**B”SD**

**Parshat Ki Teseh**

In this week’s parsha, we learn about the lashes that the Jewish court sometimes sentenced to those of Bnei Yisrael who had transgressed certain prohibitions of the Torah.

Since we do not have a Beit Hamikdash or a Bet Din that has sufficient authority these days, we are not punished with lashes or other similar punitive measures when we sin. We may think this is a blessing – who wants to suffer physical punishment and pain?

Yet, we need to remember that Hashem in His kindness created the world such that He knows that following His precepts and His derech is the absolute best thing for us as Jewish people. Connecting to Hashem is the greatest pleasure we can have in this World, and doing Torah and mitzvot is building our most beautiful, permanent dwelling in the World to Come. Conversely, committing errors and sins are the worst thing for us, both in this World and particularly in the World that really counts.

Behaviour modification is an effective psychological tool used to well, modify behaviour. As much as we may like the modern Western approach of stroking egos and everything being positive, part of modifying behaviour involves punishment (or consequences). If we are punished immediately for our negative behaviour, there is a greater chance that we will eventually stop the behaviour as it is not in our interest to persist. Human beings will do a lot to avoid pain.

Thus, immediate, clear physical punishment of our errors and sins – such as in the form of lashings – though harsh, is actually a kindness in that it clearly functions to deter us from going astray. We may erroneously presume that avoiding such physical punishment is better for us. But that’s just our guf (bodies) talking. Since our souls are what really counts, enduring a temporary physical punishment, though certainly no picnic or enjoyable, is helping us to stay on track and protecting our neshamot and our bayit in the World to Come.

In his parsha sheet this week, Rabbi Ledder cites the Gemara (Makkot 22a-b) that the court inflicting these lashes would set the appropriate number of lashes by carefully considering the sinner’s physical strength. Furthermore, the person chosen to carry out the punishment on the sinner was someone wise but not physically strong. Finally, the courts were warned to ensure that the sinner was not given even one additional lash over and above what was designated for him.

These parameters suggest that:

1.    Sometimes physical punishment is a necessary means in order to keep us on track

2.    The punishment should exactly fit the crime, and should be exactly proportionate

3.    Wisdom, not strength, is the best quality in meting out discipline.

How can we relate this message to our parenting practice this week?

Many parents struggle with the disciplinary aspect of parenting. Arguably, discipline would be much simpler if there was a formulaic approach. If a child hits, you can hit him once back. If a child runs on the road, two minutes of rebuke. If a child has chutzpah, ten minutes in his room.   But we learn from the Gemara that though disciplining our children is sometimes necessary and a kindness to them, the form is variable, unique and dependant on the individual child.

Based on this rationale, it seems that one of the most important aspects of discipline in parenting is that it be compassionate and tailor made to the individual. And in order to determine what is compassionate for each child one must have knowledge (ie wisdom) of that individual child. If one child is exquisitely sensitive, then even a minor rebuke may be sufficient to correct them without them suffering any additional pain. If another child is naturally tough and obstinate, repeated rebukes or consequences may be more appropriate.

We also must have wisdom and knowledge of ourselves in order to discipline our children effectively. For instance, in his book Dust to Gold, Erez Moshe Doron teaches that it is advisable not to discipline when we ourselves are angry. Rather, we must wait until we are cool and then deliberately summon up pseudo anger from a calm, calculated, left-brain space if required. The author documents a father who disciplines his children by leaving the scene and donning a red cape to let them know he is moving into ‘anger’ mode with deliberation.

In other words, if we are not self-aware (ie lack da'as or wisdom), we may not be aware of our emotional state or our triggers and avoid disciplining when angry or emotional. Wisdom is the key to disciplining without destroying a relationship or inflicting excessive pain in the process. Not physical strength or even creative ideas or reading the right parenting book!

Wishing you a Shabbat Shalom, filled with the courage to discipline when required, and the wisdom to know what is compassionate in every situation.

With bracha