

Kinder Torah

Parashas Emor

Listen Carefully

"Abbas, do you have a minute?"
"Sure, Ruchie. What's doing?"
"I have a difficult situation with one of my classmates that I need to talk about."
"Go ahead, Ruchie."

Ruchie proceeds to pour out her heart to her father about the tsaar (aggravation) that she is having. She talks on and on for almost half an hour. All the time, her father listens patiently, nodding his head in sympathy to her situation.

"Ruchie, I hear what you are saying, and I understand your problem. I have been in similar situations, and I know how badly you feel. I think that I can help you."

"Abba, you have already helped me. You listened to me. I appreciate you so much. You are so patient. You listen so well. I can really open up to you."

"I appreciate the appreciation, Ruchie. Listening well, like all good middos (character traits), is a lifelong job. I have been working on it."

"I would like to join you, Abba. Where do I start?"

"The Torah brings out a very important point in last week's parasha, Ruchie, when it commands us to *mochiach* (reprove) our fellow Jews (Vayikra 19:17). If we see a person doing something wrong, we should care enough about him to point out his mistake. This will help him to correct it."

"That is so beautifully put, Abba. We must care about him in order to reprove him."

"Yes, Ruchie. Criticism can be a mitzvah or an aveyra. If it comes from sincere concern - like a parent for a child - it is a mitzvah of *tochacha*. If a person criticizes someone just to put him down, it is a terrible aveyra."

"I see, Abba."

"Now, Ruchie, imagine that you are the person who is receiving the sincere *tochacha*. How do you take it?"

"It is not so easy for me to hear about my faults, Abba."

"That is true, Ruchie. However, the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (6:6) gives encouragement. The Mishna lists forty-eight ways in which the Torah is acquired. Number 32 is 'loving criticism.' One who wants to succeed in learning Torah must be prepared to accept the fact that he makes mistakes in his learning. He must be willing to listen to his Rebbe or chavrusa who corrects those mistakes. Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch broadens this concept to include constructive criticism about our middos. The Sefer, 'U'sfartem Lachem' goes even farther. One should look for a *mochiach*. Seek out someone who cares about you and will correctly point out your faults. This will keep you constantly on the path of Torah."

"I am ready, Abba."

"Wonderful, Ruchie. This Monday is the 32nd day of the Omer. Those who work on one of the 48 ways each day of the Sefiras HaOmer will work on 'loving criticism' this Monday. Let us use this as a springboard. We will begin to work on listening carefully to people, especially those who love us enough to *mochiach* us. We will thank them for their concern, take it to heart, and work

upon those faults that need correction. We improve our middos, and love those people who have helped us by criticizing us."

"Abba, that is wonderful! I am ready."

"May we both succeed together."

"Amen."

Kinderlach . . .

Did your Rebbe point out a mistake in your learning today? Great! Did your teacher find something in your school uniform that needed attention? Thank her! Did your good friend tell you that you once hurt her feelings? Now you have the opportunity to apologize and do teshuva. Did your Imma tell you to spend more time on homework? Fantastic! She is helping you to get better grades. Did your Abba tell you to take more time to concentrate when making your berachos? Wonderful! He is helping you improve your mitzvos. You will get much more schar (reward) in Olam Habba. Kinderlach, love criticism! Thank those who help you by correcting you! Listen carefully to their words. Become a better person.



The Real Fire

"Avi, are you coming with us to the Lag B'Omer bonfire?"

"I hope to, Chaim. Right now I am learning Torah."

"What a tsaddik! Everyone is out dancing around the bonfire and you are learning Torah. *Kol ha'kovod* (What an honorable deed)! What are you learning?"

"A Mishna that was taught by Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai. I thought that it would be appropriate to learn it on Lag B'Omer, his yahrtzeit. The *zechus* (merit) would bring an elevation to his neshama. Do you want to learn it with me, Chaim?"

"Well, I really wanted to go to the bonfire."

"There is plenty of time for that. Right now, we can help and honor Rebbe Shimon by learning his Torah."

"Okay, you convinced me Avi."

"Pirkei Avos chapter 6, Mishna 8. 'Beauty, strength, riches, honor, wisdom, old age, a white head, and children are beautiful for tsaddikim, and attractive for the world.'"

"How do we understand that, Avi?"

"The Medrash Shmuel explains that these are all gifts from Hashem. They can be used for good purposes - to perform mitzvos - or for selfish reasons - to gratify one's desires. Rebbe Shimon instructs us to use all the gifts that Hashem gave us for the good."

"How?"

"The Medrash Shmuel elaborates. Beauty can bring a person to righteousness, as it did with Yosef HaTsaddik. He was very attrac-

tive. He had a strong yetzer hara to use his good looks for the wrong purposes. He conquered his yetzer and became Yosef HaTsaddik."

"That is so relevant to our days. There is a big yetzer hara to wear the wrong kind of clothes. They attract attention, instead of indicating the true beauty of a Jew - the neshama. We have to overcome that yetzer hara and become tsaddikim and tsidkanios."

"Excellent! Now, the next point of the Mishna. Strength can be used for the good - to learn Torah (which needs a lot of stamina) or for the bad - to lord over people. Similarly, wealth can be used for *tsedaka* and *chesed*. It can give the person the time to learn Torah without interruption. Unfortunately, money used improperly to fulfill one's desires can drag a person into all sorts of nonsense and sins, causing him to lose this world and the next."

"How true."

"Honor is good for tsaddikim. Their wise words will be heard because they are held in esteem. They will not become arrogant from the honor. However, an evil person will take the admiration to heart, and do as he pleases, for there is no one to challenge him and his pride. Similarly, wisdom can be learned in order to know and teach the correct path to serve The Creator. Or it can be used to subvert the truth *chas v'shalom* (Heaven forbid.)"

"Fascinating."

"Old age and a white head are both the 'crowns' of tsaddikim. They are the culmination of a life of righteousness, and bring honor to the tsaddik and Hashem. However, one who runs after his desires his entire life will continue into his old age. Fools will honor him for his 'achievements' in this area. Lastly, children are a person's legacy in this world. His righteous descendants earn him eternal reward. However, a wicked person uses his children to carry out his evil plans."

"That is wonderful. You have given me a completely new outlook on Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai and his teachings. Let's now go to the bonfire."

Avi and Chaim reach the bonfire. The heat is intense. The boys don't seem to mind. Everyone is dancing around and singing about Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai. Avi and Chaim sing and with intense happiness. They have been ignited with the "light" of Rebbe Shimon's teachings.

Kinderlach . . .

Lag B'Omer is much more than dancing around the bonfire. It is even more than traveling to Rebbe Shimon's kever in Meron. It is appreciating who Rebbe Shimon was. The Gemora is full of his teachings. Learn them this Lag B'Omer. Bask in the light of Rebbe Shimon's Torah. That is the real fire of Lag B'Omer.

Parasha Questions:

- How did the Kohen wave the Omer offering? (Rashi 23:11)
- What is the reason for adding a month to make a leap year? (Rashi 23:39)