

Shabbos Hagadol

When the Righteous Will Talk Together

In the special *Haftorah* for *Shabbat Hagadol*, the prophet Malachi has the people complaining against G-d and saying: "It is useless to serve G-d. What have we gained by keeping His charge and walking in abject awe of the Lord of Hosts?" (*Malachi 3:14.*) The people had lost confidence in the value of righteousness. They felt that being good and moral does not accomplish anything. Yet the Prophet continues to say: "In this vein have those who revere the Lord been talking to one another. The Lord has heard and noted it, and a scroll of remembrance has been written at His behest concerning those who revere the Lord and esteem His name. And on the day that I am preparing, said the Lord of Hosts, they shall be My treasured possession..." (*Id, 3:16-17.*) Why the sudden change of attitude? Why should a book of remembrance be written for those that revere the Lord? How did the people regain a sense of purpose and enthusiasm?

The answer may lie in the fact that those who revere the Lord were speaking to each other. Relationships between supposedly righteous people are constantly marred by the assumption that bad ideas are the products of bad people. If I disagree with somebody's outlook, I personalize our difference and consider the other as inherently evil. All of a sudden he or she is immoral, his or her parents despicable, and everyone with the same background untrustworthy. In fact, it is normal for well-meaning individuals to differ. Just as no two human fingerprints are the same and the O. J. Simpson trial has taught us that genetic makeup varies from person to person, so, too, do four eyes behold different scenarios and two minds weigh each situation dissimilarly. Indeed, G-d's omnipotence and greatness, said the rabbis, are revealed by the unique mold in which each one of the billions of human beings that inhabit this earth is cast.

That is the precise point that Malachi is making. The awesome day of the Lord will come when the righteous will stop thinking in terms of black and white. Despite the normal differences between generations, parents will reconcile with children and children with parents. The righteous, at least, will be able to disagree without being disagreeable.

Though the Prophet spoke centuries ago, how little has the world

changed since. Turn on the radio, look at the TV, pick up the daily newspaper, and you will immediately note the name-calling, the bad manners, the demonization of the other. Even Jews have begun to hate one another. The fact that one doubts that the Middle East peace process can succeed doesn't mean that Rabin is a traitor. Only if all who consider themselves righteous will talk to one another will G-d's work get done and G-d's spirit be visible on earth.