

### *Would You Rather Be Right or Happy?*

I have had the good fortune, my entire life, to avoid physical fighting. I've never been "beat up" as a child, teen or adult. I guess I always found a way to talk my way out of things. Recently, I had the opportunity to mediate a situation that nearly became violent. It served as a lasting lesson for me, and hopefully, the others involved.

Someone I knew had a dispute with someone whom I had never met. A roommate situation was terminating, with one party moving out of a rented house at the end of a month. The one moving out needed to get the final possessions out of the house. The landlord was concerned there might be a "scene," and asked me to be present to make sure things happened peacefully.

By the time I arrived, the hope of a quick, peaceful exchange was gone. The one who moved out was pointing fingers and accusing the other of assault. The one who was staying claimed the home had been abandoned, and now nobody else had rights to come on to his property. They argued loudly about who had paid what, which obligations had been met and which had not. Both claimed that the other had agreed to things and not lived up to the agreements. Both claimed they knew their case would prevail if it was brought to law enforcement and legal authorities. Each heard what the other was saying, but neither was listening to the other's point of view. Without anyone listening to the other, the idea of finding the "truth" seemed hopeless; the whole situation was complicated, but further complicated by the emotions.

In hindsight, the difficulty of this situation was more than the money involved or the promises either broken or misunderstood. It was about a change in expectations, a loss of hope. When they first agreed to share the home, expenses and chores, they were hopeful that it would be a good situation for all. They probably thought they would enjoy the experience, enjoy each other's company and become friends. Something, or a series of things, must have occurred that eroded the friendship. When they realized that it would no longer work out to share a home, there was a feeling of loss. Did it matter whose "fault" it was? Both parties had to alter their expectations. When our expectations are forced to change, it hurts no matter whose fault it is.

I wasn't interested in who was right and who was wrong. As far as I was concerned, they were both wrong. All I wanted, was a peaceful resolution. I wanted the situation to end without violence, without extending the issue into the uncertainty of pursuing the legal system. The rented truck was there, now; nobody really wanted to stretch out the situation to force one party to be without his possessions and the other to have a house filled with items that were not his.

In the end, a resolution would involve money. One party gave the other a greater amount than he thought was accurate. The other accepted less than he thought he was entitled. Despite both feeling wronged, each apologized to the other, accepting partial responsibility for the deteriorating situation and the volatility of the argument. Neither accepted full responsibility for anything, but when each saw the other willing to give in on a small issue, the encounter became more of a conversation with people listening to each other. Believe it or not, it ended with hugs.

Sometimes, there is more than one possible "right." Certain situations will never result in agreement when enough stubbornness will prevent any solution. When we are willing to let go of the need to be 100% right, we can give up a little vindication for a lot of peace. It reminds me about a wedding I officiated, in which the father of the bride gave marriage advice to his new son-in-law. "When you're wrong, admit it," said the man who had recently celebrated his fortieth wedding anniversary. "And when you're right, shut up."

With any disagreement, it's important to ask the right question: "What's *really* important?" So much trouble can be averted when we're willing to focus on the important aspects of our relationships rather than deciding who is right.

L'shalom,  
*Rabbi Dan Gordon*

To see previous monthly messages from Rabbi Dan Gordon, visit  
<http://temple-beth-torah.org/our-rabbi/rabbis-monthly-message-archives/>