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**Have you met Debbie Downer?  
(How to gently help her climb out of the dumps)**

Have you ever met “Debbie Downer”? She’s an ever present friend that always seems to have something negative to say. Some reason why it won’t work, why it’s not for you, why you should just give up.

You: “Wow. That dress is stunning!”

DD: “What? That one? The size minus 2. It looks like it’s cut for a doll. They probably won’t even have it in your size. And even if they do it will probably be tight in all the wrong places. By the time you get it back from the seamstress it will be out of season. And it’s not even on sale. Are you ready for another mortgage? It’s like they know which dresses from women need so they can make them ridiculously expensive. You should probably just check Next’s website instead. They might have something by now. But they probably won’t. Oh well, another season with your old wardrobe. What can you do? Can’t win them all.”

You: “Oh. Never mind. You’re probably right. Let’s just get some fro-yo.”

Could you imagine if someone like that followed you around all day long. At home. At work. At the park. Always creating self-doubt and pointing out failures?

I can. Because DD and I have spent a lot of time together. And you’ve probably spent a lot of time with her as well.

Many of us have a DD that lives in a prime locale in our mind. She sits in a comfy armchair and second guesses everything we do. She patiently and methodically explains to you why your husband probably hates you, why you are ruining your children, and why you’ll always be bad at your job. Some of you may have been fortunate enough to only have brief interactions with her. Some of you may have managed to silence her. With skill, I want to teach you how she can become a friend and a resource.

As a coach, and let’s be honest, a perfectionist, I am always on the search, trying to understand why self-help programs sound so good but often don’t achieve the desired effects when applied. Brilliant educators who have earnestly put together incredible content can often have clients walk away defeated, not having succeeded in putting their programs into effect.

I’ve come to an insight as to why that might be happening.

The secret missing piece is....compassion.

Trying to sell someone on the importance of compassion is like trying to convince someone that they should drink water every once in a while. We all know compassion is good. We’ve heard it ever since we were little girls. It is one of Hashem’s middos.

The problem is that we overlook it in our day to day lives, and tend to act callously instead. We all would love to work on being more compassionate but most of us are too busy putting out bigger fires. We struggle with being mechanech our kids, with honoring our parents, appreciating our spouse, taking care of ourselves! Who has time to deal with a nice middah when we are so busy trying to just stay afloat.

Imagine if someone taught you how to drive a stick shift car without teaching you about the clutch. You can practice driving a stick shift car for hours on end but if you don't step on the clutch the car will inevitably sputter to a halt. Self-help can be like that as well. Without compassion you'll never see what you can accomplish.

This was something that I learned over the many years of taking a dozen self-help courses and having read dozens of books. I knew the steps of many of these widely acclaimed programs by heart, but I could not get them to create the big changes I was looking for in my life. I didn't know if the problem was with me or with the approach I was learning.

Over the next few weeks I will be bringing compassion to your inbox. We are in the midst of the three weeks, a time when baseless hatred and a judging gaze are on all of our minds. I want to show you how compassion can finally shift the way you view the world. This means compassion for yourself, compassion for others, and even how compassion can allow you to be an agent of change when there is conflict around you.

Learning compassion rewrites our internal dialogue, and the way we speak to ourselves, the world and others. Compassion allows you to tune in, and get present and connected, like a massage or a good bar of chocolate, but for your soul. You'll see how it gets you connected to your values and showing up in relationships the way you really want to.

Let's come back to DD, our inner critic. The nagging, cynical voice inside of us that pushes us to leave projects half-finished, friendships in limbo, and assures we don't feel too good about anything we may have accomplished. Whatever it is, the voice assures us it was probably a mistake to begin with. A strong inner critic can smother you.

We have been taught that when something doesn't serve you, you fight against it. Many of us have been trained that the way to make it past the inner critic is by pushing harder and tuning out her voice. We are going to show that inner critic who is boss. We'll go to war against it. The problem with wars is that they require a lot of resources. When we are in a war, our creativity dies. We hit a brick wall. We're too busy trying to go to battle against ourselves.

The stronger we push the inner critic down, the more exhausted we become, living in a state of struggle. Until, eventually exhausted, we loosen our grip, to see her surface again, proving our inability to get anything right.

What if there is something more powerful, and less painful, than fighting?

When we learn to give ourselves compassion, we hear the inner critic and show it that we don't have to quit because we have flaws. It replaces the inner critic with a voice that allows us to just BE. We understand the risks, but we have the compassion for ourselves and others to know

that trying is better than quitting. We allow ourselves the freedom to try without judgment. To fail without being a failure. And down that path is the surest way to success.

When we are able to hear our compassionate voice we become even more effective and powerful. Compassion allows us to explore possibilities and to open up and allow ourselves to flow once again.

The critic stops us in our tracks, and shows us a world in which everything is a threat and a danger, it makes us see ourselves as a threat to our own safety. You may have even developed such a powerful inner critic in the first place in order to keep you safe from a world you found threatening. That voice may have been there to get you to stop short before you put yourself out there and exposed yourself to deep hurt.

As adults we get to replace that maladaptive defense mechanism with a more evolved one.

The compassionate voice keeps us safe in a totally different way, it shows us how to say YES to the world but in a safe way. It allows us to say YES to ourselves and our relationships while staying safe. The inner critic just says NO. The compassionate voice opens us up to possibility, it connects us with our infinite potential and essence,

As we grow more confident in our compassion, we no longer feel threatened by DD. She will do her thing, give voice to dangers that may be lurking around the corner, and our compassionate voice will hear what she has to say without judging it. Tapping into our well of compassion, we can find confidence in feeling loved and understanding that we can never be perfect. We can thank DD for her insights and make bold, powerful, and compassionate moves forward.

This month you can look forward to episodes that will include exercises on how to make these ideas practical and apply them to your life, as well as meditations to connect you to your compassion when you're not feeling it. May we all merit to see the change in how we view ourselves and others and zocheh to see the Bais Hamikdash rebuilt speedily in our days.

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