

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

Rashi explains that *devarim*, words, is a reference to the words of rebuke that Moshe *Rabbeinu* conveyed to the Jewish people. He did not mince words, nor did he conceal the people's infractions. He did, however, refer to their sins by allusion in order not to embarrass or offend them. When admonishing someone, it is vital that the rebuker use *chochmah*, wisdom, and *seichel*, common sense, or he will only succeed in turning off the subject of his reprimand. Rebuke is, or should be, motivated by love. Hashem reproves us as a father rebukes his errant son. The father cares about his son with boundless love. The *Malbim* writes that reproach is a sign of love. One who loves wants to see positive change in his son. Woe is to the son whom his father does not chide, because this is a sign that he has given up on him. Rebuke that is meant to inflict pain is not rebuke, it is a hate-filled diatribe. At times, the subject of the rebuke is actually waiting to be insulted, so that he can justify his behavior to himself. In such instances, the rebuker is playing into his hands.

What does one do when he notices someone blatantly desecrating *Shabbos*? He can conjecture that the person does not care, or he can give him the benefit of the doubt and say that the person probably does not know the *halachah*. Such an incident occurred with *Horav Nissim Yagen, zl*. As part of an outreach project, he was invited to spend *Shabbos* in a *moshav*, settlement, in the southern part of *Eretz Yisrael*. The purpose was to strengthen *Shabbos* observance in the *moshav*. While some observed *Shabbos* and some blatantly did not, those who observed did whatever they thought was correct. If it was incorrect, oh well, it is what it is. This was their attitude.

They participated in a vibrant *tefillas Kabbalas Shabbos*, with much singing and even some dancing. As they were about to leave, one of the members of the congregation, while humming one of the more lively *Shabbos* tunes, went over to the light switch and closed it. When a young man who had accompanied *Rav Yagen* saw this egregious act of *Shabbos* desecration, he was about to lambast the fellow. *Rav Yagen* stopped him, explaining that the *moshavnick* was probably unaware of even the minimalist *halachos* of *Shabbos*. Chances are that he did not know that closing the light is an act of *chillul Shabbos*. He attends *shul* services, but he is clueless about *Shabbos*, what it means and represents, and the *halachos* associated with it. He did not extinguish the light maliciously. He did it because he did not know better. To excoriate him concerning his sinful behavior would be counter-productive.

Rav Yagen returned to *Yerushalayim* that *Motzoei Shabbos*, purchased a time clock and returned to the *moshav*. He sought out the young man and said, "My friend, you are too old to worry about closing the lights in *shul* every Friday night. All you should do is set the timer on this clock, and the lights will go on and off as you wish." The man was reasonably impressed that *Rav Yagen* would return that same night just to give him a clock. Had *Rav Yagen* rebuked the fellow, chances are that it would have had a negative impact. This way, he preserved the man's dignity, while delivering a subtle message concerning *kedushas Shabbos*.

Rebuke is an awesome undertaking. After all, what elevates the rebuke over the subject of his rebuke? Is he not acting sanctimoniously to reproach a fellow Jew, when, in fact, he is not perfect? Apparently, as mentioned earlier, one who rebukes must do so out of love. Love has no boundaries. One who truly loves, truly cares – even if it results in his being humiliated for his efforts. Thus, while many take it upon themselves to reproach others for what they feel is an infraction on their part, only a small portion of these are successful – because only this fraction is acting out of love and care – not just to assuage their own ego or to put someone down.

Horav Chaim Sofer, zl (author of *Machne Chaim* and disciple of the *Chasam Sofer*), once traveled by train accompanied by a group of students. In their coach, the students noticed a man who appeared to be Jewish, but seemed to be totally alienated from religion. (Sadly, this was not an unusual sight to behold in Hungary, as well as in parts of Western Europe. The *Haskalah*, Jewish Enlightenment movement, had done a job on the religious values and observance of our co-religionists.) This man had the audacity to pull out a non-kosher sandwich from his bag and proceed to eat. Not to be unexpected, the students went ballistic and were about to yank the sandwich from the man's mouth as a precursor to the abuse they were about to heap upon him. The *Machne Chaim* quieted his students and asked, "Do you know anything about the man: From where he hails? What his background is, etc.? Do you know his history which led to this point?"

The *Rav* proceeded to approach the man to ask him where he had grown up? The man replied that he was from a certain Hungarian town which was under the leadership of a free-thinking rabbi who had more than once caused – and even encouraged – members of his community to renege the Torah. He had a deleterious effect on many members of the community. The *Machne Chaim* turned to his students and said, "When you consider the pathology of this man's descent to his present spiritual nadir, you realize that he is not the sinner, but rather his background forcefully turned him away from religious observance. Prior to offering rebuke, we must take everything into consideration."

Horav Aryeh Levin, zl, the venerable *Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, was walking with *Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl*, *Mashgiach* of Kamenitz, Yerushalayim, on *Shabbos*, when they chanced upon a Jew smoking a cigarette in flagrant desecration of the holy day. *Rav* Moshe Aharon feared that *Rav* Aryeh would be carried away by this public display of *Shabbos* desecration. He was wrong. *Rav* Aryeh approached the man and said, "My brother, I love you. Why are you smoking?" When the man heard himself addressed as a brother, his countenance and demeanor did an about face. No longer aloof and audacious, he replied, "*Rebbe*, I have been reprimanded a hundred times and called *sheiget*, *goy*, *rasha*, but never 'brother.' You are the first *Rav* to address me as a human being, as a brother. I will put out the cigarette." *Rav* Aryeh said, "Just place it on the floor. To extinguish it is *chillul Shabbos*." The man said, "I will not smoke anymore this *Shabbos*. I am not promising that I will refrain on other *Shabbos*s, but this one I most certainly will."

People in *Eretz Yisrael* had extremely negative feelings concerning the secular Zionists, and, as such, expressed crude reactions to anyone who did not excoriate them in some way. They would

certainly not countenance anyone had on amicable relations with them. *Horav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, zl*, Chief Rabbi of the Holy Land, maintained a relationship with the Zionists. It was his hope that he could influence them positively. (This is not the forum for discussing the matter, with its many repercussions throughout the *chareidi* community. Let it suffice to assert that *Rav Kook* was a Torah scholar of note, who had serious detractors.)

One day, at the *minyan* where *Rav Aryeh davened* daily, a member of the congregation fell into disfavor due to a remote link that he had with the secular Zionists. A group of extremists used this relationship to have this man banned from receiving an *aliyah*, being called up to the Torah. *Rav Aryeh* ignored the “judgment” passed against this man and gently insisted to the *gabbai* to give the man an *aliyah* – which he did. The action aroused the wrath of one of the extremists, who, ignoring the stature of *Rav Aryeh*, came over and almost tore *Rav Aryeh’s tefillin* from his head, as he berated and insulted him. In his inimitable manner, *Rav Aryeh* accepted the humiliation, bowed his head and said nothing.

A few moments later, despite the cheers and accolades *Rav Aryeh* received from the congregants, another “responsible” extremist asked *Rav Aryeh*, “Do you know why you were publicly humiliated?” *Rav Aryeh* replied, “I must have sinned, and this was my penance.” “No!” the man countered. “It is because you are friendly with ‘that Rabbi,’” his reference to *Rav Kook*.

Rav Aryeh asked the man, “Do you think I acted properly by remaining silent and not responding to his diatribe and insults?” “Certainly, that is a very fine quality, lauded by *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 88b), ‘Those who accept insult and make no reply.’” “Well, you should know,” *Rav Aryeh* told the man, “that I learned this trait from ‘that’ Rabbi.” This is how a *gadol* gives *mussar*: subtle, to the point, and with love and understanding.