

Loving Rebuke

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1. R. Levi Yitzhak, A Blessing on Account of Rebuke

One day, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak entered the House of Study in Berdichev. At the pulpit was a guest preacher, one of the wandering *maggidim* who made their living speaking in one town after another. Levi Yitzhak listened to the preacher enumerate the failings of the Jews, giving a vivid account of their sins and unworthiness. When the sermon was over, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak lifted his eyes in prayer. "Master of the Universe," he called, "please give this man money!" The parishioners next to Rabbi Levi Yitzhak looked at him in shock. Their rabbi was praising such a *maggid*? Their Levi Yitzhak, famous as the compassionate defender of the Jewish people? Rabbi Levi Yitzhak continued his prayer. "Obviously, Almighty, this preacher needs the few coins he is given for these bitter sermons. I beg You, please give him some other source of income, so he will no longer need to chastise Your children!"

2. Leviticus 19:11-18

17. You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall surely rebuke your neighbor, you shall not bear sin on his account.
18. You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.

ויקרא פרק יט

(ז) לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך הוֹכַח תוֹכִיחַ
את עֲמִיתְךָ וְלֹא תשא עָלָיו חֲטָא:
(יח) לא תקם וְלֹא תטור את בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ וְאֶהְבֶּת
לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךְ אֲנִי יְקוּק:

3. BT Bava Metziah 31a

One of the rabbis said to Rava: Perhaps *hokheah* means to rebuke the other once and *tokhiah* means to rebuke the other twice. He answered: *Hokheah* means to rebuke him even a hundred times! As for *tokhiah*, I only know that the master must rebuke the student. Where do we know that the student must rebuke the master? From *hokheah tokhiah*, implying under all circumstances.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא מציעא דף לא עמוד א

אמר ליה הווא מדרבנן לרבא: ואימא הוכח -
חדא זימנא, תוכיח - תרי זמני? אמר ליה:
הוכח - אפילו מאה פעמים משמע, תוכיח -
אין לי אלא הרב לתלמיד, תלמיד לרב מנין -
תלמוד לומר הוכח תוכיח מכל מקום.

4. BT Shabbat 31a

R. Zera said to R. Simeon, Let the Master rebuke the members of the Resh Galutha's suite. R. Simeon said: They will not accept it from me. Said R. Zera: Though they will not accept it, you should nevertheless rebuke them. For R. Aha b. R. Hanina said: ...The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the angel Gabriel, Go and set a sign of ink upon the foreheads of the righteous, that the destroying angels may have no power over them; and a sign of blood upon the foreheads of the wicked, that the destroying angels may have power over them. Said the Attribute of Justice before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Sovereign of the Universe! Wherein are these different from those?' Said the Holy One: 'Those are completely righteous men, while these are completely wicked.' The Attribute of Justice retorted, 'Sovereign of the Universe, they had the power to protest but did not.' Said the Holy One: 'It was fully known to Me that had they protested they would not have heeded them.' The Attributed of Justice replied once again, 'Sovereign of the Universe, if it was revealed to You, was it revealed to them?' ... The Holy One, blessed be He, spoke thus to the destroying angels; 'Commence [destruction] from the place where song is uttered before Me.'

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף נה עמוד א

אמר ליה רבי זירא לרבי סימון: לוכחינהו מר
להני דבי ריש גלותא. אמר ליה: לא מקבלי
מינאי. אמר ליה: אף על גב דלא מקבלי -
לוכחינהו מר, דאמר רבי אחא ברבי חנינא: ...
אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לגבריאל: לך
ורשום על מצחן של צדיקים תיו של דיו,
שלא ישלטו בהם מלאכי חבלה. ועל מצחם
של רשעים תיו של דם, כדי שישלטו בהן
מלאכי חבלה. אמרה מדת הדין לפני הקדוש
ברוך הוא: רבונו של עולם, מה נשתנו אלו
מאלו? אמר לה: הללו צדיקים גמורים, והללו
רשעים גמורים. אמרה לפניו: רבונו של
עולם, היה בידם למחות ולא מיחו! אמר לה:
גלוי וידוע לפני, שאם מיחו בהם - לא יקבלו
מהם. (אמר) +מסורת הש"ס: [אמרה]
לפניו: רבונו של עולם, אם לפניך גלוי - להם
מי גלוי? ... אמר להו הקדוש ברוך הוא:
התחילו ממקום שאומרים שירה לפני.

5. BT Archin 16b

How do we know that if a man sees something unseemly in his neighbor, he is

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ערכין דף טז עמוד ב

מנין לרואה בחבירו דבר מגונה שחייב
להוכיחו? שנאמר: ויקרא "ט"ו הוכח תוכיח,

<p>obligated to reprove him? Because it is said: 'You shall surely rebuke.' If he rebuked him and he did not accept it, how do we know that he must rebuke him again? The text states: 'surely rebuke' all ways. One might assume [this to be obligatory] even though his face blanched (i.e. he was shamed), therefore the text states: 'You will not bear sin because of him'. It was taught [in a Baraitha]: R. Tarfon said, I wonder whether there is anyone in this generation who accepts reproof, for if one says to him: Remove the mote from between your eyes, he would answer: Remove the beam from between your eyes! R. Eleazar b. Azariah said: I wonder if there is one in this generation who knows how to reprove! R. Johanan b. Nuri said: I call heaven and earth to witness for myself that often was Akiba punished through me because I used to complain against him before our Rabban, Gamaliel Beribbi, and all the more he showered love upon me, to make true what has been said: 'Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate you; reprove a wise man and he will love you.' [...] How far shall reproof be administered? Rab said: Until he [the reprover] is beaten. Samuel said: Until he is cursed. R. Johanan sad: Until he is rebuked back.</p>	<p>הוכיחו ולא קבל מנין שיחזור ויוכיחנו? תלמוד לומר: תוכיח, מכל מקום; <u>יכול</u> אפי' משתנים פניו? ת"ל: לא תשא עליו חטא. תניא, א"ר טרפון: (תמיהני) + מסורת הש"ס: [תמה] + אני אם יש בדור הזה שמקבל תוכחה, אם אמר לו טול קיסם מבין עיניך, אמר לו טול קורה מבין עיניך. אמר רבי אלעזר בן עזריה: תמיהני אם יש בדור הזה שיודע להוכיח. ואמר רבי יוחנן בן נורי: מעיד אני עלי שמים וארץ שהרבה פעמים לקה עקיבא על ידי, שהייתי קובל עליו לפני רבן (שמעון ברבי) + מסורת הש"ס: [גמליאל] + וכל שכן שהוספתי בו אהבה, לקיים מה שנאמר: <u>משלי ט</u> + 'אל תוכח לץ פן ישנאך הוכח לחכם ויאהבך... עד היכן תוכחה? רב אמר: <u>עד הכאה</u>, ושמואל אמר: עד קללה, ורבי יוחנן אמר: עד נזיפה.</p>
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<p>6. BT Yevamot 65b</p> <p>R. Ile'a stated in the name of R. Eleazar son of R. Simeon: As one is commanded to say that which will be heeded, so is one commanded not to say that which will not be heeded. R. Abba stated: It is a duty; for it is said in Scripture, 'Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate you; reprove a wise man and he will love you' (proverbs 9).</p>	<p><u>תלמוד בבלי מסכת יבמות דף סה עמוד ב</u></p> <p>ואמר רבי אילעא משום ר' אלעזר בר' שמעון: כשם שמצוה על אדם לומר דבר הנשמע, כך מצוה על אדם שלא לומר דבר שאינו נשמע. רבי אבא אומר: חובה, שנאמר: <u>משלי ט</u> + 'אל תוכח לץ פן ישנאך הוכח לחכם ויאהבך'.</p>
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<p><u>7. R. Levi Yitzhak, Rebuke without Rebuke</u></p> <p>Rabbi Levi Yitzhak sent for a wealthy man who lived in his town of Berdichev. When he arrived, the rabbi implored him, "There is a poor man who needs assistance. I have asked all the others to give to a fund for him. But a substantial sum is still needed. I have no one else to ask but you." "Rabbi, it pains me to refuse you. I obey every commandment, every <i>mitzvah</i>. You know that. But I will not give to any of these special causes. In fact, I wish you wouldn't even ask me in the future. That way, I won't be forced to dishonor you by turning you down."</p> <p>Months later, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak was visited by the brother of that wealthy man. The brother, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak learned, was poor, had many children, and now needed money for the marriage of one of his daughters. Naturally, he had asked his wealthy brother for assistance. His brother had turned him down. Rabbi Levi Yitzhak looked at the man a long while. Then he said, "Do not worry. I believe I know what to do."</p> <p>The next day, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak appeared at the wealthy brother's door. When the surprised man escorted the rabbi inside, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak walked to a chair and sat down. He said nothing. Respectfully, the wealthy man stood in front of him, waiting for the rabbi to speak. Rabbi Levi Yitzhak smiled, but did not speak. After a long time, the wealthy man sat down. Even so, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak remained silent. An hour later Rabbi Levi Yitzhak, still smiling, got up and left.</p> <p>The next day, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak appeared again at the wealthy man's door. Again, the wealthy man sat in silence for an entire hour, waiting for the smiling rabbi to speak.</p> <p>The third day, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak appeared once more. He sat silently for another hour then got up to leave. As he rose, the wealthy man said, "I can't bear this, rabbi. Why do you come here and say nothing? And why do you smile the whole time?" Rabbi Levi Yitzhak settled back in his chair. "Our sages say it is a <i>mitzvah</i>, a commandment, to give a rebuke when it will be heeded. And they also say we are commanded <i>not</i> to chastise when it will <i>not</i> have a positive effect.</p> <p>"All these years, my friend, I have fulfilled the first of those commandments many times. But the second one? The people in this town have been eager to hear what I want and to do what I ask. As a result, I have never had the opportunity to fulfill the commandment <i>not</i> to offer a rebuke. So I smile in pleasure at fulfilling a commandment for the first time!"</p> <p>The wealthy man turned red with embarrassment. At last he said, "What is it you wish me to do?" When Rabbi Levi Yitzhak told him, he gave a large sum of money for his brother.</p> <p>As Rabbi Levi Yitzhak left, he smiled.</p>	
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<p><u>8. Rashi (1040-1105), Leviticus 19:17</u></p> <p>"You shall not bear sin on his account" – You should not publicly embarrass him [Hebrew: <i>malbin panim</i>, literally, "make his face grow pale"], in which case you will bear sin on account of him.</p>	<p><u>רש"י ויקרא פרק יט</u></p> <p>(ז) ולא תשא עליו חטא - לא תלבין את פניו ברבים:</p>
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<p><u>9. Ibn Ezra (1089-1164), Leviticus 19:17</u></p> <p>Perhaps you suspect him of something which never occurred, therefore Scripture states, "Do not bear sin on his account," for you might be punished on his account.</p>	<p><u>אבן עזרא ויקרא פרק יט</u></p> <p>הוכח תוכיח שמא תחשדהו בדבר ולא היה כן, וזה טעם ולא תשא עליו חטא, כי עונש יהיה לך בעבורו:</p>
<p><u>10. Rashbam (1080-1160), Leviticus 19:17</u></p> <p>"You shall not hate your neighbor in your heart" – ...Do not hate him in your heart, rather, you must rebuke him for his action, and through it peace will be done.</p>	<p><u>רשב"ם ויקרא פרק יט</u></p> <p>ז) לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך - ...אל תשנאהו בלבבך אלא הוכיח תוכיחהו על מה שעשה ומתוך כך יהיה שלום:</p>
<p><u>11. Ramban (1194-1270), Leviticus 19:17-18</u></p> <p>The verse states: "do not hate your brother in your heart" when he does something to you against your will, but instead you are to reprove him, saying, 'Why did you do thus to me?' and you will not bear sin because of him by covering up your hatred of him in your heart and not telling him, for when you will reprove him he will justify himself before you [so that you will have no cause to hate him], or he will regret his action and admit his sin, and you will forgive him. After that He admonishes [in the following verse] that you are not to take vengeance of him, nor bear a grudge in your heart against him because of what he has done to you, for it is possible that he will not hate him, but yet he will remember in his heart his neighbor's sin against him; therefore He admonishes him that he is to erase his brother's sin and transgression against him from his heart. Following that admonition, He commanded that he love him as himself.</p>	<p><u>רמב"ן ויקרא פרק יט</u></p> <p>יז – יח) אל תשנא את אחיך בלבבך בעשותו לך שלא כרצונך, אבל תוכיחנו מדוע ככה עשית עמדי, ולא תשא עליו חטא לכסות שנאתו בלבבך ולא תגיד לו, כי בהוכיח אותו יתנצל לך, או ישוב ויתודה על חטאו ותכפר לו. ואחרי כן יזהיר שלא תנקום ממנו ולא תטור בלבבך מה שעשה לך, כי יתכן שלא ישנא אותו אבל יזכור החטא בלבו, ולפיכך יזהירנו שימחה פשע אחיו וחטאתו מלבו. ואחרי כן יצוה שיאהב לו כמוהו:</p>
<p><u>12. Maimonides (1138-1204), Hilkhot Deot 6:6-9</u></p> <p>Halacha 6 When one person wrongs another, the latter should not remain silent and despise him... Rather, he is commanded to make the matter known and ask him: "Why did you do this to me?", "Why did you wrong me regarding that matter?" as [Leviticus 19:17] states: "You shall surely admonish your colleague." If, afterwards, [the person who committed the wrong] asks [his colleague] to forgive him, he must do so. A person should not be cruel when forgiving [as implied by Genesis 20:17]: "And Abraham prayed to God..."</p> <p>Halacha 7 It is a mitzvah for a person who sees that his fellow Jew has sinned or is following an improper path [to attempt] to correct his behavior and to inform him that he is causing himself a loss by his evil deeds as [Leviticus 19:17] states: "You shall surely admonish your colleague." A person who rebukes a colleague - whether because of a [wrong committed] against him or because of a matter between his colleague and God - should rebuke him privately. He should speak to him patiently and gently, informing him that he is only making these statements for his colleague's own welfare, to allow him to merit the life of the world to come. If he accepts [the rebuke], it is good; if not, he should rebuke him a second and third time. Indeed, one is obligated to rebuke a colleague who does wrong until the latter strikes him and tells him: "I will not listen." Whoever has the possibility of rebuking [sinners] and fails to do so is considered responsible for that sin, for he had the opportunity to rebuke the [sinners].</p> <p>Halacha 8 At first, a person who admonishes a colleague should not speak to him harshly until he becomes embarrassed as [Leviticus 19:17] states: "[You should]... not bear a sin</p>	<p><u>רמב"ם הלכות דעות פרק ו</u></p> <p>הלכה ו כשיחטא איש לאיש לא ישטמנו וישתוק... אלא מצוה עליו להודיעו ולומר לו למה עשית לי כך וכך ולמה חטאת לי בדבר פלוני, שנאמר הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך, ואם חזר ובקש ממנו למחול לו צריך למחול, ולא יהא המוחל אכזרי שנאמר ויתפלל אברהם אל האלהים. הלכה ז הרואה חברו שחטא או שהלך בדרך לא טובה * מצוה להחזירו למוטב ג' ולהודיעו שהוא חוטא על עצמו במעשיו הרעים שנאמר הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך, המוכיח את חברו בין בדברים שבינו לבינו, בין בדברים שבינו לבין המקום, צריך להוכיחו בינו לבין עצמו, וידבר לו בנחת ובלשון רכה ויודיעו שאינו אומר לו אלא לטובתו להביאו לחיי העולם הבא, אם קיבל ממנו מוטב ואם לאו יוכיחנו פעם שניה ד' ושלישית, וכן תמיד חייב אדם להוכיחו עד שיכהו ה' החוטא ויאמר לו איני שומע, וכל שאפשר בידו למחות ואינו מוחה הוא נתפש בעון אלו כיון שאפשר לו למחות בהם. הלכה ח</p>

because of him." This is what our Sages said: Should you rebuke him to the point that his face changes [color]? The Torah states: "[You should]... not bear a sin because of him." From this, [we learn that] it is forbidden for a person to embarrass a [fellow] Jew. How much more so [is it forbidden to embarrass him] in public. Even though a person who embarrasses a colleague is not [liable for] lashes on account of him, it is a great sin. Our Sages said: "A person who embarrasses a colleague in public does not have a share in the world to come." Therefore, a person should be careful not to embarrass a colleague - whether of great or lesser stature - in public, and not to call him a name which embarrasses him or to relate a matter that brings him shame in his presence. ...

Halacha 9

It is pious behavior if a person who was wronged by a colleague would rather not admonish him or mention the matter at all because the person who wronged him was very boorish or because he was mentally disturbed, [provided] he forgives him totally without bearing any feelings of hate or admonishing him. The Torah is concerned only with those who carry feelings of hate.

המוכיח את חבירו תחלה לא ידבר לו קשות עד שיכלימו שנתאמר ולא תשא עליו חטא, כך אמרו חכמים יכול אתה מוכיחו ופניו משתנות ת"ל ולא תשא עליו חטא, מכאן שאסור לאדם להכלים את ישראל וכל שכן ברבים, אע"פ שהמכלים את חבירו אינו לוקה עליו עון גדול הוא, כך אמרו חכמים המלבין פני חבירו ברבים אין לו חלק לעולם הבא, לפיכך צריך אדם להזהר שלא לבייש חבירו ברבים בין קטן בין גדול, ולא יקרא לו בשם שהוא בוש ממנו... הלכה ט
מי שחטא עליו חבירו ולא רצה להוכיחו ולא לדבר לו כלום מפני שהיה החוטא הדיוט ביותר, או שהיתה דעתו משובשת, ומחל לו בלבו ולא שטמו ולא הוכיחו הרי זו מדת חסידות לא הקפידה תורה אלא על המשטמה .

13. R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Be Within, Stay Above*, edited by Tzvi Freeman, pp. 154-156

Appropriate Criticizing

Criticizing another person is not out of the question, it's just that there are a few conditions to attend to before you start: First, make sure this person is your close friend. Those are the only people worth criticizing – not just because they may actually listen, but also since you run a lower risk of making them into your sworn enemies.

If this person is not yet your close friend, you'll need to spend some time with him, finding out everything that's good about him and going out of your way to help him out until a real friendship develops.

Also, you'll need to ensure that this person has the same knowledge, understanding and perspective of right and wrong as you do before you can attack his decisions. If he doesn't, you'll need to spend some time learning and discussing together until you see each other's point of view.

Once the two of you are in the same space in Torah and observance of *mitzvos*, and he's your good friend to boot, then it's okay to criticize – if necessary. And if you can remember what there was to criticize.

If you have not yet succeeded in fulfilling the criteria mentioned above, yet still feel a necessity to provide criticism, there is an alternative:

Sit and criticize yourself, very hard, from the bottom of your heart, until the other person hears.

If it comes from your heart, it will enter his as well.

14. Bereshit Rabbah 54:3

"And Abraham Rebuked Avimelech" (Genesis 21:25) – R. Jose b. R. Hanina said: Rebuke leads to love, as it says, 'Reprove a wise man, and he will love you' (Prov. 9:8). Such indeed is R. Jose b. Hanina's view, for he said: Love unaccompanied by reproof is not love. Resh Lakish said: Rebuke leads to peace; hence, 'And Abraham rebuked Avimelech' [leading to an oath of peace]. Such is his view, for he said: Peace unaccompanied by reproof is not peace.

בראשית רבה (וילנא) פרשת וירא פרשה נד

ג והוכיח אברהם את אבימלך וגו', א"ר יוסי בר חנינא התוכחת מביאה לידי אהבה, שנאמר (משלי ט) הוכח לחכם ויאהבך, היא דעתיה דרבי יוסי בר חנינא דאמר כל אהבה שאין עמה תוכחה אינה אהבה, אמר ריש לקיש תוכחה מביאה לידי שלום, והוכיח אברהם את אבימלך, היא דעתיה דאמר כל שלום שאין עמו תוכחה אינו שלום

15. Agra deKallah

When the Maggid Rabbi Yehiel Mikhal of Zlotchov [18th – 19th cent.] used to preach and admonish the folk, he would cover his face and turning toward the Ark would say, "Master of the universe, lo, your folk are perfect and worthy, and eager to do your will. Now the reason why I am speaking against them is for the sake of the honor of your Name – that they be even stronger in keeping your commandments."