

Ha Shavuah B' Sha'arey Israel

July 23 – July 30, 2009

2 Av – 9 Av 5769



Candle lighting time 8:21 pm
Friday July 24

Friday Evening Kabbalat Shabbat Services begin at 6:15 pm
Saturday morning Shabbat Services begin at 9:30 am

PARASHAT DEVARIM (Commentary on Page 2)
SHABBAT HAZON

Annual: Deuteronomy 1:1 - 3:22 (Etz Hayim, p. 981)
Triennial: Deuteronomy 2:2 – 2:30 (Etz Hayim, p. 990)
Haftarah: Isaiah 1:1 – 27 (Etz Hayim, p. 1000)



We wish a Happy Birthday this week to:

Carol Chanin, Robert Fieldsteel, Amy Cohen, Aaron Fleming, Rachel Goodrich, Rebecca Fleming and Kate Perofsky

And Happy Anniversary to:

Carol & Robert Chanin and Janice & Robert Donner

This week we remember the Yahrzeit of:

Robert Gerson, Scheiwa Granek, Helen Frank Chanin, Karl Theodore, Abraham Louis Cohen, Michael Yardeni, Mose Chanin, Sheila Weger, Seemah Shier, Fanny Burg, Joe Goldman



Tisha B'Av Service

Next Wednesday - July 29

8:00 PM

Tisha B'Av begins at sundown on July 29. Tisha B'Av - the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av - is often considered the "saddest" day on the Jewish calendar. A fast day that commemorates the destruction of both the First and Second Temples, it is the culmination of a three week period of increasing mourning that begins with the fast of the 17th of Tammuz, when the walls of Jerusalem were first breached, leading to the destruction of the First Temple. While Tisha B'Av is primarily intended to recall the destruction of the Temples, both of which were destroyed on the ninth of Av, it is also considered a day to mourn the many other tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people on this day.

TBI is compiling a brochure for their 150th Anniversary Celebration that is scheduled for the October 24, 2009 weekend.

If you would be interested in making a \$25.00 donation to the Temple for having your name or your business included in the congratulations section of the brochure, please contact the Temple – 745-6727.

The deadline for having your name included is August 15.

Devarim (Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22)

This week's commentary is by Rabbi Shraga Simmons

Constructive Criticism

It's been 40 long, hot years in the desert. The era is drawing to a close with the Book of Deuteronomy - Moses' swan song, his final appeal to the Jewish people.

Much of this week's Parsha consists of Moses rebuking the people for a variety of mistakes, including the Golden Calf, Korach's rebellion, the complaints about meat and water, and more.

Why did Moses choose now - the final days before his death - to deliver 40 years worth of pent-up rebuke?

The Torah tells us:

"You shall rebuke your neighbor, but not do a sin in the process." (Leviticus 19:17)

Rebuke is fine, but not if the effect will be negative. If the other person will get defensive, angry, or not accept the criticism, then it is better left unsaid.

Moses evaluated that because he was in his final days, his criticism would be accepted by the people, because:

- a. He wouldn't have to keep repeating the rebuke - i.e. "nagging."
- b. He saved the people the embarrassment of having to face him in the future.
- c. The people wouldn't feel a need to get defensive and rebel - e.g. "Oh, I'll show him!"
- d. The people would pay close attention, knowing that Moses' dying words are his most selective and important to hear.

If a person feels you have your own self-interest at heart - and not his - he won't listen to what you're saying.

Rebuke must clearly be for the benefit of the other person. He has to know that you care about him, are on his side, and want what's best for him.

That is why Moses specifically delivers the rebuke after defeating Sichon and Og in battle (see Deut. 1:4). He had just reaffirmed his dedication to the people. So they knew that if Moses had criticism, it was only coming from a place of love.

THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING

A look at the original Hebrew clarifies this concept. The Torah says: "You should give *toch'acha* to your neighbor." *Toch'acha* is from the same word as *hoch'acha*, meaning "proof."

The Torah is telling us that the way to get our neighbor to change is not through harsh rebuke, argumentation, or clever persuasion. The only way to convince anyone of anything is by way of a clear and obvious proof. As the Talmud (Brachot 7a) says: "It is better for a person to realize the truth for himself, than to have it beaten into him with 100 lashes."

Remember the story of Joseph and his brothers? After being sold into slavery, and then rising to the position of prime minister, Joseph again meets up with his brothers when they come to Egypt searching for food. (The brothers don't recognize Joseph because he's aged and grown a beard.) Joseph gives them a hard time and threatens to take Benjamin hostage. Judah protests vehemently, saying that their father Jacob will be unable to survive the loss of a son.

At this point, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers by saying, "I am Joseph; is my father still alive?" (Genesis 45:3) This was Joseph's *toch'acha*: "You say that our father won't survive the loss of a son - but did you consider that when you tore me away from our father 22 years ago?!"

Nobody like to be told what to do. Therefore it is the act of self-realization which eliminates the defensive reaction ... and produces effective *toch'acha*. Joseph got the brothers to realize the internal contradiction of their own argument. Moses, too, only hinted at the people's sins indirectly - e.g. referring to the incident of the Golden Calf by referring to the city Di Zahav ("enough gold").

Toch'acha is not harsh. Rather, *toch'acha* is the beauty of reality staring us squarely in the face.

GONE FISHING

The Midrash (Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu) tells the story of Elijah the Prophet meeting up with a fisherman. "Do you study Torah?" Elijah asks. "No," replied the fisherman, "I'm just a simple man, not endowed with any measure of talent or intelligence."

"Tell me," said Elijah, "how do you prepare your fishing net?"

"Well," said the man, "It's actually quite complicated. First I have to select the proper gauge rope, and then I weave the net in a particular pattern to ensure the proper balance of strength and flexibility."

"How do you go about actually catching the fish?" inquired Elijah.

"Oh," said the man, "that involves many complex factors like water depth, temperature, speed of the current, season of the year, time of day, type of fish and location. I've spent years mastering these techniques, and I'm able to earn a good living from fishing."

"When you get to heaven," said Elijah, "you said you plan to testify that you didn't study Torah study because you're just a simple man, not endowed with any talent or intelligence. But your expertise as a fisherman refutes your very own claim!"

Did you ever hear someone say he doesn't have time to study wisdom, visit his mother, or do volunteer work? Yet what about all the hours of TV he watched?

This is *toch'acha* - incontrovertible proof.

LOVE REBUKE

Of course, nobody likes to be on the receiving end. But do you think you're perfect? Of course not! If you want to reach your potential, look for constructive criticism. Go ask for help to get rid of your mistakes. When a person is committed to reaching a goal, he'll accept incredible doses of nagging, harrassments and insults. Think of what an Olympic athlete willingly endures from coaches!

One of my favorite all-time stories is told about the Sfas Emes, a famous Torah commentator (19th century Poland). One time when he was about 12 years old, he had stayed awake all night learning Torah with a friend. When dawn broke, they prayed the morning service at the earliest time, and went to bed. A few hours later, the boys awoke and returned to the Yeshiva, where they encountered the grandfather of the Sfas Emes, the revered Rabbi Yitzhak Meir (known as the "Chiddushe HaRim"). Rabbi Yitzhak Meir did not know that his grandson had stayed awake all night studying, and proceeded to rebuke him for not having attended the regular morning service. The rebuke lasted a few minutes, throughout which the Sfas Emes stood and listened attentively, not uttering a word.

When the grandfather had left, the boy's friend expressed disbelief: "Why didn't you defend yourself against this unwarranted rebuke?!" "Because," replied the Sfas Emes, "it's not every day that I get such personalized feedback from my revered grandfather. And I wasn't about to miss such an opportunity!"

No doubt this is what King Solomon meant when he said, "Give *toch'acha* to a wise person? and he'll love you!" (Proverbs 9:8)

CARING ENOUGH

One final point: Giving *toch'acha* is everyone's obligation. We mustn't ignore another person in need. That is why it is juxtaposed with the verse: "Don't stand by your brother's blood" (Leviticus 19:16).

If you really love someone, you can't stand to see him living a misguided life. Who gives you the most criticism? Those who love you the most - your parents. It's because they love you that they can't simply ignore you by saying, "He's wasting time but I don't care." Similarly, humanity is one. If one person hurts, we all feel it.

We must reach out and find a way to help. The Talmud (Shabbat 119) says that Jerusalem was destroyed because people didn't correct each other. Today, the Jewish people are hemorrhaging from assimilation. We have to make a pro-active effort to bring Jews closer to Torah. How? By being better role models.

Giving *toch'acha* does not mean criticizing, throwing stones, or shouting louder than the next guy. Real *toch'acha* is demonstrating through action and deed. If secular Israelis do not appreciate the warmth and sanctity of Shabbat, it is because observant Jews are not keeping Shabbat in the right way. If Jews were truly projecting the beauty of Torah, then the truth would be obvious to all. No arguments, no conflicts. Indeed, the Talmud says that Moses was able to instruct the people only because he exemplified what he preached.

The Sages ask: When the Messiah arrives, how will we know it's really him? The answer: It will be obvious. Of course, there are some technical qualifications, but his basic identity as the Messiah will be self-evident. He will speak words of Torah so sweet and clear, that no one will need to question his identity. It will be a pure outpouring of positive energy that overwhelms everything in its path. That is the beauty of true *toch'acha*.

For other commentaries on this week's Torah portion check out these sites:

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ISJL Taste of Torah

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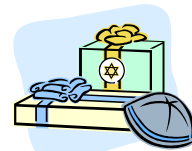
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