Criticism: Can you give it? Can you take it?

Leviticus 19:17

Do not hate your brother in your heart; you shall surely rebuke your neighbor and don’t carry his sin.

YOUR TALMUD NAVIGATOR

Now that you know what the verse means, see how the Talmud deals with the issue of criticizing with sensitivity.

Babylonian Talmud, Erchin 16b

The Rabbis taught, "Do not hate your brother in your heart." Might the verse be referring to not hitting, slapping or hurting? No, the verse states, "in your heart." The verse is referring to hatred from within. From which verse do we know that if we see something disgusting in another we are obliged to correct it? "...one shall certainly rebuke..." What happens if one was rebuked and did not respond that you are obliged to repeat? [The word rebuke is repeated in the verse] It is written, "You shall certainly rebuke." As much as it takes. Maybe one can rebuke until the person blanches? The verse states,

Don't carry his sin.

It was taught that Rabbi Tarfon said, "I would be surprised if anyone in this generation can take rebuke. You tell a person to take a stick out of their mouth and they'll tell you to take a board between your eyes." Rabbi Eliezer Ben Azarya said, "I'd be surprised if anyone in this generation knows how to criticize."

Rabbi Yochanan Ben Nuri said, "I swear that when Akiva and I were before Rabbi Gamliel, I would accuse him, but he even showered me more with love, as it is written "Do not rebuke a fool for he will hate you, rebuke a wise person and he will love you."

YOUR NAVIGATOR AGAIN

There are Talmudic sages that find criticizing difficult. What is the necessary pre-requisite for being able to grow from criticism and why?
Telling Someone They Did Wrong--And You're Wrong

YOUR NAVIGATOR

I think we could use an example of a successful act of criticism that actually worked. Once again, read the following selection from I Samuel Chapter one paying close attention to verses 13-17. How does Hannah handle Eli? How does Eli respond?

Tanach - Samuel I Chapter 1

1. And there was a certain man of Ramathaim-Zophim, of Mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite;
2. And he had two wives; the name of the one was Hanna, and the name of the other Peninna; and Peninna had children, but Hanna had no children.
3. And this man went out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there.
4. And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninna his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions;
5. But to Hanna he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hanna; but the Lord had closed her womb.
6. And her adversary also provoked her bitterly, to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb.
7. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat.
8. Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hanna, why do you weep? and why do you not eat? and why is your heart grieved? am I not better to you than ten sons?
9. So Hanna rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drank. And Eli the priest sat upon a seat by the gate post of the temple of the Lord.
10. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly.
11. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your maidservant, and remember me, and not forget your maidservant, but will give to your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.
12. And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli observed her mouth.
13. And Hanna spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought that she was drunk.
14. And Eli said to her, How long will you be drunk? Put away your wine from you.
15. And Hanna answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord.
16. Take not your maidservant for a worthless woman; for out of my great complaint and grief have I been speaking.
17. Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant you the petition that you have asked of him.
18. And she said, Let your maidservant find grace in your sight. So the woman went her way, and ate, and her countenance was sad no more.
19. And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah; and Elkanah knew Hanna his wife; and the Lord remembered her.
20. And it came to pass, in due course, that Hanna conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him from the Lord.

YOUR NAVIGATOR
Now the Talmud is going to give its reading of what Hannah meant when she spoke to Eli. What does the Talmud do to Hannah's voice in the story? What lessons does the Talmud learn and what do we learn about giving criticism?

Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Brachot 31A-B

Rabbi Hamnuna said: There are so many important guidelines to be learned from the verses about Hannah...

Eli said to her, 'How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Sober up!' Rabbi Eleazar said: From here we learn that one who sees a companion doing
something inappropriate must let them know (rebuke them).

**And Hannah replied, 'Oh no, my lord!'**... Some [rabbis] teach that she said to him: "You are not a lord -- the shechina (divine presence on earth) and holy spirit are not with you -- considering that you judged me guilty rather than judging me favorably." **I am a very unhappy woman. I have drunk no wine or other strong drink.** From here we learn that someone who is wrongfully suspected must clear themselves...

"Then go in peace," said Eli. Rabbi Eleazar said: from here we learn that one who wrongfully suspects a companion must appease them and not only that, but must also bless them: **and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked.**

1) **What guidelines do the rabbis learn from the verses about Hanna?**

2) **If you suspect that a friend is carrying out self-destructive behavior, what is an appropriate course of action?**

**YOUR NAVIGATOR FOR THE LAST TIME**

In leadership it is the personal interactions that will sustain your credibility. The more you love the people you serve and not the position you have, the more effective you will be.

How will you become a person whose criticism is trusted and how will you become a person who can trust criticism? Look at Hannah, and look at Rabbi Akiva. These are both models of integrity.