



Kinder Torah[©]

Parashas Vayechi



Constructive Criticism

"Shalom, Shiri! Welcome home! How was your day at school?"

"No so good, Imma. I was really hurt by Chani. She is so bad! I don't want to be her friend anymore."

"Oy vey. What did she do that was so bad, Shiri?"

"She got angry with me."

"I see. I sympathize with you Shiri. That must have been very unpleasant. However, let us take a minute to think about this. Perhaps you did something that annoyed her. You may not have realized it. Or perhaps Chani was tired, or hungry, or frustrated, or in a rush. All of these things can make a person get angry easily. We have a mitzvah to judge our fellow Jews favorably."

"I understand, Imma. Even if a person has a good excuse for getting angry, it is still very unpleasant. It's just bad."

"True, Shiri dear. You may not realize it, but you have touched on a very important point. When you first told me about Chani, you said that she was bad. This second time, you said that her anger was bad."

"What is the difference?"

"There is a very big difference. In this week's parasha, Yaakov Avinu blessed his twelve sons before he departed from this world. Part of the blessing involved criticism. When speaking to Shimon and Levi he said, 'Cursed is their anger' (Bereshis 49:7). Rashi makes a very interesting observation. Even when Yaakov Avinu was criticizing Shimon and Levi, he only cursed their anger, and not the sons themselves."

"I see."

"When you criticize a fault, you are not downgrading the person. You are saying that the fault is bad - a true statement. However, if you say that the person is bad, you can cause a lot of damage. Most people are not bad; they just have faults that need to be corrected. When you call a person bad, you are making a statement that is probably not true. Worse, you are putting down the whole person. If he hears this often enough, he may actually begin to think that he is a bad person. Then he can get into real trouble. When a person thinks that he is bad, there is nothing stopping him from committing the worse aveiyros (sins)."

"I certainly would not want to be responsible for that."

"Of course not. First, be very careful before correcting anyone. Make sure that they are prepared to listen to what you have to say. If you must be critical, say it in a way that criticizes the fault, and not the person."

"Imma, you are an example of what you teach."

"In what way, Shiri?"

"Just now, you pointed out my fault, without criticizing me directly."

"Shiri, you are a wonderful daughter, who is always willing to listen and learn."

"And you are a wonderful Imma. Thank you for everything!"

Kinderlach . . .

We must be very careful about criticizing. In a situation where it is appropriate, we must proceed carefully. Only criticize the fault and not the person. He will see the fault as something external, which needs to be corrected. You can also help him by encouraging him, and showing him that this fault is not so difficult to overcome. More importantly, you should be ready to accept constructive criticism from people who love you. They want to help you work on yourselves. Listen to them. Thank them for pointing out the problem. Take their advice and work on correcting it. May we all help each other to grow in Torah, mitzvos, and middos tovos.



Tell Them You Love Them

"Then Yisrael saw Yosef's sons and he said, 'Who are these?' And Yosef said to his father, 'They are my sons whom Hashem has given me here' (Bereshis 48:8-9). Why did Yisrael ask this question? He surely knew who Menashe and Efraim were. He taught them Torah for seventeen years while he was in Mitzraim.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh answers this question in a lovely way. Yisrael was about to bless his grandchildren. Before the blessing, he wanted to arouse his love for them. This would enhance the blessing because it would be coming at a time of great love and affection. Therefore, he asked his dear son Yosef who they were. Now he would hear the words coming from Yosef's mouth, "They are my sons." His heart would open up to them and he would bless them with the love of a parent for his offspring. This is the hidden meaning of the verse, "Is Efraim My favorite son or a delightful child, that whenever I speak of him I remember him more and more?" (Yirmiah 31:19). Speaking about him arouses Hashem's love for him.

Kinderlach . . .

We know that we are supposed to love our fellow Jews, especially close family members, but we sometimes need help. The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh gives us a valuable insight. Speak about them. Tell your parents how much you appreciate them. You will feel that warm feeling of true love, glowing in your heart. Tell your sister that you love her. Watch her face light up, and feel your love for her grow. Hashem gave us beautiful emotions. Learn how to use them in the proper time and place. Love your fellow Jews.

What's In A Name?

"May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the boys, and may they be called by my name and the names of my fathers, Avraham and Yitzchak, and may they multiply abundantly like fish within the land" (Bereshis 48:16). This is the blessing that Yaakov gave to his two grandsons, Efraim and Menashe. It is so beautiful that we say it every night before we go to sleep. What is good about being named after Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov? The Sforno explains that tsaddikim do not name their children after evil ancestors, like Terach and Nachor. And the opposite is also true. A wicked person, even though he has righteous ancestors, will name his child after one of his evil ancestors. Therefore, Yaakov Avinu blessed Efraim and Menashe that they should always be ready to do Hashem's will, and they should receive *Siyata Dishmaya* (Heavenly Assistance) to succeed. In this way, they will be fit to show their relationship to their righteous ancestors, Avraham and Yitzchak.

Kinderlach . . .

What's in a name? A blessing. When we receive the name of a tsaddik or a tsadekes, we know that our parents care about us and love us very much. They are observing Hashem's Torah and Mitzvos, just like their grandfather or great-uncle did. And they want their newborn baby to be a tsaddik just like he was. So they give the baby his name. Isn't that beautiful? This is Yaakov Avinu's blessing to all of us. May we all be tsaddikim and tsidkonios and therefore merit to be named after, and name our children after righteous ancestors.

Parasha Questions

- Can a person harm someone who has Hashem's protection? (50:19 and Rashi)
- Why did Yaakov's grandsons not help bury him? (Rashi 50:13)
- How did the tribe of Zevulun make parnassa? (Rashi 49:13).
- Should one condemn a person, or his faults? (Rashi 49:7)

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