

Honorable Mention II Appropriate Criticism #1

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

In his Shabbat Shuva drasha, Rav Chaim Brisker would say, "Chaim is speaking to Chaim, but if you wish you can eavesdrop." A very productive way to give criticism is to accept part of the blame and admit that you too have the same problem. This makes the perpetrator far less ashamed of doing wrong, and moves him towards rectifying his flaws.

Confine your criticism to a specific act. General criticism demoralizes people. It's important not to make unrealistic demands. Suggest small steps and ways to improve. A good way to offer criticism to a miser would be, "Maybe this year you can give one percent more." Increase the amounts little by little and soon the miser will turn into a generous donor. It is forbidden to shame someone in public. However if by remaining silent you will condone unethical behavior, you may speak out. In fact the gemara in Avodah Zarah says that if you don't rebuke a sinner, you bear responsibility for the sin as well. If someone is speaking lashon hara and circumstances make it difficult to stop him, try to change the subject. If that fails, get up and leave.

The quintessential example of proper criticism is the story of King David and Nathan Hanavi. The prophet approached the king after he had sent Bathsheva's husband to his death. He came in the guise of one soliciting advice. There were two men, one wealthy and one poor, who lived in the same city. The rich man had many sheep while the poor man had one small lamb. One day, a guest came to call at the rich man's house. The wealthy host took the poor man's lone lamb and prepared a meal for his guest. The prophet then asked the king, "What should be done to this wealthy man?" King David immediately answered that he deserved death. Nathan Hanavi then told David that he was the man. By depersonalizing the rebuke, the prophet was able to make King David view the act in its moral simplicity and indeed he had no choice but to admit and repent.

Think about all the times you were criticized and didn't change. Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv of Kelm would say, "Don't become angry if you can't make people be the way you wish them to be, because you too can't make yourself the way you wish to be." Confront the person himself. It's very tempting to share our

resentment of someone with others. However, the obligation is to rebuke the person himself, not destroy his good name. Give him an opportunity to defend himself. Before criticizing someone, ask yourself the following questions: Am I being fair or am I exaggerating? How can I express myself without inflicting too much pain? How would I feel if someone criticized me this way? Am I enjoying criticizing this person? Is my criticism confined to a specific act or trait? Are my words non-threatening and in part reassuring?

In Parshat Kedoshim, the verse says, "You shall rebuke your fellow man and do not bear sin because of him." Rashi explains that rebuking should be done with sensitivity. Do not publicly embarrass the offender. It is both ineffective and immoral, and only puts the sinner on the offensive. In addition, you will have lost the opportunity to bring about change. The Sefer Hachinuch notes that criticism should be delivered privately, with tact and refinement. Mastering the art of constructive criticism takes thought and insight. Let's invest the effort to do it right.

Parshat Chukat-Miracles of Faith

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Gemara tells the story of the angels' argument to save Chananaya, Mishael, and Azarya from the fiery furnace of nevuchadetzar. The angel Yurkuma offered to put out the fire with ice and hail while the angel Gavriel countered that he would descend into the fire and cool it down. Hashem sent the angel Gavriel. The Shem Mishmuel asks, what would have been the difference between the two miracles? Ice putting out fire shows that Hashem can harness specific forces to overwhelm other forces. But a greater testimony to His omnipotence is manipulating the force itself. Hashem controls the essence of nature. He can change the rules as He sees fit and He can make fire cold just as He can make it hot. Ratson Hashem (G-d's Will) can alter the behavior of the laws of nature, because its very behavior is His Ratson. In Shachrit we say, "Hamechadesh b'tuvu bchol yom tamid"-Hashem in His goodness

renews every moment of creation. He is constantly involved. When Hashem caused water to flow from the b'eer (the miraculous Well of Miriam which produced water from a rock) it was as if stone molecules were turned to water molecules. This testified that Hashem could control things at their root source. However when He commanded Moshe to hit the rock, it was a miracle disguised in nature. A stick made of hard-like diamond can potentially split a stone so water will flow out. It was one force overwhelming another. Miriam's merit activated the miracle of turning stone into water. When she died, the water ceased flowing. It was now necessary to essentially change the rock to water again, but Hashem refused to perform this miracle for Moshe. The merit of Klal Yisrael would need to replace the merit of Miriam. Miriam had emunah. She believed that the stone was Hashem's will and that He could transform it into water if He so

wished. Finding Hashem in our everyday lives, in the little incidents of Divine Providence, helps us come to the belief that He can change the essence of nature. This is what the Jewish people were expected to achieve at the end of forty years. Hashem said to Moshe, "Hakhel es h'am...v'dibartem el hasela"-Gather the people and speak to the rock'. If the Jewish nation would have acquired the proper faith it would have been adequate to just speak to the rock. Unfortunately they did not reach that level and therefore Moshe failed.

How can we rectify this flaw in emunah? Opening our eyes to see the daily Divine Providence in our lives, cultivating faith and belief in Hashem, and trusting that just as miracles kept us alive throughout our long exile they will continue to sustain us



Parshat Chukat: The Well of Miriam

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smile

Our Sages teach us that the Well of Miriam accompanied the Jews in the desert in the merit of Miriam. When she passed away, the well dried up. If we examine the nature of the well and the personality of Miriam, we can discern an intricate connection between them. The mishna in Avot tells us that the mouth of the well was created bein hashmashot on the first erev Shabbat. The Maharal explains that the well consisted of a mundane element of Friday, and a holy element of Shabbat. Although the well functioned in the natural world it had a metaphysical dimension.

Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer writes that at the end of time, the well will once again spring up under the threshold of the Beit Hamikdash and divide into twelve different paths, one for each tribe. Its waters will irrigate all the barren fields and vineyards, which will then produce fruit. It will sweeten the waters of the Dead Sea and heal all those who immerse in it.

There is a tradition that the well is now found in the Kinneret, and water drawn from its source on Motzai Shabbat has unique healing properties.

We see that the well is not only connected to Friday night but also to Motzai Shabbat. We also see that it not only provided physical nourishment but contains supernatural healing powers.

Let us take a glimpse at the unique personality of Miriam. The Kli Yakar asks how Chazal knew that Puah was really Miriam. He answers that Puah means to soothe. Miriam's strength was in her mouth. Her job was to soothe newborn babies and calm them. When she saved the babies in Egypt, she demonstrated her belief that the exile would not last forever. She never gave up hope and continued to trust that the redemption would eventually come.

Rav Yedid notes that we see two outstanding elements of Miriam's personality. She believed in her prophecy that her mother would give birth to the redeemer. When Moshe was placed in the Nile, she stood by to watch him. She never let go of the vision of redemption. Second, she valued the beauty and sanctity of the Jewish home. She told her father that he, as the gadol hador, must be a model of rebuilding this holy sanctum.

We see these themes repeated later in the Torah. Miriam took along drums when they left Egypt because she strongly believed that Hashem would perform miracles for them. Additionally, the washbasins in the Mishkan were fashioned from the mirrors of the Jewish women of Egypt. With iron clad emuna, inspired by their leader Miriam, the women used their mirrors to continue holy Jewish family life and raised new generations. They believed that the geula would come.

The Netziv offers a different explanation. Just

as the man fell closer or further from each person depending on his level of tzidkut, the water would flow based on a person's level of middat hachessed. Water is chesed and women are connected to chesed. The Maharal notes that spring water rises from beneath the ground to above. Miriam's mission was to bring the people from a lower level to a state of elevation and desiring Hashem.

Water has an absorbable quality. When water is absorbed, it transforms latent potential into actual life. The waters of Miriam nurtured the nutrients of Torah and abstract faith to each individual, and were absorbed on his particular level. Just as the well had both a mundane and holy quality, Miriam's job was to teach the people how to uplift the physical into something spiritual.

This is reflected in Motzai Shabbat where we take the holy experience of Shabbat and bring it into the new week. Miriam is connected to the beginning of Shabbat and the end of Shabbat. The well is also connected to the beginning of time and the end of time. Miriam understood that this world has a beginning and an end. She embodied the power to hold on and believe that salvation would ultimately come. May our efforts to emulate Miriam's indomitable faith and strength, help bring the final redemption speedily in our days.