

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael. (1:1)

Rashi explains that the term “these words,” applies to the words of rebuke which Moshe *Rabbeinu* spoke to the Jewish people shortly before he took leave of them. Because the Torah here lists many of the places in which the nation angered Hashem, Moshe put his words vaguely, mentioning the places through intimation, out of respect for the honor of the nation.

Administering rebuke, regardless of its nature, is often a double-edged sword. Rebuke expressed in the wrong manner hurts a person, often causing him irreparable shame. One of the most difficult aspects of rebuke is demonstrating to the subject of the rebuke that the rebuker truly cares about him and that he is chastising him out of concern and love – not animus. Unfortunately, when one is being rebuked he sees only what he hears – negativity. He does not hear the underlying concern for his future, for his betterment.

The *Pele Yoetz* writes: “One must maintain extreme vigilance in the manner that he rebukes, making certain that he does not sustain a personal sin (as a result of his rebuke). He should be careful not to publicly embarrass his friend; rather, he should speak with a soft voice.” This is a tall order, since rebuke is often tendered at a time – or under such circumstances – that the one who rebukes does so under intense pressure, in a public forum, when it is absolutely necessary to take a stand. The result is that the intended rebuke sounds more like an excoriation, a censure, than an act of concern and love. The alternative is to let it go, ignore the situation, thereby allowing the travesty to fester and germinate into an act of malevolence, so that the individual who may have acted foolishly might do so again, only this time it will be a premeditated act of evil. While being brutally honest is often quite difficult, remaining silent is even more so.

Horav Uri, zl, m'Strelishk, was a holy man. He was called the *Saraf m'Strelishk* due to his fiery passion in serving Hashem. He was a primary disciple of *Horav Shlomo Karliner*, a saintly *Rebbe* who inspired his students to serve Hashem with great intensity. Tragically, *Rav Shlomo* died an untimely death at the hands of a crazed Cossack. He was poised in prayer to Hashem when the wild beast, in the guise of a human being, came upon him and murdered him. Right before his holy *neshamah*, soul, left his bloodied body, the *Rebbe* instructed his students to seek inspiration from the *Tzaddik*, *Horav Mordechai, zl, m'Neshchiz*.

Rav Uri was unaware of his *Rebbe's* passing. When he arrived in Karlin to visit his *Rebbe*, he was informed of the bitter news. He wept incessantly and rent his garments as a sign of mourning. He sat on the ground as a mourner, lamenting his *Rebbe*. His close friends, students of *Rav Shlomo*, visited and consoled him. After a while, he asked the other disciples of *Rav Shlomo*, “Did the holy *Rebbe* offer any instructions as to his successor?” They replied that the *Rebbe's* choice was *Rav Mordechai of Neshchiz*.

“If that’s the case, we must go immediately to carry out the *Rebbe's* command.” He immediately arose, gathered his few belongings and left for Neshchiz. *Rav Uri* arrived and immediately

proceeded to the *bais hamedrash* of Rav Mordechai. The room was filled with men from all over, lined up to speak to the holy *Rebbe*. Rav Mordechai listened to the petition of each and gave his response, accompanied by his blessing.

Since the room was packed, no one noticed Rav Uri enter and go to the side. He was amazed at the “variety” of people: rich and poor; professional and simple; intellectual and illiterate; distinguished personages of illustrious lineage and Jews of simple background. They all received the same treatment: a smile; a listening ear; advice and a blessing. Suddenly, a tall, physically impressive man entered. Dressed in the garb of a successful businessman, this man obviously was used to getting whatever he wanted. “Line” to him was something that someone “cut,” which he did, bypassing all those who were waiting patiently to speak with the *Rebbe*. Exhibiting no respect for all those in line, this man walked over to the *Rebbe* and insisted on speaking with him – now!

The *Rebbe* treated this rude individual as he did the others before him, with a smile, a listening heart and a warm blessing. Rav Uri was shocked. “Do not the holy eyes of the *Rebbe* see through this rude, gross man?” Rav Uri wondered. His passion for truth burned fiercely within him. Unable to control himself, he followed the rude man out of the room with the intention of rebuking him in the manner that he deserved. How dare he enter the room of the holy Rav Mordechai and act so disrespectfully towards the people who were also waiting there? Who did he think that he was?”

“Sensing” what was about to transpire, Rav Mordechai raised his voice and said, “Young man! What are you doing here? What is your intention here, coming to a place uninvited? Turn around on your heels until I call for you!” In other words, Rav Mordechai told him in no uncertain terms that one does not come crashing into the *Rebbe*’s room and suddenly “take charge.” Rav Mordechai was eminently capable, and he had a reason for his actions – or non- action.

When Rav Uri heard this declaration, he became visibly depressed and immediately left. He proceeded to the *shul*, where he sat down, dejected and distraught. What should he do now? He was not sure if he had carried out his holy *Rebbe*’s wishes that the *chassidim* should turn to Rav Mordechai for guidance. On the other hand, after what he saw transpire, he was not certain if he wanted to return to Rav Mordechai.

As Rav Uri was sitting in the *shul*, ruminating over the experience and contemplating what action to take, the door suddenly opened and before him stood Rav Mordechai. He immediately stood up at attention out of fear and reverence for the holy Rav Mordechai.

“My son,” Rav Mordechai began, “I know why you came to Neshchiz, and I am aware of what you saw and how much it troubled you. The reason that you are here is that Rav Shlomo instructed you to come to me. Do you know why he sent you here (as opposed to anywhere else)?”

Rav Uri did not know what to say. Indeed, he was bothered by the same question. Why did his *Rebbe* send him to Neshchiz?

Rav Mordechai continued, “Your *Rebbe* sent you here for one purpose: To learn a *derech* in *avodas* Hashem, proper approach toward serving Hashem. Accept this rule: Anyone whose *ahavas* Yisrael, love for all Jews, is not so firmly entrenched in his heart to the point that, even when he sees another Jew committing the most heinous transgression, he is not prepared to embrace and kiss that ‘sinner’ as a brother – then he has not even achieved half of the *avodas Hashem* demanded of a Jew! By doing this (reaching out to the sinner), you bring him closer to Hashem, catalyzing his eventual return. Thus, the one who is stringent and demanding of others ultimately distances Jews from Hashem. He must reach out and embrace them, thereby plucking them from the clutches of *Gehinnom*, Purgatory.”

When *Rav* Uri heard this, he remained silent. He now understood what was apparently missing in his *avodas hakodesh*, and why *Rav* Shlomo had sent him here. He became very close to *Rav* Mordechai, studying from him until his passing, when *Rav* Uri became *Rebbe*.