



THIS IS HOW YOU FIX IT

Dear Parents,

Erev Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar, Chag HaShvuos 5782

One of the hardest things to do is to accept criticism graciously. Recognizing that fact, we face an even bigger challenge when attempting to criticize our children. We are obliged to find the balance between possibly deflating our children's spirit due to our critique, while constantly trying to help build up their sense of self-esteem.

"...the balance between deflating ... (and) building up their sense of self-esteem...."

A surprising and helpful reaction of *Klal Yisrael* to implied criticism by *Hashem* can be found in the *Midrash* in this week's *parsha*. The *pasuk* tells us (*Bamidbar 1:53-54*) ... *the Leviim (and not the rest of Klal Yisrael) surrounded the Mishkan to avoid harm to the Jewish People... And the Bnei Yisrael did all that Hashem commanded Moshe*. The *Midrash* explains that the *Klal Yisrael's* 'doing what *Hashem* commanded' was to distance themselves from the immediate environs of the *Mishkan* to make room for the *Leviim*. The *Midrash* points out that, in fact, the Jewish People were not worthy of being so close to the *Mishkan*. The *Eitz Yosef* (commentary on the *Midrash*) states that the Jews moved away wholeheartedly. According to our *Rosh HaYeshiva*, *HaGaon Harav Alter Chanoch Henach Leibowitz, zt'l*, as brought in *Sefer Chidushei HaLev*, the *Midrash* is telling us that the Jews had originally positioned themselves close to the *Mishkan*, presumably to grow closer to *Hashem*. *Hashem*, however, let them know they were not worthy of such closeness and ordered them moved to the outer locations of the encampment. They did this enthusiastically and wholeheartedly and earned praise for it.

The *Rosh HaYeshiva* questions this reaction and why their enthusiasm was praiseworthy. The command to move away was effectively a message of rejection. It would seemingly have been more appropriate for them to have trudged away in shame and depression on account of their sins and misdeeds having cost them a missed opportunity to be close to *Hashem*.

"...the Jews moved away wholeheartedly."

It must be, concludes the *Rosh HaYeshiva*, that the *Klal Yisrael* were indeed pained by their own shortcomings that blocked their closeness to *Hashem*. At the same time, they felt *Simcha* that they were fulfilling *Hashem's* command and will by moving away from the *Mishkan*. They were focused on the present which came with a *Mitzvah* opportunity (of following *Hashem's* command to move away) which obscured the pain from the past (the *aveiros* they committed that brought this negative consequence).

The *Rosh HaYeshiva* concludes that we can take out a lesson from here that applies to all circumstances in which we are forced to confront our shortcomings, mistakes and *aveiros*. Although we feel remorse and regret and pray for forgiveness, we need to focus on the present opportunity that we do have, which is to return to *Hashem* in complete *teshuva*.

This is also the key in guiding our children to accept criticism and discipline. When they mess up, they do need (sometimes, but not always) to be called out for what they did. It first goes without saying, that the parent's rebuke cannot be out of frustration, anger or disappointment. Then, it behooves the parent to explain that *Hashem* has granted us the most wondrous opportunity – to fix what we have broken and move on. We should assure our child that what is problematic is not the child but the behavior, and that is already in the past. The child remains whole and special and can and should feel pride and joy in his or her *teshuva* that is here in the present.

"...Hashem has granted us the most wondrous opportunity – to fix what we have broken and move on."

Our goal in correcting our children's mistakes is never to break their spirit or to even hint that the child is essentially faulty. Their (mis) behavior of the past (five minutes ago) needs to change and the opportunity to make that correction now is a cause for celebration, not denigration. Such a wholesome approach will nurture a wholesome child, who will undoubtedly possess the self-esteem and inner strength to lead a successful, productive and joyous life.

Wholehearted wishes for a wonderful *Shabbos* and a joyous and purposeful *Shvuos*,



Rabbi Kalman Baumann