**B”SD**

**Parshat Devarim**

In this week’s parsha, Moshe starts rebuking Bnei Yisrael for their sins and errors over the course of their wandering in the desert. One incident he recounts is that of the *meraglim* (spies). However, as Rabbi Ledder pointed out in his parsha sheet this week, there are a number of significant differences between the original account of this story in Parshat Shelach and Moshe’s recounting of it here in sefer Devarim. Perhaps the fact that the account in Sefer Devarim is not recorded exactly the same as original version set out in Parshat Shelach (Sefer Bamidbar) has some message related to the concept of rebuke. Let’s explore.

When we are rebuked, we often instinctively react defensively. Why am I being criticized? Aren’t I good enough? Our self-esteem may be knocked, especially if we focus on ourselves and our worth. As we grow older, we may eventually see the wisdom of criticism or rebuke, and learn to accept it. A higher level to which we can aspire is to accept that rebuke that comes from someone we love is coming from a place of kindness. (An even higher magrega level, is to realize that even if the person rebuking does not love you, the rebuke is coming from Hashem (albeit through a kli, vessel) and thus it is ultimately from love for our best.)

True Ahavat Yisrael is being able to not just accept but to love and appreciate another who criticizes us by realizing that they are being kind to us by expending the effort, care and love to help us change! Chazal teach that helping another person spiritually is a much higher *madrega* (level) than helping them physically. For instance, as the Rambam (Hilchot Matanot L’evyonim 10:7) teaches, the highest level of *tzedaka* is giving a poor person a loan so he can earn his own *parnasa* (see also Tehillim 112:5). This means that we are not just supporting them physically but helping them to earn self-respect and feel good about themselves.

But how can we stop feeling defensive and negative towards someone who rebukes us and increase our Ahavat Yisrael?

In order for most people to accept criticism without defensiveness and take it on board, they must feel a bond with the person (or see Hashem working through the kli).

Arguably one way to increase our love for a person who rebukes us so that we can accept their advice with love is to put ourselves in their shoes and see the issue at hand from their perspective. In her excellent and highly recommended course on *shalom* *bayit*, the Kesher Wives’ Club, Sarah Yocheved Rigler teaches that no two people have the same background, the same philosophy, experiences, position in the house, etc. So no two people can see the same situation in the same way. To minimise strife in the home, we can actively work at stepping into the other person’s shoes and seeing the world (or at least the issue) from their perspective.

Realising that another person stands in a different place from us and naturally has a different vantage point of the same situation may increase our ability to accept that they are more objective about our situation and behaviour than we are. People are generally blinkered when it comes to their own faults so loving rebuke is a gift of da’as.

This is perhaps why the Torah in this week’s parsha focusing on rebuke also included a different version of the meraglim’s incident. In his parsha sheet, Rabbi Ledder cites Rav Chanoch Waxman as teaching that a possible reason for the two different descriptions of the meraglim’s incident is to teach us that people always have different points of view of the same event. Whereas the original description was recorded from Moshe’s perspective, in this parsha, the tale is told from Bnei Yisrael’s perspective. Perhaps one practical way to accept rebuke with love is to remember and understand and accept that every human being is standing at a slightly different vantage point. Even if we strive to be as objective as possible, we can never reach the complete truth (a fully malchut, expansive view). Realizing this, we may be more open to accepting another’s rebuke with flexibility and openness.

During this period of the 9 Days leading to Tisha B’Av, we are mourning the destruction of the Batei Mikdash. The second Beit HaMikdash was destroyed due to *sinat* *chinam* (baseless hatred). Rav Kook suggests that one way to combat exile and bring about the rebuilding of the Temple is to practice this *ahavat chinam* (baseless or unconditional love) because it is the complete antithesis of *sinat chinam*. One preliminary step to exercising unconditional love is to accept rebuke that comes our way based on our understanding that our own vision (and senses) is limited. We accept that others are not as biased or subjective as we are.

And how much more so does this lesson apply to our relationship with Hashem, who knows us completely, Who loves us completely, and Who only ever has our best interests at heart? Rav Tzadok Cable (cited on Devorah Yaffa Singer’s website: [www.G-ddirectTorah.com](http://www.G-ddirectTorah.com)) teaches that during the 9 Days more than ever, we need to be able to access Ahavat Hashem/Love of G-d.

Chazal teach that while we are in exile, Hashem’s Shechinah is also in exile. He is crying right alongside us, longing (so to speak) for His Shechinah to return. If we strive to adopt more of a G-dly perspective and see how we are causing pain to our Creator, we will more readily feel the true tragedy of this time period. By being more focused on Hashem’s pain and the grief we give Him, we will be less wrapped up in our own limited, egocentric view. In turn, we may feel closer to giving Hashem unconditional love (Ahavat Hashem), even when it feels like He is distant or angry with us, and even when we are also struggling. When we have fostered Ahavat Hashem, then we will be able to accept His rebuke at this time of year, to realize that He is only distancing Himself from us and instructing us to change out of love.

How can we apply this to our parenting practice this week?

Often when our children are suffering, parents yearn to help ease their pain. Being a step removed (and hopefully a little wiser), we want to tell them what to do, which way to turn, what to stay away from. Whether it is a little toddler who is asserting their independence, or a tween or teenager who knows best, our children’s initial reaction to our rebuke may be one of rejection and distrust. No-one likes to hear that they are travelling down the wrong path, making the wrong decisions, or had made a mistake. Why should they listen to our rebuke or do what we say, even if they know we love them? They can only see things from their own perspective. Even if they are trying to see things objectively, they are in the middle and only see their own, subjective view.

However, we must remember that even though we may have slightly more objectivity, we too are finite, mortal and subjective. We are too close to our children to be fully objective. In contrast, Hashem **does** have the full picture. His view is not just ‘a perspective’ but rather He ‘perceives’ the entire Truth.

Our parenting role gives us a taste of how ‘frustrated’ Hashem feels when He sees us veering off His path, sinning, failing to follow His decrees that He has given to us out of love. Imagine His grief when He knows the truth but sees us turning our back on His Infinite Wisdom. Imagine the patience He exercises when he gives us yet another chance by rebuking us with love. By being less defensive and more open to the G-dly view, including our own role in perpetuating the exile, we may be more able to activate positive change to do tikkun Olam. And IY”H bring about the *Geula*, *bimhera* *b’yameinu* amen selah.

Wishing you a comforting, peaceful Shabbat full of the taste of the Geula.

With bracha