

GEVURAH – DISCIPLINE

WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO DISCIPLINE?

CHECK-IN

Share your name and response to the question, what comes to mind when you hear the word “discipline?”

OUR BRIT (COVENANT)

- ❖ Everybody’s story is sacred: we commit to respectful communication.
- ❖ Listening is important for understanding: we commit to active and thoughtful listening.
- ❖ Our hearts are open when we feel safe: we commit to confidentiality.
- ❖ We will not try to fix, explain, or judge one another.
- ❖ We will allow for silences within the discussion so that everyone has the space to speak.
- ❖ As our Omer Groups are under the umbrella of Isaiah Together and the broader umbrella of Temple Isaiah, we will keep the values of each front and center.

COUNTING OF THE OMER

Hineini – I am ready to fulfill the mitzvah of counting the Omer.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ, וְצִוֵּנוּ
עַל סְפִירַת הָעֹמֶר.

Baruch atah, Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, asher kid’shanu b’mitzvotav v’tzivanu al sfirat haOmer.

Praised be You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe, instilling within us the holiness of mitzvot by commanding us to count the Omer.

Today is the _____ day, which is _____ weeks and _____ days of the Omer.

May I understand and make the decisions necessary to live my life with discipline.

WHAT IS GEVURAH?

If love (*chesed*) is the bedrock of human expression, discipline (*gevurah*) is the channels through which we express love. It gives our life and love direction and focus. Take a laser beam: Its potency lies in the focus and concentration of light in one direction rather than fragmented light beams dispersed in all different directions.

Gevurah is the necessary counterbalance to *chesed*. Overflowing love can become overwhelming, oppressive, dictatorial. Limiting love sets boundaries that recognize the realm of the other, and of oneself. For the world to exist, there must be limits and boundaries, and justice. But, even those qualities that may energize us to justice can be exaggerated: righteousness can become self-righteousness; pain can energize aggressive response in anger. For the world to exist, the limits and boundaries of *gevurah* must be doubly strong in these instances.

Gevurah - discipline and measure - concentrates and directs our efforts, our love in the proper directions. Another aspect of *gevurah* is - respect and awe. Healthy love requires respect for the one you love.

The underlying intention and motive in discipline is love. Why do we measure our behavior, why do we establish standards and expect people to live up to them - only because of love. Even judgment of the guilty is only to express love. In other words punishment is not vengeance; it is just another way to express love by cleansing anything antithetical to love. Tolerance of people should never be confused with tolerance of their behavior. On the contrary: love for people includes wanting them to be the best they can and therefore helping them be aware of anything less than perfect behavior.

And yet, *gevurah* must be balanced with *chesed*. Too much discipline, too much judgement, too much rigidity – these things can lead to a life in which we struggle to connect with another, to love one another freely.¹

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

How do you understand *gevurah*? When have you experienced it in your life?

¹ Slater, Rabbi Jonathan, *Counting the Omer*, Institute for Jewish Spirituality, p. 48.
https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/276679/jewish/Omer-8.htm

WISDOM FROM OUR TRADITION:

Do not say, "When I am available I will study [Torah]," lest you never become available. – Mishnah Pirkei Avot 2:4

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (a) What is the text suggesting? How is this related to discipline?
- (b) To what other parts of our lives can we apply this lesson? Why do these things require discipline? What practices support your ability to remain disciplined?

MORE ON GEVURAH:

There was a certain pious but hot-tempered man who, when people quarreled with him, would begin shouting and cursing instead of replying. After he calmed down, he would regret his actions.

The man went to a sage and asked, "What can I do to avoid cursing at people in my rage?"

The sage replied, "Take it upon yourself to say after cursing, 'May everything that I said about him come to me.' Or, before cursing, say, 'May that which I am about to say come to me.' Then you will stop cursing."

But the man was unwilling to follow that advice. Instead he took it upon himself that every time he yelled or cursed, he would give a certain amount to charity. The knowledge of how much it would cost him tended to keep him from cursing. In addition, giving charity was for him a way of atoning for his bad temper. For charity, it was a source of profit. – Sefer Hasidim, Section 656

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (a) What role does regret play in self-discipline?
- (b) Can you see the rabbi's advice helping you in moments of anger or lack of discipline? What about the man's own solution? In your mind, does giving charity atone for bad temper?
- (c) How do we respond in correct measure to our own over-blown *gevurah*? How can we respond in love and compassion to this excessive *gevurah*?

MODERN VOICES:

Letter from Birmingham Jail by Martin Luther King, Jr.

From the Birmingham jail, where he was imprisoned as a participant in nonviolent demonstrations against segregation, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote in longhand the letter which follows.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have never yet engaged in a direct-action movement that was "well timed" according to the timetable of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "wait." It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This "wait" has almost always meant "never." It has been a tranquilizing thalidomide, relieving the emotional stress for a moment, only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration. We must come to see with the distinguished jurist of yesterday that "justice too long delayed is justice denied." We have waited for more than three hundred and forty years for our God-given and constitutional rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward the goal of political independence, and we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say "wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim... -- then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the bleakness of corroding despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (a) How does *gevurah* get expressed in Dr. King's letter? In which instances do we understand these different expressions of *gevurah* to be in good measure and in which instances is it clear that *gevurah* is overblown or not developed enough?
- (b) How did *gevurah* in the form of non-violent protest help him promote the cause of African-Americans in the 1950s and 1960s?
- (c) What can we learn about this kind of *gevurah* to motivate change in our world today?

A FINAL WORD:

During this week, notice when impatience or irritation arises in you with those around you. Counterbalance that impulse with *chesed* and respond with as much love and patience as you can muster. Alternatively, if you are caught in a situation (a traffic jam or long line) that makes you frustrated or angry, use the time to find an example of love or discipline from the world around you.

As we leave here today, what is one aspect of *gevurah* that you might want to think more about, that challenged you, or that you will work to build up?