

Tell a story
Parshah Devarim
by Julie Zhuk on 2022-08-06

Comments

We know from reading the history of the Jewish people they made many transgressions in their time. Moses saw these transgressions and inside his heart hurt each time. He didn't say anything to the people every time they made a mistake whether they knew it was a bad thing to do or they didn't. He stayed silent most of the time, it wasn't until he was about to die that he gave his few cents to the Jewish people speaking to them about their poor behavior. The main reason he didn't constantly rebuke the Jewish people was, he didn't want to come off as an annoying leader. His other reason for not rebuking them consistently was, he didn't want them to feel embarrassed every time they would see him. From reading this parsha one will learn the best way to give criticism to someone else.

Criticism should be given in some kind of a light way because otherwise the person it's aimed for will turn away before even hearing it. One example the parsha uses was, when the Jews sinned by worshipping the golden calf. Moses did give some feedback to the Jewish people, but he didn't call them "lousy idolaters". He didn't call them out on seeing G-d at Mt Sinai and then all of a sudden worshipping this golden calf. Moses was very careful when criticizing the Jewish people. He did it as if he was walking on some kind of a thin line. He used two words in Hebrew that were, *di zahav*. Those two words translate to, "it is enough". The words "it is" refer to the Hebrew word "*dayeinu*" The word "*zahav*" means gold. Moses was reprimanding the Jewish people, but at the same time he was defending them as well.

The parsha asks us why the Jewish people transgressed in the first place with this golden calf? The parsha gives us the answer that the Jewish people had an abundance of gold. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, once stated that the criticism coming from Moses was taken into consideration by the Jewish people. They took it well and the reason for this was, they knew Moses was their greatest defender. They could mess up a million times, but in the end Moses would plea before G-d about why the Jewish people should be forgiven. We see that Moses loved the Jewish people like G-d loved them. Anytime the Jewish people got themselves in trouble, whether by accident or knowingly, Moses was always there to defend them. The Jewish people knew Moses loved them, and the best part was they trusted him.

When criticizing the Jewish people or even if it was just a single person, Moses was careful how to talk to them about what wrong thing they did. He never wanted anyone to feel humiliated for anything. In a Talmudic passage there is a Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah. He once asked if there was anyone in his generation who knew the right way to reprimand someone? We learn from the parsha that it's really easy to speak out to another person and call them out on whatever they did wrong. It doesn't always help the other person, who is the one you are trying to give the message to.

There are people who can critique others, it comes natural to them. When people are critical of someone else, it's crucial to have a sense of deep wisdom, being sensitive of the person you are criticizing at the time, having respect for the other person, and being considerate of them. When criticizing someone, if they feel you don't have respect for them or are not being

considerate of them or you are insensitive of their feelings, the person doing the criticizing will have a problem.

In the same section of the Talmud, Rabbi Tarfon is quoted. This rabbi brings up the question of whether there is any person in his generation who knew how to accept the criticism that was being given to them? The one receiving all of this criticism won't listen to the words one is trying to express. The one giving it is trying to help the other one, but if it's not done out of love it won't work. The parsha teaches us to be careful because the worst thing that could happen is the one receiving the criticism could feel embarrassed.

If anyone feels humiliated by hearing out the criticism, they won't listen to whatever advice was being given to them. Instead they will go back to their old ways and then there won't have been a point for any of the criticism in the first place. The criticism must be constructive, we can't allow it to become a personal attack or even a vendetta. If that happens then it will fan the fires of dissension. No one should ever reprimand anyone in a public setting and it has to be done in a gentle way.

The Torah is pushing for stopping inappropriate behavior in a gentle manner for a reason. If the person transgressing or needing to be reprimanded does not feel respected, it will cause the person giving the criticism to sin just by embarrassing the person who they are criticizing. The most important lesson we learn from the parsha this week is, we need to be wise when giving criticism to someone else. We also need to be sensitive and think of how the other person is taking the words of rebuke in. The person it's being given to is the one who will need to swallow whatever advice they are being given.

At the same time the person that is getting this criticism needs to be intelligent and humble when hearing out the advice being given to them. Moses was always constructive, gentle, subtle, and sensitive when he approached the Jewish people as a group or even individual people. The previous Rebbe used to say in the name of his father who had the name of Rebbe Rashav: "To cherish criticism, because it would raise you up to new heights' ". When King Solomon was alive he used to say, "Do not chastise a fool, lest he hates you. Chastise a wise man and he will love you."

In the parsha itself, Moses goes over the events and laws that pertained to the Jewish people. These covered the forty years they spent in the desert as they traveled from Egypt, Sinai, and finally making it to the Promised Land. This parsha is when he called the Jews out on whatever faults they had. Some of the events Moses recounted were the refusal of the nations of Moab and Ammon to allow the Jewish people to pass through their countries. There were wars against the Emorite kings named Sichon and Og. There was the settlement of their lands by the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and part of the tribe of Menasseh.

Moses gave a message to his successor before he died. That person was Joshua and he would take the people into the land and lead them into battles to eventually win over the land of Israel. Moses' last words to the Jewish people were to not fear the enemy they would have to face in their many battles they would go through. The reason for them to not fear their enemies was because G-d would always be on their side. G-d would consistently fight for the Jewish people.