

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael on the other side of the Yarden. (1:1)

Rashi explains that, in the last days of his life, Moshe *Rabbeinu* was giving *Klal Yisrael mussar*, words of rebuke. Perhaps rebuke is too strong a term. Moshe was guiding them on their future journey, calling to mind their errors of the past. As long as *Bnei Yisrael* would learn from their earlier mistakes, they would be on a positive road toward spiritual ascendancy. Moshe did not spell out in clear terms their mistakes; rather, he alluded to their faults by employing names for non-existent places, but the message was nonetheless clear: the place called Di Zahav refers to an abundance of gold, which led to the *chet ha'eigel*, sin of the Golden Calf.

The *Shlah HaKadosh* derives from here the proper approach concerning how one is to rebuke. First and foremost, the purpose of rebuke is not to put someone down, but rather, to raise him up, to make him aware of his potential and how to achieve it. Moshe never outright mentioned their shame, the actual sin which they had committed. He attempted to allude to their greatness, and then, once they were identified as “great,” the taint of sin was obvious against such a backdrop. Shlomo *HaMelech* writes: *Al tocheach leitz pen yisna'echa, hocheach l'chacham v'yehavecha*, “Do not rebuke a scoffer, perhaps he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you.” When rebuking someone, don't present him as a *leitz*: do not put him down; do not make him feel that he is a nothing. For this will only cause him to close up, to turn away from you, to hate you. Instead, treat him as a *chacham*, who should know better, who should act on a higher plane. Then he will respect and love you. The *Kli Yakar* adds: “Anyone who rebukes and wants to be assured that his words will be accepted and achieve efficacy should (not come outright and describe the sin in all of its gory details, as some take perverse enjoyment in doing) make an effort simply to allude, to hint (in a round-about manner, if possible) to the infraction. Thus, he maintains the sinner's dignity and self-esteem.

The attitude one must retain, especially upon rendering *mussar*, is best encapsulated by *Horav Meir Chadash, zl*, in describing his revered *Rebbe*, the *Alter m'Slabodka*. The *Mashgiach* (as *Rav Meir Chadash* was reverently called) was once asked to summarize his *Rebbe's* teachings. He thought for a long time, then answered with a single word: *V'ahavta!* “And you shall love!”
V'ahavta es Hashem Elokecha... V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha. “And you shall love Hashem, your G-d... And you shall love your fellowman as yourself.”

It is all about sensitivity towards another Jew, a sensitivity which is based upon love. If one does not love his fellow Jew, he has no business rendering *mussar*. I might add that one who refrains from pointing out his friend's failings in a respectful and sensitive manner is really not much of a friend.

The *Alter* was unique in his outlook and educational approach – a perspective which not only guided the establishment of Torah throughout Lithuania, but also directed how he dealt with his

students. Constantly emphasizing the idea of *gadlus ha'adam*, man's greatness and his power in the world, he strongly believed that the development of man's stature was the key to his elevation and success. Thus, he strove to imbue each student with a sense of his own personal significance and value and (thus) his responsibility. All this was derived from the notion that man is the crown of Creation.

"It is through a sense of man's greatness," claims the *Alter*, "that a student (this actually applies to anyone) comes to sense the tremendous responsibility that rests upon his shoulders." This realization will eventually motivate him to exert himself, to apply effort in seeking to realize his potential and to elevate himself in Torah."

As the accentuation upon *gadlus ha'adam* played an especially crucial role in the early to mid-twentieth century (when yeshiva students were considered on the low-end of the totem pole) so, too, it is vital in dealing with anyone who has issues related to esteem (which often is the greatest catalyst for self-destruction). The Jewish youth who spent his time learning Torah was considered a pathetic loser, a societal parasite, an embarrassment to society. Such negative appellations were hurled at the Torah world by none other than our own co-religionists who had fallen prey to the scourge of the *Haskalah*, Enlightenment movement. The *Alter* battled strenuously on behalf of the *yeshivah* man's stature by first inculcating in him, in his own eyes, a sense of self-importance, and only later in the eyes of those around him.

One who rebukes must feel a sense of love for -- and be sensitive to -- his subject's needs. How he presents his rebuke makes a powerful difference in its acceptance, because it often is an indication of the rebuke's true intentions. A *maggid* who would travel from town to town exhorting the people to develop a closer relationship with Hashem, and to elevate their level of observance, once stopped in Radin, home to the venerable *Chafetz Chaim*. The elder statesman of the Torah-world listened to the *maggid* deliver a *shmuess*, ethical discourse, on the topic of rebuke and how it should be administered, and he was reasonably impressed. He observed that the *maggid* was a gifted orator who knew exactly "how" and "when" to say "what." He felt strongly that an individual with such a gift had a moral obligation to implement his gift in the service of *Klal Yisrael*, to help Jews navigate the difficult challenges to their spiritual wellbeing.

The *maggid* replied to the *Chafetz Chaim* that he also thought that he had the ability to inspire, but a recent trip was weighing heavily on his mind, to the point that he had begun to consider taking up another means of sustaining himself. Apparently, he spoke in a community that had a group of individuals living there who had little to no respect for anyone who would preach against the way of life they had adopted. This *maggid* prepared what he felt was an excellent discourse. Unfortunately, his words were short lived, as the entire group walked out in the middle of his speech. They created such a commotion that he was forced to prematurely end his speech and leave.

The *Chafetz Chaim* asked him, "How did you present your *shmuess*? What tone did you use?"

The *maggid* replied, "What is the question? I gave it my all. I lashed into them, raising and lowering my voice for maximum effect. I excoriated them in such a manner that they had to see the folly of their ways."

The *Chafetz Chaim* calmly asked, "When you put on your *Tefillin* this morning, did you raise your voice? Did you scream out the *brachah*, blessing? Obviously not! Why? Because one need not scream when performing a *mitzvah*. *Hocheach tocheach es amisecha*, "You shall reprove your fellow" (*Vayikra* 19:17) is likewise a *mitzvah*. There is no reason to raise one's voice."

At times, however, despite the incredible spiritual benefits which may be reaped, if it might hurt or even make someone feel ill at ease, it is better that one leave well-enough alone. *Horav Shmuel Aharon Yudelevitz, zl*, author of the *Meil Shmuel* was a *gaon*, brilliant Torah scholar, and *tzadik* in a generation when the Jewish community of Yerushalayim was replete with *gaonim* and *tzadikim*. He was an individual who possessed a singular *dveikus*, clinging relationship with the Almighty, was a paragon of humility and sensitivity, taking great pains never to do anything that might in any way impinge on another Jew.

The story is told that following the passing of the *Rav* of Batei Horodna the lay leadership turned to *Rav Shmuel Aharon* to deliver a *drashah*, soul-stirring, inspirational speech, prior to *Kol Nidrei*. *Rav Shmuel Aharon* was well-known as an inspirational speaker. This was an unparalleled opportunity designated for *teshuvah*, repentance/return. *Rav Shmuel Aharon* demurred. Despite the many times he was asked to speak -- and regardless of who did the asking -- *Rav Shmuel Aharon* adamantly refused to speak.

"This was an incredible opportunity to bring the entire *shul* to tears," the *baalei batim* said. "True," he continued, "I might be able to inspire them to such a point, but there is one person whose tears which I do not want." They looked at him incredulously. He continued, "Every year, prior to *Kol Nidrei*, the late, revered *Rav* of the *shul* would ascend to the lectern and give a fiery, emotional discourse on the importance of *teshuvah* on *Yom Kippur*. Every year, his *rebbetzin* would sit up front and listen raptly with pride to her husband's passionate words. This year, I am certain, the *rebbetzin* will be sitting in her regular seat listening. Only this year it will not be her husband that is speaking. She will once again cry, but this time the tears will be tears of grief and sadness over her loss. If she will hear someone else speaking, it will intensify her suffering, as her loss becomes more palpable. I, for one, do not want to be the cause of such tears to be shed."