

“Tough-Love” – The Mitzvah of Rebuke

"הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת-עַמִּיתְךָ"

There is a mitzvah – a positive, Biblical commandment – to give rebuke. This mitzvah, in a very basic sense, really stands as a basis for living life properly. How so?

People make mistakes. If no one alerts them to their errors, they're likely to continue with their mistakes, and, over time, it may become increasingly difficult to turn themselves around. If, however, the mitzvah of rebuke is fulfilled properly – that is, the giver approaches the situation with knowledge and care, and the receiver welcomes the reprove – then everyone wins!

We can compare the mitzvah of rebuke to that of one's sense of pain. An individual whose pain-receptors are not functioning properly is in serious danger of getting hurt – he may put his hand in the fire, and not even realize that it's being burnt! A healthy individual, on the other hand, senses the heat, and removes his hand in time. Similarly, one who bends his ears to wise words of rebuke, is a truly healthy individual.

In this session, we'll explore the following topics:

- Under what circumstances does the mitzvah of rebuke apply?
- Is there a distinction between rebuking an individual, as opposed to a group?
- What if the one receiving the rebuke is not going to listen?
- How many times does one have to offer rebuke?
- What should one's intentions be for fulfilling this mitzvah?

1 – THE BASICS

Source 1- Vayikra 19:17 - Basic Verse

You shall not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your brother, but incur no guilt because of him.	לֹא־תִשְׂנֵא אֶת־אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת־ עַמִּיתְךָ וְלֹא־תִשְׂא עָלָיו חֲטָא:
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The commentators explain a very straight-forward reading of this verse: When you see someone you care about doing something wrong, don't just stand there idly and bear ill-feelings (*"Don't hate"*), rather, go and reprimand him (*"Rebuke..."*), and then, by doing so you will not be held accountable for his misdeed (*"incur no guilt..."*).

However, as with every other Mitzvah in the Torah, there's *much* more to say about this concept of 'rebuke'.

The Talmud discusses this Mitzvah in numerous places, and it will require a solid amount of good ol' fashioned thinking and hard-work to piece all the sources together.

Our puzzle will have 3 pieces (i.e. 3 sources in the Talmud).

Your assignment: put the puzzle together in to a beautiful picture!

2 – THE PUZZLE

Puzzle-Piece #1 – “Relentless Rebuke!”

Source 2 – Erchin 16b – Again & Again!

From where do we know that one who sees his fellow doing something wrong, that he's obligated to rebuke him? For, as it says in the verse “You shall reprove.” (Let's say) he's rebuked once, and he (the rebukee) did not listen, how do we know he should go back and rebuke him again? As it says <i>“tochiach”</i> (i.e. the double-language of the verse).	מנין לרואה בחבירו דבר מגונה שחייב להוכיחו שנאמר (ויקרא יט) הוכח תוכיח הוכיחו ולא קבל מנין שיחזור ויוכיחנו תלמוד לומר תוכיח מכל מקום
What are the parameters of 'rebuke'? Rav says until he hits you. Shmuel says until he curses you. R' Yochanan says until he embarrasses you...	עד היכן תוכחה רב אמר עד הכאה ושמואל אמר עד קללה ורבי יוחנן אמר עד נזיפה

The repetitious language of a word (for example: “הוכיח תוכיח”) is commonly expounded to give extra emphasis. So too here: “הוכיח תוכיח” implies ‘don't just rebuke once, keep going and going...even until the ‘rebukee’ is on the verge of hitting or cursing you!’

This is the first piece of the puzzle. On the other hand...

Puzzle-Piece #2 – “Know When to Keep Quiet”

Source 3 – Yevamos 65b– Know When to Keep Quiet

<p>R' Ilaa said in the name of R' Elazar, the son of R' Shimon: just as people are commanded to say what will be listened to, they are commanded not to say what will not be listened to.</p> <p>R' Abba said: this is an obligation, as the verse says “<i>Do not rebuke a fool lest he hate you; but rebuke a wise person and he will love you</i>” (Proverbs 9:8).</p> <p>Rashi, “to say what will be listened to” – As is says in the verse “<i>Hocheiach tochiach</i>”, that is to say, to rebuke he who will receive it.</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</p> <p>רבי אבא אומר חובה שנאמר (משלי ט) אל תוכח לץ פן ישנאך הוכח לחכם ויאהבך</p> <p>רש"י "לומר דבר הנשמע" – דכתיב הוכיח תוכיח להוכיח מי שמקבל הימנו</p>
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Rashi explains that the Mitzvah of rebuke **only** applies if the listener will (or may, at least) accept the rebuke. If, however, one ascertains that the reprimand will not be accepted, then he *must* keep quiet.

This, of course, sounds diametrically opposed to the concept of rebuking 100 times until he chases you out the door! This problem is compounded when we note that the source for these 2 seemingly contradictory concepts is the exact same words: “הוכיח תוכיח”!!

This is the second piece of the puzzle. On the other hand...

Puzzle Piece #3 – G-d Only Knows

Source 4 – Shabbos 55a – Only G-d Knows

<p>R' Zeira said to R' Simon “Master, go rebuke those members of the Reish Galusa”.¹ He responded “They won’t listen to me.” He retorted “Even though they won’t listen to you, you should rebuke them”,</p> <p>For R. Acha b. R. Chanina said: Never did a favourable word go forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, of which He retracted for evil, except the following, where it is written, “<i>And Hashem said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof, etc.</i>” (the Gemara explains):</p> <p>The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Gabriel, Go and set a mark of ink upon the foreheads of the</p>	<p>א"ל ר' זירא לר' סימון לוכחינהו מר להני דבי ריש גלותא א"ל לא מקבלי מינאי א"ל אע"ג דלא מקבלי לוכחינהו מר</p> <p>דא"ר אחא בר' חנינא מעולם לא יצתה מדה טובה מפי הקב"ה וחזר בה לרעה חוץ מדבר זה דכתיב (יחזקאל ט) "ויאמר ה' אליו עבור בתוך העיר בתוך ירושלים והתית תיו על מצחות האנשים הנאנחים והנאנקים על כל התועבות הנעשות בתוכה וגל"</p>
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¹ The leaders of the Jewish people who were exiled to Babylon, who themselves were Jewish

<p>righteous, so that the destroying angels may have no power over them; and a mark of blood upon the foreheads of the wicked, so 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! How are these different from those?' 'Those are completely righteous men, while these are completely wicked,' He replied. 'Master of the Universe!' it continued, 'they had the power to protest but did not.' (Hashem responded) 'It was fully known to me that had they protested they would not have heeded them.' Master of the Universe! said he, 'If it was revealed to You, was it revealed to them?!?' Hence it is written, <i>"Slay the old man, the young and the maiden, and little children and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my Sanctuary [mikdash]."</i> Then they began at the elders which were before the house.</p>	<p>א"ל הקב"ה לגבריא"ל 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 הקב"ה רבש"ע מה נשתנו אלו מאלו אמר לה הללו צדיקים גמורים והללו רשעים גמורים אמרה לפניו רבש"ע היא בידם למחות ולא מיחו אמר לה גלוי וידוע לפני שאם מיחו בהם לא יקבלו מהם אמר לפניו רבש"ע אם לפניך גלוי להם מי גלוי והיינו דכתיב (יחזקאל ט) <i>"זקן בחור ובתולה טף ונשים תהרגו למשחית ועל כל איש אשר עליו התיו אל תגשו וממקדשי תחלו"</i> וכתיב <i>"ויחלו באנשים הזקנים אשר לפני הבית"</i></p>
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This is a very dramatic story: the righteous people of Jerusalem were punished for not admonishing the “wicked ones”.

Here, the Gemara seems to rule definitively: give rebuke, even if you *know* they’re not going to listen!

What’s going on here? When does the Mitzvah of rebuke apply exactly; if he’s *going* to listen, if he’s *not*? 0 times, 100 times? How are we going to piece this together?!?

What do you think?

How would you suggest to resolve these 3 sources?

It may be helpful to lay out the 3 sources in front of us, to begin to think about what each scenario is uniquely discussing (feel free to fill-in the chart):

	<u>What is this referring to?</u>	<u>Why is this true?</u>
<u>Puzzle Piece #1</u> “Relentless Rebuke”		
<u>Puzzle Piece #2</u> “Know When to Keep Quiet”		
<u>Puzzle Piece #3</u> “G-d Only Knows”		

4 – THE CHART OF THE GREAT SAGE

The Nemukei Yosef, R' Yosef Chaviva (early 15th century), addressed this puzzle some 600 years ago. His resolution to these seemingly contradictory statements of the Talmud serves as the basis for the practical halacha, as outlined in the Shulchan Aruch, Ohr Chaim section 608:2.

Source 5 – Nemukei Yosef, Yevamos 65b – Individual vs Group

<p>To he will listen, there's a mitzvah (of rebuke), as it says "You shall surely rebuke" – even 100 times, but, to he who will not receive the rebuke, there's a mitzvah, and even an obligation, not to rebuke him.</p> <p>The great sages have challenged from that which it says in Erchin (16b), namely, that one is obligated to rebuke even so far as until the receiver hits or curses.</p> <p>(The answer is) that's referring to an individual, whereas here (Yevamos 65b) is referring to a group.</p> <p>And that which is says in Shabbos (55a) "Master, go rebuke those members of the Reish Galsua", and he responded "They won't listen to me." And he retorted "Even though they won't listen to you, you should rebuke them", that's referring to a case where he'd not yet rebuked them at all, rather, he assessed that they'd likely not listen. Therefore, since there still was a possibility that perhaps they'd listen (he was instructed to rebuke). Alternatively, in order that they (the Reish Galusa) should not have grounds for justification, he was obligated to at least rebuke them once.</p>	<p>למי שמקבל מצוה דכתיב הוכח תוכיח אפי' מאה פעמים אבל למי שאינו מקבל מצוה וחובה שלא להוכיחו.</p> <p>והקשו ז"ל מהא דאמרינן במסכת ערכין (זט:) שחייב להוכיח עד שיכנו או יקקלנו.</p> <p>התם ביחיד אבל לרבים לא.</p> <p>והא דאמרינן במסכת שבת (נה.) לוכחינהו מר להני דבי ריש גלותא ואמר לא מקבלי מינאי ואמרינן אפילו הכי לוכחינהו מר התם הוא שלא הוכיחם כלל אלא שהיה מכיר בהם שלא ישמעו ומשום דאולי ישמעו או משום שלא יהיה להם פתחון פה היה חייב להוכיח לפחות פעם אחת.</p>
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To summarize, the Nemukei Yosef's chart looks like this:

	<u>What</u> is this referring to? (In what way does this qualify the parameters of the Mitzvah of 'rebuke'?)	<u>Why</u> is this true? (Explain/justify the reasoning behind this particular rule)
<u>Puzzle Piece #1</u> "Relentless Rebuke"	An individual	?? (Doesn't explain)
<u>Puzzle Piece #2</u> "Know When to Keep Quiet"	A group, which has been reprimanded at least once	?? (Doesn't explain)
<u>Puzzle Piece #3</u> "G-d Only Knows"	A group, which has not yet been reprimanded	1. Maybe, just maybe, they'll listen 2. So there shouldn't be room for justification ("פתחון פה")

1. Individual vs Group

How do we understand this difference? Why should the attempt for rebuke be given repeatedly to an individual, whereas by a group one should promptly keep quiet?

What do you think??

Answer: by an individual, through persistent, loving rebuke, the idea may indeed eventually penetrate. In a group setting, however, the sociological-laws of ‘group mentality’ dictate that each individual in the group strengthens the others behavior. More specifically, in this context, their misdeeds.

In other words: the social pressure of the group makes any attempts for rebuke almost certain to fall on deaf ears.²

2. Justification (“פתחון פה”)

The Nemukei Yosef presents an interesting idea: Even in a group context, where one assesses that his admonishment will certainly fall on deaf ears, even still, he should speak up once. Why? So that the group will not have a “פתחון פה” (lit. “*opening of the mouth*”) – an excuse or justification.

What does this mean? If there’s no benefit to the group of ‘transgressors’ – since they simply won’t listen – so then why should we be concerned about this element of ‘justification’?

What do you think??

Answer: true, there’s no benefit for the ones *receiving* the rebuke. There is, however, a benefit to the one *giving* the rebuke: so that there can be no claim against him, that, in his silence, he was indicating some degree of approval for the group’s misbehavior. Instead, in order to conclusively show his disapprobation, he should voice his opinion once, so as to vindicate himself of any degree of wrong-doing.³

² כן הסביר לי מו"ר הגרש"מ שליט"א, וכן מצאתי אה"כ בתורה תמימה על הפסוק "הוכיח תוכיח"
³ כן הסביר לי מו"ר הגרש"מ שליט"א, וכן כתוב בספר "לרעך כמוך" חלק מצות תוכחה פ"א ס"ק ס"ב. ע"ש שהסביר גם "פתחון פה" באופנים אחרים

5 – ADDITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Before we role-up our sleeves and go out on a holy rebuke-campaign, there's a few more 'rules-of-rebuke' ("ROR") that we need to know in order to fulfill this Mitzvah properly:

ROR #1 – Don't Embarrass!

Source 6. Erchin 16b – Just don't embarrass

<p>From where do we know that one who sees his fellow doing something wrong, that he's obligated to rebuke him? For, as it says in the verse "<i>You shall reprove.</i>" (Let's say) he's rebuked once, and he did not listen, how do we know he should go back and rebuke him again? As it says "<i>tochiach</i>" (i.e. the double-language of the verse). Perhaps (one should rebuke) even so far as to the point where his face changes color (i.e. he's embarrassed)? To that, the verse concludes "Don't bring upon him a sin."</p>	<p>מנין לרואה בחבירו דבר מגונה שחייב להוכיחו שנאמר (ויקרא יט) הוכח תוכיח הוכיחו ולא קבל מנין שיחזור ויוכיחנו תלמוד לומר תוכיח מכל מקום יכול אפילו משתנים פניו ת"ל לא תשא עליו חטא</p>
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The words "and don't bear upon him a sin" qualify the extent of ones rebuke: just make sure not to embarrass the recipient.

ROR #2 – Correct Intentions

Source 6 – Erchin 16b– A Good Rebuker (hard to find!)

<p>It's taught in a Baraisa: R' Tarfon said "I'd be astounded if there's anyone in this generation who can receive rebuke." (for example, say) Someone told another "Take the splinter from between your teeth," He'll respond "Take the beam from between your eyes!"</p> <p>R' Elazar, the son of Azaria, said "I'd be astounded if there's anyone in this generation who knows how to give rebuke!"</p> <p>R' Yochanan, the son of Nuri, said "The heavens & earth will give testimony about me, that on many occasions Akiva was reprimanded by me, in so far as the fact that I would rebuke him in front of R' Shimon ben Gamliel. Moreover, I actually increased feelings of love, as a fulfillment of that which the verse says "<i>Do not rebuke a fool lest he hate you; but rebuke a wise person and he will love you</i>" (Pr 9:8).</p>	<p>תניא א"ר טרפון תמיהני אם יש בדור הזה שמקבל תוכחה אם אמר לו טול קיסם מבין שיניך אמר לו טול קורה מבין עיניך</p> <p>אמר רבי אלעזר בן עזריה תמיהני אם יש בדור הזה שיודע להוכיח</p> <p>ואמר רבי יוחנן בן נורי מעיד אני עלי שמים וארץ שהרבה פעמים לקה עקיבא על ידי שהייתי קובל עליו לפני רבן שמעון ברבי גמליאל] וכל שכן שהוספתי בו אהבה לקיים מה שנאמר (משלי ט) אל תוכח לץ פן ישנאך הוכח לחכם ויאהבך</p>
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Already in the times of the great Sages of Israel, 2000 years ago, the Talmud testifies to the fact that it's difficult to come across individuals who can really deal with the mitzvah of rebuke

properly. We can easily understand why *receiving* the rebuke may be difficult (it stings!), but what's so difficult about *giving* it?

Chazal teach elsewhere (זוהר, פרשת קדושים דף פה: :) that rebuke which is not given out of ***love and concern for the offender*** is not only ineffective, but, it may even be damaging.⁴ How so? If a person conveys an attitude of "I love you. I care about you. Please stop this misbehavior", the offender may indeed mend his ways. If, however, the feeling which is conveyed is "I'm better than you, and I'm telling you how to behave!", then, not only will such reproof almost certainly not be received, but, the offender will likely be *insulted*, and, therefore, worse-off than he began!

Therefore, one must take a genuine look at his intentions in giving rebuke.

⁴ הסבר זה מצאתי בספר לרעך כמוך חלק מצות תוכחה בקונטרס הביאורים סימן ד'

EXAMPLES

1. Stuart and Dave are buddies that both work in the same business district together. They make an effort to meet up for lunch on Wednesdays. Stuart notices that Dave always has something negative to say about at least one of their co-workers, and, although initially he had let it slide – to let Dave ‘get it off his chest’ – eventually, he realizes that Dave is speaking derogatorily simply for his own enjoyment. One week, Stuart reprimands him “Davey, buddy, you shouldn’t talk trash about people.” It seems to fall on deaf ears.

What should Stuart do the following week?

2. Rabbi Hawk notices that the talking during davening at his shul is getting out of hand, and he knows that he should do something. On the other hand, he’s unclear as to whether his kindest and most genuine efforts, his rebuke will fall on deaf public ears.

Should he lovingly rebuke the congregation nonetheless? How many times?

3. Shlomo and Aaron daven in the same shul together each weekday evening. Shlomo prays behind Aaron, and has noticed on many occasions that upon completing his *Shemona Esreh* Aaron does not take a full 3-steps backwards, but, rather, just sorta shuffles slightly. Shlomo does not want to come across as a “Mr. Goody-2-Shoes”, but he confidently believes that his friend Aaron is doing something which is not in accordance with Halacha, as prescribed in the Shulchan Aruch, Or Chaim 123:3.

How should Shlomo approach this situation??

Advanced

4. Avi’s just been to a Torah class entitled “*Stealing Bases: Contemporary Examples of the Torah Prohibition of Theft*”, where he learned that pirating music off the internet may very likely be considered theft. After the class, Avi excitedly tells Rabbi Crowngold “Wow! I never knew. I’m immediately going to go home and post on facebook that it’s forbidden according to Jewish Law to pirate music illegally!”

Surprisingly, the Rabbi tells him “Avi, not so fast.”

What could possibly be R’ Crowngold’s reason for Avi not to spread the righteous news?