

## The 5<sup>th</sup> Postulate; Lines to the Divine

Shabbat Shalom.

This past summer I had the opportunity to spend two weeks in Argentina with a group of BBYO Members from around the world. As our group of Americans, Argentines, Columbians, and a Frank spend our time exploring the sights of Buenos Aires, boating through waterfalls at Iguazú, and eating ludicrous amounts of steak, we formed a tight bond held together, even after the trip's conclusion, by shared experiences, culture, and religion; by Judaism.

On the last day we spend together, we gathered in a small, cramped apartment, sat in a circle, and began to throw a spool of twine between us. As it wound its way around us, forming a web of memories, we spoke; about our time together, about what we will remember, about the family sitting in that room and how we had changed because of it. We had entered as strangers into a strange land and exited as friends and family.

This element of the trip stands far beyond the rest, the bonds we created formed the structure upon which everything else stood, and as I reflect back, it is them that I remember before the waterfalls and the Dulce de Leche. I remember the people and the memories that we created together.

The second day we spend in Buenos Aires happened to be the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing of AMIA, la Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (the Israeli-Argentine Mutual Association), and while the Americans on the trip, myself included, had never heard of this attack, as we listened to the stories of our friends and counselors we sat in silence, listening, caring, and remembering those who we had never met or even heard of before that day.

There is a famous Talmudic teaching: “*Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Bazeh*, the entirety of the people Israel is responsible for one another.” Not only does this refer to our obligations that the

basic necessities of our people are met, that those in need of food and resources receive them, but also that we shall stand with our fellow Jews, be it to keep them from sinning, or to remember those that they have lost. There is a reason that *Kadesh* is said in the presence of a minyan, no one should need to suffer alone, we must all bear the burden together. On that day, that time in a guarded basement blocks from where 90 innocent people, Jews and Gentiles alike, were slaughtered for no reason other than senseless hatred, we were that minyan, those who light their torches so that no one walks alone.

The teaching of “*Kol Israel Arevim Zeh Baze*h” highlights two things: one not only are Jews in both Buenos Aires and Wilmette related, but also that it is our jobs to ensure that a community of support exists between the two... &, how can we support our global community without relationships of friendship and love tying us together, it is our responsibility to support Jews everywhere, but perhaps more importantly to care for them, to invest time and energy into building relationships that last lifetimes. It is through the relationships we form with one another that a true community is built, not through donations of food and money, or prayers giving strength and support, but through action, communication, and understanding. Listening to their stories rather than simply hearing them told. Without putting in the effort needed to build the web of trust and love on which a community is built we cannot fulfill this commandment, nor create the bonds needed to ensure that our people continue to pass Torah on for generations to come.

While ensuring the future of our people and creating these global bonds may be reason enough to seek deeper relationships with others, our tradition also tells us that it is through human relationships that we become holy. The Talmudic line “It is on three things on which the World stands: Torah, Worship, and Deeds of Lovingkindness,” is a prime example as it places

good deeds and relationships with others on the same level as Torah and Worship. The famous story of Hillel's converting of a gentile is another example, which states: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation of this—go and study it!" While I love this message, that all that is needed to be holy is to be kind to others, I don't entirely agree with that conclusion. It certainly may be true on a daily level, but I feel that as you zoom out it becomes but one possible, and not fully descriptive, law.

I view this commandment as one of the five postulates of Judaism, just as Euclid wrote out the five postulates to geometry. In this "geometry of holiness", the postulates proposed by Moses are as follows: 1) I am the Lord your God. 2) You shall not have other gods before me. 3) Keep holy the Sabbath day. 4) You shall not oppress a stranger, as you know the heart of the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Mitzraim. And 5) What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. While these have served us well for generations, I believe that they do not reach the heart of the matter. They certainly are a set of laws to holiness, but not the only one. Just as always, the truth resists simplicity. To begin my exploration of my version of Holy Postulates, I will start with the fifth Mosaic Postulate, the one denoting human connection. Just as Euclid's Parallel Postulate was doubted, and ultimately shown to be but one of infinite possibilities. I believe, this postulate of connection may show you how to be a good person, holy on the micro level, but not how to reach a purer holiness on the macro level. Just as Euclidean Geometry states that two lines which are parallel will never intersect, if you see the world for globe it truly is, these seemingly separate lines will inevitably meet at the poles. The lines are parallel on the plane, but not the sphere; and I believe the same is true of relationships. Being kind to others is part of a relationships, it establishes parallelism, but it is through a deeper connection to others that holiness through human connection is reached. You cannot merely treat

others with kindness, you must truly connect with them, tilting the view of your plane, revealing the sphere that truly exists. However much as Euclid told Ptolemy that there is no “Royal Road to Geometry,” let us acknowledge that there is no “Royal Road to Holiness,” relationships are hard to build and maintain, but in the words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Road to the Sacred, inevitably leads through the Secular.” To achieve this greater connection to others, we must connect to others not through extraordinary feats, but through the mundane, and the entirely unremarkable acts of the everyday.

Before I continue, let me define the “lines of holiness” which comprise the heart of this geometry using words from the great philosopher and theologian Martin Buber who wrote: “When I confront a human being as my You and speak the basic word I-You to him, then he is no thing among things nor does he consist of things. He is no longer He or She... Neighborless and seamless, he is You and fills the firmament... Extended, the lines of all relationships intersect in the eternal You... Every single You is a glimpse of that. Through every single You the basic word addresses the eternal You.”

It is connections between us and others that are the lines to the divine, these lines run through everything and everyone, binding us together; however, following Mosaic Law, you reach the relationship postulate, which creates parallels, the lines related, but no more, they will never intersect. It is only by acknowledging deeper connections, the connections created by I-You relationships, that you can quantify the sphere on which the poles mark the intersections of all lines, all human connections, the holiest of holies.

Before I continue I would like to introduce one more mathematical curiosity present in our geometry, the antipode. An antipode is the point opposite to you, on any sphere there are an infinite number of them, the most obvious being the north and south poles. Since the map to

holiness that I am laying out is a sphere, antipodes are an inevitability. On this map you lie in the center, and opposite you, as far away as possible, yet simultaneously immensely close, lays your antipode, God. Not the almighty, transcendent creator of all, but an intimate, immanent aspect of the demiurge that exists in each and every one of us, an aspect accessible only by us, and specific to us. By losing ourselves in others, we become the opposite of us, merge with the lines that our relationships form, and as all lines are circles, contact our antipodes, and see the world through the wonder of the divine. We not only become one with others, but one with God, we become our opposites, and see the glory of creation as it truly is, not through human eyes, even if for a fleeting minute, through the lenses of its creator. The more intimate a relationship becomes the more we lose ourselves in others becoming what we are not, our antipodes; as we reach for our antipodes the holier we become, and as we become holier we reach God. Ergo, it is our relationships with others that we form the path to God

There is a great Hassidic teaching which echoes, and likely inspired, what Buber wrote, it states that as two people become close, they lose themselves in the other, they become more than simply two yuds, rather they form the ineffable name of God. Everything in existence is an aspect of the demiurge, and much like the lines of a globe, which at first glance may seem parallel, if we zoom out far enough everything circles back to God. Every action we take, everything that we experience, everything we think, every relationship that we form always leads us back to the realm of the divine. As Rabbi Heschel wrote: “The essential message of Judaism is that in doing the finite we may perceive the infinite.” Doing finite deeds of practicing compassion and lovingkindness towards others, allows us to enter into the infinite circle of the divine... And with that beautiful segue, let me circle back to the beginning of our story.

On the last day we spend together in Buenos Aires, we gathered in a small, cramped apartment, sat in a circle, and began to throw a spool of twine between us. As it wound its way around us, forming a web of memories, we spoke; about our time together, about what we will remember, about the family sitting in that room and how we had changed because of it. And as the spool spun its way around us, connecting us, binding us together, each one of us wrapped the string around our arms seven times, before splitting it into three branches at the palm, wrapping it to form an upside-down L along the fingers, and adding an apostrophe at the end. *Shin, Dalet, Yud, Shaddai*, the first name that our Patriarchs gave the being that created their universe and was rendered visible by the bonds they formed in their exodus from Ur and its pagan beliefs. From the relationships on that trip, both the trip I took in Buenos Aires and the trip our forefathers made time and time again from oppression, we were united beneath the same God. My Argentine family was no longer connected only by the religion that we shared before meeting, nor the modern life that we all live, but bound together as people by our memories, experiences, and a single yellow string, a string which I wear to this day.

We had gone from being strangers in a strange land to being family, from barely appearing on the furthest outskirts of our planes, to literally circling each other's wrists each and every day, spelling out the divine name

As we take time during this season to reflect on our lives this past year, and look forward to the next, I bid that you remember that it is through becoming a better husband, wife, brother, sister, son, daughter, and friend that we become holy. The more that we walk as one, rather than as two separate "yuds" the more our lines will curve, and the more we will merge with the antipodal divine.

*Gemar chatimah tovah and Shabbat Shalom.*