.

When hurt and other painful emotions have you in their icy grip, it is difficult to pull yourself out of your outrage, righteous indignation, self-pity and fear. It takes the courage of a child whose need to trust, love and be loved outweighs and overrides his/her pride or fear of pain. Children do not collect evidence and refer back to complex narratives over time that erode the hope that what they long for is entirely possible.

Restoring this state of innocence demands courage, integrity, humility and deep abiding commitment to the larger project or higher purpose that transcends the needs and wants of the two individuals in the relationship. It may mean crawling

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weak and wounded out of the ashes of an explosion or out of the engulfing dark, choking pain of betrayal, or the wounds from years of barbs, arrows and slaps in the face that weaken and erode the spirit. To get back to innocence means being willing to muster up all your inner resources to work through the issues with the other person, and when that is done, commit to waking up to a fresh new start and a new beginning. This means taking hold of a second chance to create a life that more closely represents your goals, ideas and highest aspirations. This would mean creating a life built on deeper understanding and compassion for yourself and others.

The deepest and most enduring bonds can be built on hurt that has been transmuted into love through forgiveness, generosity of spirit, and the willingness to see each other as you most deeply wish to be seen, and not as the contention showed you to be.

The process of restoring innocence is similar to the process of teshuva, prescribed by the Rambam, where we restore the intimacy, wholeness and perfect service in our relationship with Hashem. The process starts with the full disclosure and explicit acknowledgment of wrongdoing caused in the past, followed by the experience of profound regret and remorse in the present for having caused the damage to the relationship, ended off with commitment to change in order to honour and protect the relationship in the future.

The narrative to follow this process in a human relationship could look something like this:

I regret what has happened as well as my part in what has transpired. I did not want this to happen to me, to you or to us.

I recognise the consequences this event or dynamic has had for me, for you and for us. I recognise it both on the level of intellectual understanding and on an emotional level in that I empathise with your feelings, my own feelings and the emotional impact on the relationship.

I take full ownership and responsibility unequivocally and unconditionally for my participation in what transpired without defence, excuse, justification or diversion of responsibility.



“ THE PROCESS STARTS WITH THE FULL DISCLOSURE AND EXPLICIT ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF WRONGDOING CAUSED IN THE PAST, FOLLOWED BY THE EXPERIENCE OF PROFOUND REGRET AND REMORSE IN THE PRESENT FOR HAVING CAUSED THE DAMAGE TO THE RELATIONSHIP, ENDED OFF WITH COMMITMENT TO CHANGE IN ORDER TO HONOUR AND PROTECT THE RELATIONSHIP IN THE FUTURE.”

I regret deeply with all my heart any envy, resentment, pride, arrogance, obstinacy, vainglory, insensitivity, complacency, ignorance, lack of empathy and compassion in me that informed partially or completely my behaviour towards you.

I commit to deeply listening to your needs and feelings until I fully understand them and appreciate what you need to feel, hear and see in order to fully believe that I truly wish to make amends.

I will use that knowledge to move to a place within myself that will give you the reassurance and confidence that I will, to the best of my ability, become the person that I need to be for you to feel safe enough to restore the innocence in the relationship.

I commit to let go of and not re- evoke or add to my own epistle of past hurts and disappointments. I commit to going forward with a new start and to forgiving and forgetting.

Any lapses in our commitment should be dealt with through respectful reminders in a supportive way and not through accusations, recriminations and punishments or pulling out the old charge sheets of past mistakes.

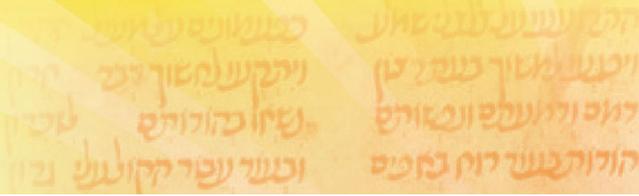
I invite you to join me in creating a memorable reference point to remind us of our commitment to creating a truly harmonious relationship. This could be something like releasing balloons or burning letters that both symbolise releasing the past and embracing a new future.

I would like you to help me to put mutually decided safeguards in place and support each other to make sure we never have to go through this process again.

OBSTACLES TO RESTORING CLOSENESS

Oftentimes, fixing a relationship seems too scary or simply not worth the effort. You become accustomed to the space where things are not bad enough to require big changes, but never good enough to be deeply fulfilling. Your state of mediocrity might seem stale but safe. Alternatively, you may be harbouring resentment that convinces you that if you keep swallowing poison, the person that you are upset with will die. Resentment seems safe because it protects you from hurt. The protection, however, is that of a prison wall that creates a barrier preventing you from fully experiencing the richness of life. Often, resentment is simply an alibi for not taking responsibility for creating a positive future. Your behaviour cannot be caused by the past, because all decisions you make are made with reference to the future.

The most dangerous belief you can harbour is that you do not have the power, ability or necessary life conditions to make



a difference and to create the relationships that you most prefer. Related to this belief is the idea that something or someone else would need to change for you to enjoy the quality of relationships you most desire.

Another obstacle to real forgiveness is that to admit you have gone wrong might mean acknowledging you have been destructive or been doing wrong for a long time, and have in the process lost a lot of time, damaged your life or relationships and destroyed potential. Forgiveness often entails forgiving yourself first for your own mistakes that stem from misunderstanding, blindness, laziness, stubbornness, conceit, ignorance, poor judgment, overreactions, hyper-sensitivity and other weaknesses of being human. In essence, you need to forgive yourself, others and life itself for not living up to your expectations or ideals, or for not turning out the way you would have preferred. In essence, it is about being able to accept your imperfection and human frailty and having

the humility to view and accept yourself as a very ordinary person. This means not judging and not comparing yourself to an infallible angel or a god.

What is important is to never let the past hijack the future. The starting point in liberating yourself from this destructive thinking is to refocus on what you value, appreciate and can affirm in yourself and others. Take an inventory on what you and your loved one have contributed to each other's lives and created together.

Restore the memories of when, as two people in a relationship, you were both at your best and your relationship seemed like a wellspring of promise, possibility and hope for the future. This focus creates a protective fence around your connection that shields it from the forces of selfish desires and expectations that stem from a sense of scarcity, deprivation and lack.

When you heal your relationships, you become more whole in the process. When you become more whole, you in turn take that wholeness into your relationships and

they start to embody the ideal of Shalom as a result. The more you are able to overcome the inner obstacles to creating Shalom, like an overblown sense of your own importance and entitlement, the more you will grow in wisdom and maturity. The more you work through and process in a relationship in the constructive manner described, the richer, deeper and stronger you will become and the more able you will be to create true harmony and peace in your world. **LL**



Leonard Carr is a clinical psychologist who consults in private practice, to government, local and international business. He has developed an appreciative perspective of personality. Leonard runs growth courses and workshops based on his model and its applications to the areas of leadership, organisational functioning, personal growth and interpersonal relationships.

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