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Discovering Coaching

It is always exciting to embark on a new journey of learning. It is especially gratifying to discover how the learning impacts and connects to so many facets of life. In the following pages, I will share some of these discoveries.

In their book, "Coaching Plain and Simple", Peter Szabo and Daniel Meier write the following: "Rembrandt was quoted as saying that during his whole career, it was more difficult for him to find an appropriate frame than to paint the picture. Framing a picture in such a way that it can unfold its full expressivity is an art that few people have mastered." The book goes on to compare the art of framing to that of coaching. "Coaches create a frame (of thought) for the client in which his or her goals, solutions and first steps can shine. The frame constructed by the coach consists of goal-oriented questions, reinforcing feedback, present listening and useful summary. The client can take space and time to sort out his or her thoughts, set concrete goals..."

This basic principle of the coaching system sets coaching apart from mainstream psychology. It is the fundamental belief that the individual has the intelligence and ability to come up with his or her own solutions. The job of the coach, through asking "powerful questions", is to stimulate and support the coachee's thinking process and exploration. The coach is not much interested in (over) exploration of the past; but rather, the future. Hence the term Solution Focused Coaching. The coachee comes up with solutions to create a better future for himself. The coach is there to guide, not to advise.

Coaching was first developed in the sports world. World class athletes had personal coaches. The coach did not need to possess the skills of the athlete; rather, he needed the techniques and skill necessary to bring out the best of the athlete's potential. This, is coaching. It is coaching in the sports world, executive world, and in life coaching.

Through my reading I have come to learn that coaching is founded upon principles and values that fit perfectly into my paradigm. One which has been shaped by the Torah education I've received throughout my life. In the following pages I will highlight some of these parallels.

The Relationship between Hashem and B'nei Yisroel:

"Ki ner mitzvah v'Torah ohr" (Mishlei 6:23). "a mitzvah is a lamp and Torah is light". R' Bunim of Pschis'che explained this *posuk* with a parable. Two wise men and one simpleton were thrown into a dark dungeon. Food was lowered to them daily. But because it was pitch black, the simpleton could not discern between the cutlery and the food. And so, one of the wise men helped him eat, day in and day out.

One day, this wise man said to the other, "why don't you help me out with this responsibility of caring for our friend? Why do you leave it all to me?" To which he replied, "I am busy chipping away each day at the stone wall so that light may come in. Then, our simple friend will be able to feed himself."

R' Bunim explained that this represents the two ways in which people can be guided:

1. Showing them how to do everything. This obviously stunts their personal growth and independence.
2. Teaching them skills and giving them tools. This will empower them to make independent choices in the future.

"Torah and mitzvos," said R' Bunim, "are the principles which serve as beacons of light. Knowledge of Torah principles will give one the ability to choose wisely in life. "

Chazal say, *"Habah l'tahev, mesayin lo."* "He who comes to purify himself, is helped from Above." Hashem gives us the tools. He helps us along the way. But ultimately, the choice, the power, the direction we take, lies in our hands. Torah is Hashem's way of "shedding light" on our abilities. This is the challenge and richness of self discovery.

Rebbe and Chassid:

In 1977, Mr. Yehuda Avner, former member of Prime Minister Menachem Begin cabinet, met in a private audience with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, zy”a. He tells the following story: “In the course of our conversation, I asked the Rebbe, ‘what is the job of a Rebbe?’ The Rebbe answered with the following analogy- ‘imagine you are looking at a cupboard and I tell you to open it. You open it and inside you see a candle. But I tell you that it is not a candle. It is a lump of wax with a piece of string in it. When do the wax and wick become a candle? When you bring a flame to the wick. Then the wick and the wax become a “*ner*”. That is to say, they fulfill the purpose for which they were created. That is what a Rebbe attempts to do. To help each man and woman fulfill the purpose for which they were created.’ “ After speaking of other matters, Mr. Avner rose to leave and asked the Rebbe, “has the Rebbe lit my candle?” To which the Rebbe responded, “no, I have given you the match. Only you can light your own candle.”

The Rebbe empowers the chassid through his guidance, teaching and encouragement. Ultimately though, it is the chassid who must create change.

On Yud Shvat 5711 (1951), the Lubavitcher Rebbe zy”a, in his inaugural farbrengen, expressed the following thoughts. “The Rebbes of Chabad demanded that their chassidim take personal action; not to rely on the Rebbe...if I am able to help, I will certainly help. We can work together. There is no one else to rely on. It’s in your hands...”

Rabbi Y.Y. Meir Kalish zy”a, the previous Rebbe of Amshinov, was known to patiently and lovingly guide those who came to seek his help, to discover their own solutions. Though he could have surely offered them the best advice, he chose, rather, to help them help themselves. Ultimately, he knew, this would be best for them.

Coaching:

The coaching model mirrors the methods of guidance used in the above mentioned models. In coaching, through active listening and empathetic coaching, the client is guided towards independent thinking and ultimate success. When a person makes his own plan, he feels empowered and is much more likely to buy into it and work to follow through with it. The coach

does not focus on the client's shortcomings or failures. He focuses on the strengths, successes and resources of his client.

In "Coaching Plain and Simple", the following analogy is given: Awareness is similar to the beam of a flashlight. Whatever the beam shines on will become illuminated. Often, a client comes to a coach with his "flashlight" focused on the problem. Everything else is dark. With the help of the coach, the beam is widened and what was dark before, now becomes more visible and clearer. Expanded awareness leads to expanded choices and increased self confidence. The coachee becomes aware of possibilities he did not see before. "Coaching always aims at helping someone to help themselves." (ibid. p.7)

Education:

The coaching model can also be applied to the field of education.

"Lo o'seem Talmud Chacham b'ones." "A scholar is not created by force." True success in education is teaching a child how to learn and motivating him so that he will want to continue learning in the future.

Dr. William Glasser, psychiatrist and author, developed standards of education and motivation for schools. "Quality Schools", as they are called, are based on these standards. It is a revolutionary approach to educating children. It teaches that internal motivation is fostered in both the teachers and the students by exploring ways to make the information being taught/learned, relevant. This is done in a warm, non coercive atmosphere. They are encouraged to find methods of doing things better. As the saying goes, "in the race for quality, there's no finish line!"

Dr. Glasser, in his books on Reality Therapy, explains that the student/coachee can be asked the following questions in order to help them clarify their goals: What do you want? What are you doing to get it? Is it working? If not, what can you do instead? They are not told what to do, command and control style. Rather, they are invited to be an integral part of the process.

There are five core conditions for quality, as taught by Dr. Glasser: Quality is...

1. only obtained in a warm, friendly atmosphere.

2. always useful and constructive.
3. the best that you can achieve at any particular time.
4. never static. Quality can constantly be improved.
5. going to make you feel great! When you've done something that you value as being your quality work, it always feels good!

As is evident, these are basically the core conditions for successful coaching.

A key component of successful coaching is the awareness of the profound impact a coach can make on the lives of others. By way of illustration, a story is told of a little boy walking along the shore. Thousands of starfish lay on the sand, dehydrated from the heat of the day. He picked up each starfish as he went, tossing it back into the ocean. A passerby called out, "little boy, why are you bothering? Don't you see how many starfish are lying all around the beach? Do you really think you are making a difference? The boy bent down, reached for a starfish and proudly tossed it into the sea. "I just made a world of a difference to that one!"

It is my fervent hope that I will successfully implement all that I have learned, so that I, like the little boy, can really make a difference.