

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

Chazal teach that Moshe *Rabbeinu's* "words" were actually words of rebuke, veiled in a manner not to embarrass *Klal Yisrael*. *Tochachah*, rebuke, is a *mitzvah*. The Torah teaches in *Vayikra* 19:17, *Hocheach tochiach es amisecha*, "You shall reprove your fellow." This is part of caring about and loving our fellow man. Regrettably, some people get carried away with their performance of this *mitzvah*. While administering rebuke is a *mitzvah*, it is not one that applies to everyone. In other words, not all of us are capable of – or fit the criteria – for an individual who may express reproof to others. As *Duchaning*, Blessing the Jewish People, is a *mitzvah*, but only for *Kohanim*, likewise, rebuking one's fellow man is a *mitzvah* that should be carried out by select individuals.

From the commentaries, one deduces four primary criteria which should be satisfied before an individual assumes the mantle of censoring others. First, will the subject of our critique become embarrassed? Do I really love the person and seek only his betterment? Do I receive any personal benefit from my rebuke? Do I understand the character of the one who I am rebuking – ie, do I know if this rebuke will be helpful – and not detrimental?

Perhaps one factor should be more evident than the rest, because all of the rest hinge on this specific antecedent: *Do I really love the person and seek his betterment?* If one cares about someone enough to be brutally honest and administer rebuke, he is a true friend; he understands the character of the individual whom he rebukes; and he acts accordingly, in order to help him.

Horav Shlomo, zl, m'Karlin was a well-known *tzaddik*, righteous person, and one of the early founders of the *Chassidic mesorah*, tradition. **Horav Uri, zl, m'Strelišk** who was known as the *Saraf*, Fiery One, for his fiery passion in serving Hashem, was a disciple of *Rav Shlomo*. The *Karliner* did not achieve longevity, as he left this world at a rather young age. Yet, he achieved prominence as a holy person and had many students who viewed him as the *gadol hador*, preeminent leader of the generation. Shortly before he took leave of his earthly abode, he directed his students to look to **Horav Mordechai, zl, m'Neshchiz** as his successor and their new *moreh derech*, spiritual guide.

Rav Uri traveled to *Karlin* with the hope of seeing his *Rebbe*, but he arrived too late. When he heard the sad news, he descended into deep mourning and refused to be comforted. He had lost his illustrious *Rebbe* who was more like a father to him. All that he did for some time was plunge deeper and deeper into melancholy over the passing of his *Rebbe*. Finally, he asked one of the students, "Prior to his passing, did our holy *Rebbe* issue forth any mandate for the future?"

They replied that, yes, *Rav Shlomo* had instructed them to study under *Rav Mordechai m'Neshchiz*.

"Well, if the *Rebbe* made this request, then I must go to *Neschiz* and bask in *Rav Mordechai's* brilliance." *Rav Uri* gathered his few belongings and set forth for *Neschiz*. When he arrived in the

town, he immediately dropped his belongings at the local inn and went to visit *Rav Mordechai*. He came to *Rav Mordechai's* home and discovered it to be filled with people from all walks of life, each waiting to meet the holy *Rebbe*, to share with him his problems, hopes and needs, and ask for his counsel and blessing.

Rav Uri was not surprised to find a house filled with people, because *Rav Mordechai* was a great man whose blessings had great validity. The people would enter one by one, share their stories; the *Rebbe* would listen and offer his advice and blessing. *Rav Uri* saw a well-dressed man approach the *Rebbe* to discuss a major business deal for which he asked for the *Rebbe's* blessing. *Rav Uri* sensed that something was spiritually amiss with this man. He was an unsavory character, whose immoral escapades beclouded him. This was something that only a great *tzaddik* could notice. A man who was attuned to the highest levels of spirituality could detect a spiritual deficiency looming over a person. It, therefore, took him by great surprise to see *Rav Mordechai* greet the man with a big smile and converse with him at length. The man left the room with what appeared to be a very satisfied look. How could *Rav Mordechai* be fooled by this man?! He was a chameleon! *Rav Uri* was a passionate person to whom zealousness was no stranger. He was grasped by a spiritual seething as a reaction to this encounter.

Rav Mordechai was a wise man, and he sensed *Rav Uri's* inner tension. He was well-aware of his unique spiritual devotion and superiority. He called out to him, "*Yungerman*, what brings you here – without an invitation? Leave and do not return until I send for you!" When *Rav Uri* heard this, he immediately left in a very depressed mood and headed for the *bais ha'medrash* which was nearby.

Rav Uri sat *in shul* and contemplated the situation. Was he permitted to leave? Had he fulfilled his *Rebbe's* mandate? He came, and he did not like what he saw. Now, it was time to return. While he ruminated over his predicament, *Rav Mordechai* entered the *shul* and came over to him. *Rav Uri* was quite nervous standing before the holy *Rav Mordechai*. The *tzaddik* began, "My son, I was well aware of that man's objectionable morals and activities. Do not think that there was anything about him which I did not detect, but let me first ask you a question: Why do you think *Rav Shlomo Karliner* sent you here?"

Rav Uri just sat and listened. Some questions are rhetorical – and this was one of them.

"You should know," *Rav Mordechai* countered, "your *Rebbe* sent you here for one purpose: to learn an approach to serving Hashem. Take this rule and ingrain it into your heart: Anyone whose love for all Jews is not strong enough that, when he witnesses another Jew transgressing a grave sin, he can at that time run over to him, embrace and kiss him like a long-lost brother, then he has not even achieved half of what is demanded of a Jew! He is lacking in his service of Hashem. For this is the way we catalyze a sinner's return to Hashem."

Rav Uri was silent when he heard these words. He now understood the penetrating insight of the *Karliner*. *Ahavas Yisrael*, love for all Jews, is an uncompromising ingredient in spiritual leadership.

One must possess and maximize this trait if he is to succeed as a Jewish leader – or, for that matter, as a Jew.