

Jasmine's D'Var Torah

This week's parsha, Kedoshim, also teaches us what it means to be a good friend. The Torah tells us that if a friend, or any other Jew does something wrong we should "reprove" them. This means that we should not remain silent, but instead offer them constructive criticism. There are two reasons we should do this.

Firstly, if it is a friend of yours who does something wrong to you and you stay silent, you will end up bearing a grudge and then your sin will be as great as theirs. For example, if someone excludes you from their party and you do not communicate that the exclusion was hurtful, then your sin of hatred becomes your problem, not theirs.

On the other hand, if you tell your friend that they did wrong and that the exclusion hurt you, they might apologize and try to make amends. Even if they don't, at least you have made your feelings known and they know how you feel. This will also help you get over your hurt feelings. In my short time at VTT I have made some great friends and don't want that to change, so I think this is a good lesson for all of us 12 year olds and for our moms, dads and even our grandparents.

The second reason we should not remain silent applies to if we see another Jew do something wrong, even if it doesn't hurt you personally, the torah tells us that it is not enough for us to just observe and say in your mind that it is wrong, but that we need to get involved and point out to the person what they have done wrong. In Jewish law we are all responsible for one another and therefore if you, see for example, a friend starting to smoke tobacco or abuse drugs you are not allowed to sit idly by, you have to tell how harmful it could be. If we stay silent, we can also be considered guilty because we saw the person do wrong and did nothing to protest. The same lesson that is true about drugs is also true if someone hurts you, you are responsible for helping them to become a better person by understanding what they did wrong.

In our Bat Mitzvah lessons, we learnt a story about how this may have led to the destruction of the second Temple. It is a story of how a man wanted to throw a party for all his friends, so he drew up a guest list and told his servant to send out the invitations. One of the men on the guest list was named "**Kamtza**," but the servant made a mistake and invited "**Bar Kamtza**" instead. Now Bar Kamtza was actually a sworn enemy of the host!

When Bar Kamtza received his invitation, he was very grateful to think that the host had finally made amends. But when Bar Kamtza showed up at the party, the host took one look and told his servant to make Bar Kamtza leave.

When asked to leave, Bar Kamtza said: "I understand the mistake. But it's embarrassing for me to leave the party. I'll gladly pay the cost of my meal if you'll allow me to stay." The host said no and demanded he leave.

Bar Kamtza then said: "I'd even be willing to pay *half* the cost of the entire party, if only I'd be allowed to stay."

Again the host said no. So Bar Kamtza pleaded: "I'll pay for the *entire* party! Just please don't embarrass me in this way!"

The host, however, stuck to his guns and threw Bar Kamtza out. The rabbis at the party had observed all of this and did not say anything, and Bar Kamtza took this to mean that they approved of the host's behaviour.

The Talmud reports that Bar Kamtza was so hurt and upset, that he went straight to the Roman authorities and gave bad reports of disloyal behavior among the Jews. This made the Romans more angry, and they attacked and destroy the Holy Temple.

So for me the lessons from this parsha are:

1. If you love someone you need to be able to offer them constructive criticism. The Talmud says that any love that does not also have in it some ability to criticize is not really love. In other words the sign of fake relationship is one in which you cannot offer that kind of constructive criticism.
2. Silence does not solve anything. It makes the offend person feel worse, and it does not give the offender the opportunity to improve.

It is a hard lesson to follow, but also one of the best pieces of advice the Torah gives.

The good thing is that I already have a lot of practice because Indy and I have been giving each other constructive criticism since the day we started talking.

Indy's D'var Torah

Jasi, that was a really good d'var torah, but let me fulfil my obligation and give you some constructive criticism, next time speak a little slower.

This week's parsha, Kedoshim, talks about the important role that followers play. I found this very interesting because at school we are always learning about being good leaders, but people don't often talk about the importance of a follower.

Kedoshim tells us that in Judaism it is important for followers to not just accept authority without question. We should not just accept things the way they are. A follower should not be afraid to question their leaders. The reason we should do this is because as Jews we should care for each other and we are all responsible for making each other better people.

One interesting story in the Torah that demonstrates the importance of followers, is the story about King David and the prophet Nathan. The story goes like this:

One day King David saw this beautiful girl, Batsheba, that he wanted to date. The problem was that she was married to a general in David's army. Because he was the king, he went out with Batsheba anyway and sent her husband to the front line of the war so that he would be killed. At the end of the day he was the king and could do whatever he wanted.

One of his followers, the prophet Nathan, saw what had happened and was brave enough to go to King David and tell him that what he did was wrong. He gave David some very harsh criticism, which could have got him killed.

It was Nathan's criticism that made King David realize his mistake and David also accepted this criticism. Without Nathan, David would have been blind to his own crimes.

By actively questioning our leaders and teachers, we can help each other improve ourselves and commit mitzvot.

Being a student in Judaism is not just about doing what you teacher tells you to do. The job of the student is not just to review but also to question, as both the student and the teacher are looking to be the best possible people.

Rabbi Hanina once said "I have learnt much from my teachers, more from my colleagues, but from my students I have learnt most of all".

Now that I'm a bat mitzvah and have learnt the meaning of being a good follower, I understand how important it is to both accept and give constructive criticism. Going forward I will be conscious of making this part of my everyday life.