

Reuven, you are my firstborn...water-like impetuosity – you cannot be foremost... Shimon and Levi are comrades, their weaponry is a stolen craft. (49:3,4,5)

Yaakov *Avinu's* blessing to his sons commenced with words of rebuke to his first three sons. The reproof was not pretty – but then, it never really is. It was succinct and to the point, focusing on their errors, expressed without embellishment. It must have hurt. These were grown men, leaders of distinction, from whom the future *Klal Yisrael* would descend. To their father, however, they were sons, as such, he was obligated to rebuke them. It was not a time for coddling or sugar-coating. Yaakov told it like it was.

Chazal laud the brothers' reaction to their father's critique. In fact, *Yalkut Shimoni* posits that because of Reuven's, Shimon's and Levi's acceptance of their rebuke without complaint, they merited to have their genealogy mentioned in the beginning of *Sefer Shemos* when the Torah details the pedigree of Moshe and Aharon. Apparently, accepting chastisement without argument – conceding to one's failings without attempting to justify one's previous actions – demonstrates incredible nobility of character and tremendous inner-strength. This idea is supported by the *pasuk* in *Mishlei* 15:31, "The ear that hears life-giving reproof will abide in the midst of the wise."

Horav Henach Leibowitz, zl, analyzes this statement. Understandably, accepting rebuke is not easy, and acceding to criticism is quite difficult. It takes a strong person to concede his error. However, these were not average people. They were the *Shivtei Kah*, the twelve tribes who were the foundation of *Klal Yisrael* and upon which it was built. Furthermore, this was an especially auspicious moment. Yaakov lay on his deathbed. These were no simple words of reproof; this was Yaakov's "good-bye" to his sons. They stood there with their heads bowed in respect, accepting his critique. They did not attempt to defend themselves, to justify their actions, to offer some sort of rationale. For this they are lauded. Why?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* derives from here that accepting rebuke requires great inner fortitude. Even Torah giants such as the *Shivtei Kah* could have found it difficult, despite all the love they manifested for their father, and all the love they knew he had for them. They could have demonstrated a resistance, however so slight, but an impediment to acceptance nonetheless. They triumphed over whatever feelings of opposition they might have had, and for this they are praised.

In the commentary to *Sefer Tehillim*, *Midrash Socher Tov* notes that David *Ha'melech* found it difficult to accept Avigayil's criticism concerning *Naval Ha'Karmi*. She concluded her words with, *Al tomar bishvil sheh'ani melech, ein adam mo'chi'chaini*, "Because I am King, no man (or woman) can rebuke me," *Ho'chaiach atah atzmecha*, "Rebuke yourself!" Avigayil's need to add an addendum, "Rebuke yourself!" indicates that she was concerned lest David not accept her critique. We should bear in mind that this is David *Ha'melech* about whom we are speaking, and the sin is murder. Yet, there was a sense of foreboding concerning his concession to rebuke. So,

what should we say? Is it any wonder that as soon as we even begin alluding to some form of chastisement against another person, we ourselves become the target? “How dare **you!** How could **you!** Who do **you** think you are? What makes **you** so perfect?” These are common responses to rebuke.

If it is that difficult, how do we get around it? How does one develop a positive attitude to rebuke, a willingness to listen, to change, to act appropriately? The *Rosh Yeshivah* suggests that the answer lies in the *Midrash*'s rendition of Avigayil's last three words to David *Ha'melech*: *Ho'chaiach es atzmecha*, “Rebuke yourself.” We learn from this that when we hear rebuke from others, we should immediately introspect and “take over,” reproofing ourselves. The time to become inspired and to act is when one hears it from others. Instead of closing our minds and hearts to someone's sincere critique, it is a time for us to act, to take the “bull by the horns” and personally tackle the issues before us. It is all in **our** hands. It requires a heavy dose of pride-swallowing – ultimately, however, it will be well worth the effort.