

The Art of Moral Criticism

How to Tell People Off and When to Hold Your Peace

Sources compiled by Noam Zion

ספר ויקרא פרק יט

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THE DUTY TO SPEAK OUT - THE TORAH - Leviticus 19: 17-18

You shall not hate your brother in your heart.

Reprove your neighbor,

(and/but) incur no guilt because of him.

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your brother.

Love your neighbor as yourself, I am Adonai.

Nathan the Prophet confronts King David



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DEFINITION – Tocheicha as the Art of Moral Criticism

***Tocheicha* is the mitzvah of confronting one's neighbors in the community of Israel with their misdeeds and their character faults in such way as to catalyze a process of inner *heshbon hanefesh* leading to Teshuvah.**

Note the confrontation is direct but not physical but rather always verbal.

The words are not meant to be browbeating verbal abuse and certainly they may not openly shame the one being criticized. But they are persistent – "*hokheiakh tochiakh*." The primary goal is not to show the critic is right, to be able to say "I told you so," but to move the criticized one to accept responsibility and to begin to change behavior. In short this is a mitzvah of communication. If the mitzvah is not done in the right conditions then it is dangerous for three reasons.

First the one criticized may just be hardened into stubborn opposition.

Second the softhearted one criticized may be shamed.

Third the one criticized may strike physically the one who is verbally attacking him with words of criticism.

Here is mitzvah than can easily backfire producing greater risks than it averts.

"HASSIDIC" ADVICE by Robert Fulghum

All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten

A troubled man paid a visit to his Rabbi. A wise and good old rabbi, as all rabbis try to be.

"Rabbi," said he, wringing his hands, "I am a failure. More than half the time I do not succeed in doing what I must do."

"Oh?" said the rabbi.

"Please say something wise, rabbi", said the man.

After much pondering, the rabbi spoke as follows:

"Ah, my son, I give you this wisdom: Go and look on page 930 for the year 1970, of The New York Times Almanac and you will find peace of mind maybe."

"Ah," said the man, and he went away and did that thing.

Now this is what he found: The listing of the lifetime batting averages of all the greatest baseball players. Ty Cobb, the greatest slugger of them all, had a lifetime average of only .367. Even Babe Ruth didn't do so good.

So the man went back to the rabbi and said in a questioning tone:

"Ty Cobb - .367 - that's it?"

"Right," said the rabbi. "Ty Cobb - .367. He got a hit once out of every three times at bat.

He didn't even bat .500 - so what can you expect already?"

"Ah," said the man, who thought he was a wretched failure because only half the time he did not succeed at what he must do.

Theology is amazing, and holy books abound.

THE DUTY TO SPEAK OUT - THE TORAH - Leviticus 19: 17-18

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The Two Pronged Mitzvah of Tocheicha by Maimonides, Laws of Character Traits, Book of Knowledge, Mishne Torah Chapter 6:6-8

6 When a person sins against another, the injured party should not hate the offender and keep silent, as it is says, "[After the rape of his sister Tamar] Absalom spoke to (his brother, the rapist) Amnon neither good nor evil, for Absalom hated Amnon [and later he murdered him at a family party]" (II Sam. 13:22).

Rather it is his duty to inform the offender and say to him "Why did you do this to me? Why did you sin against me in this matter?" And thus it is said, "You shall surely rebuke your neighbor" (Lev. 19:17).

7- If one observes that a person committed a sin or walks in a way that is not good, it is a duty to bring the erring man back to the right path and point out to him that he is wronging himself by doing evil, as it is said, "*You shall surely rebuke your neighbor*" (Leviticus 19:17).

Any love that is not accompanied with criticism is not really love.

Any peace which is not accompanied with criticism is not really peace.

Midrash Genesis Rabbah 54:1

Rav, R. Hanina, and R. Yohanan taught...

Whoever can protest to his household and does not, is accountable [for the sins] of his household; if he could protest to his townspeople, he is accountable for their sins; if he could protest to the whole world, he is accountable for the whole world. (Talmud of Babylonia Shabbat 54b).

How to Tell Off Your Rabbi: A Tale of Six Scenes **By Martin Buber, *Early Hassidic Masters***

How did the Baal Shern Tov gain his Hassidic disciple, Rabbi Jacob Joseph, later the Rav of Polnoye, who subsequently set down the teachings of his master in many books?

Scene I: ON THE ROAD

When Rabbi Jacob Joseph was still a rav in Szarygrod and bitterly averse to the Hassidic way, a man whom no one knew came to his town one summer morning, at the hour when the cattle were taken to pasture, and stopped in the marketplace with his wagon. He called to the first man who came along leading his cow, and began to tell him a story, which pleased his listener so well that he could not break away. A second man caught a few words in passing; he wanted to go on and could not, so he stayed and listened. Soon a whole group of people were gathered about the story teller and still their number grew.

Right among them stood the servant of the House of Prayer who had been on his way to open the doors, for in summer the rav always prayed there at eight o'clock and the doors had to be opened well ahead of that time, around seven.

Scene 2: AT THE HOUSE OF PRAYER

Now at eight the rav came to the House of Prayer and found it locked. It is well known that he is very particular and quick to fly into a temper; now too he angrily set out to look for the servant. But there he was, right in front of him, for the Baal Shem - it was he who was telling the stories - had signed to him to go, and he had run to open the House of Prayer.

The rav shouted at him and asked why he had failed in his duty and why the men, who were usually there by that time, had not come.

The servant replied that, like himself, all those, who had been on the way to the House of Prayer, had been irresistibly captivated by the great story.

The angry rav had to say the Morning Prayer alone.

Then he told the servant to go to the market place and fetch the stranger.

"I'll have him beaten!", he cried.

Scene 3: AT THE RABBI'S OFFICE

In the meantime, the Baal Shem had finished his story and gone to the inn. There the servant of the House of Prayer found him and delivered the message.

The Baal Shem immediately followed him out, smoking his pipe, and in this manner came before the rav.

"What do you think you are doing!" shouted the rav. "Keeping people from prayer".

"Rabbi," said the Baal Shem calmly, "it does not become you to fly into a rage. Rather let me tell you a story."

"What do you think you are doing!" was what the rav wanted to repeat, and then he looked at the man closely for the first time. It is true that he immediately turned his eyes away, nevertheless the words he had been about to say stuck in his throat. The Baal Shem had begun his story, and the rav had to listen like all the others.

"Once I drove cross-country with three horses," said the Baal Shem, "a bay, a piebald and a white horse. And not one of the three could whinny [*lizhol* = neigh, whinny with pleasure].

Then I met a peasant coming toward me and he called: "Slacken the reins!" So I slackened the reins and then all three horses began to neigh".

The rav could say nothing for emotion.

"Three," the Baal Shem repeated, "Bay, piebald and white could not neigh. The peasant knew what to do; slacken reins and they neighed with joy".

The rav bowed his head in silence.

"The peasant gave good advice," said the Baal Shem. "Do you understand?"

"I understand, rabbi," answered the rav and burst into tears. He wept and wept and knew that up to this time he had not known what it was to weep.

"You must be uplifted," said the Baal Shem.

The rav looked up to him and saw that he was no longer there.

Scene 4: LOCKED in HIS ROOM

Every month Rabbi Jacob Joseph fasted for one whole week, from Shabbat to Shabbat. Since he always took his meals in his room, no one knew this except his niece who brought him his food. In the month which followed his meeting with the Baal Shem, he fasted as always, because it never occurred to him that the "uplifting" predicted for him could be attained without mortifying the flesh.

Scene 5: THE BAAL SHEM TOV'S TELEPATHY

The Baal Shem was on another one of his journeys when he suddenly felt: if the rav of Szarygrod continues as he is doing, he will lose his mind. He had the horses urged on so vehemently that one fell and broke a leg.

When he entered the rav's room, he said: "My white horse fell because I was in such a hurry to get here. Things cannot go on in this way. Have some food brought for yourself." The rav had food brought and ate.

"Your work," said the Baal Shem, "is one of sorrow and gloom. The Divine Presence does not hover over gloom but over joy in the commandments."

Scene 6: MAKING AMENDS

Soon afterward, Rabbi Jacob Joseph issued a proclamation far and wide that he would return all fines he had ever received and there had been many. He did not rest until he had distributed all the money he had.

From that time on, he used to say; "Worry and gloom are the roots of all the powers of evil."

BETTER TO REFRAIN: When to Hold Your Peace

BEYOND THE PALE: THE LIMITS OF A MORAL MISSION

Rabbi Ilia stated in the name of R. Elazar son of R. Shimon:
As one is commanded to say that which will be heard,
so is one commanded not to say that which will not be heard.

R. Abba stated: It is a duty, as it says in Proverbs 9:7 .(Talmud Yevamot 65b)

PROVERBS 9

7 To correct a scoffer or rebuke a wicked person for his blemish, Is to call down abuse on oneself.

Do not rebuke a scoffer, for he will hate you;

Rather reprove a wise person who will then love you.

9 Instruct a wise person, and s/he will grow wiser;

Teach the righteous, and they will gain in learning.

Moshe Hayim Luzzato on Blindspots

(17th century Italian rabbi and playwright, from *Mesillat Yesharim* 23)

There is nothing better for a person than to seek friends who are morally upright. They can enlighten one's eyes in one's blindspots and offer criticism out of their love and thereby save one from all sorts of injury. For one cannot see his own guilt, but they can see and understand and warn one, so one may take care. That is the message of Proverbs 24:6 "One is saved by virtue of an abundance of advisors."

Tana de bei Eliahu (9th century midrash, Babylonia)

"*Reprove your fellow man*" (Leviticus 19:17) –

Could that obligate one to rebuke an evil person or one who hates him?

No! Reprove only a "fellow man" - one who loves you and who shares the same Jewish values and practices. A morally corrupt person who feels enmity toward you need not be reprovved and in fact one is not even permitted to reprove him.

Malbim (Commentary on Leviticus 19)

Moral criticism is possible and legally obligatory only between equals sharing the same Torah values and commandments. For the secular Jew who rejects Torah cannot be appealed to [since they do not share the same values] and the morally corrupt person will not accept any criticism.

There are three conditions for moral criticism:

- 1) the moral innocence of the critic
- 2) the willingness of the one criticized to listen
- 3) the quality- of the critique which may not embarrass him.

MARK TWAIN says:

DON'T GIVE ADVICE!

WISE MEN DON'T NEED IT FOOLS WON'T HEED IT

A POPULAR POSTER:

SPEAK WHEN YOU ARE ANGRY

AND YOU WILL MAKE THE BEST SPEECH YOU WILL EVER REGRET

Jewish Wisdom Literature and Advice on Giving Advice

Question a friend; perhaps he did not do it; Or if he did, so that he will not do it again.

Question your neighbor; perhaps he did not say it; Or if he did, so that he may not repeat it. Question a friend, for often there is slander,

And you must not believe everything that is said.

A man may make a slip without intending to.

Who has not sinned with his tongue?

Question your neighbor before you threaten him. (Ben Sirach 19:13-17)

There is rebuke that is uncalled for, and a time when one who keeps silent is wise.

Yet how much better it is to rebuke someone than to get angry. (Ben Sirach 20:1-2)

Being called "Shiksa"again...

by Alisa Fox Coleman on Tuesday, 10 January 2012 at 11:03

(Alisa is Orthodox religious Zionist from England living in Beit Shemesh where her community is struggling against Haredi violence of the Edah Haredit across the street and next to their girls school which they are trying to take over for their community. Toldot Aharon thugs have been sent by their rabbi to throw eggs at little Orthodox religious Zionist girls, aged 8, walking on sidewalk to school.)

Today I was walking passed a little Yeshiva Ktana of Hassidim in Beit Shemesh. One of the boys shouted "shiksa" when I walked passed. This 13 year old kid did not know who he started with.....I am sure he did it to get a laugh from his friends , "stam' as teenage boys do. BUT being called "shiksa" is violating, and offensive ,even from a kid.

I went back and told him how he should speak. He started with excuses that I am not tzanua (modest), didn't mean me etc...well poor kid, I laid into him. I told him that it has nothing to do with how I dress ,you cannot call anyone that. His eyes rolled ,when he realised what a mistake he had made to pick on me.

I went into the yeshiva to find a Rebbe ,told them what happened and waited around outside feeling those same feelings of humiliation and anger. A few minutes later 5 men came out to talk to me. I explained that I am sure that he was just being a kid, but some things you never say.....I told them that they have to educate their boys to treat all women with respect!

They have a small American Haredi school near them that they are on great terms with. I told them that you are all fine with men and boys, but you have to teach them about behaving appropriately to women and girls.

Happily ,these men/Rabanim were are pleasure to speak to. They looked at me, when we had a serious discussion, treated me with respect and agreed with me. I told them we share the same land, we have to get along, we don't have to agree, but we do have to respect each other.

I have had a bit of faith restored in me today. It is these little personal encounters that will make the change. I am sure that these boys and men will think very carefully before they speak.

I hope that I will find other people like these few men that can understand how to behave, and together we can move forward to rid our midst of those who are only out to do evil.

JEWISH WISDOM: WHEN TO SAY NOTHING by Joseph Telsuhkin
The Obligation to Criticize, How to Do So, and When to Remain Silent

Just as one is commanded to say that which will be heeded, so is one commanded not to say that which will not be heeded.

Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 65b

Rabbi Israel of Vishnitz was in the habit of strolling with his gabbai [assistant] for a half hour every evening. On one such occasion, they stopped in front of the house of a certain wealthy bank manager. The man was known to be a maskil, a follower of the "Enlightenment" movement, i.e., anything but a follower of the rebbe: Rabbi Israel knocked on the door and, when a servant opened it, entered the house. The puzzled gabbai, without asking a word, followed the rebbe inside.

The bank manager received his distinguished guest respectfully and politely. The rebbe took the seat that was offered him, and sat for quite some time without saying a word. Knowing that protocol would deem it impertinent to ask the rebbe directly the reason for his visit, the host whispered his question to the rebbe's assistant, but the gabbai simply shrugged his shoulders. After a good while, the rebbe rose to leave, and bade his host farewell. The bank manager accompanied him to the door and, his understandable curiosity getting the better of him., asked:

"Could you please explain to me, rebbe, why you honored me with a visit?"

"I went to your house in order to fulfill a mitzvah," the rebbe replied, "and thank God I was able to fulfill it."

"And which mitzvah was that?" asked the confused bank manager.

"Our Sages teach that: *Just as one is commanded to say that which will be listened to, so is one commanded not to say that which will not be listened to.*' Now if I remain in my house and you remain in yours, what kind of mitzvah is it that I refrain from telling you `that which will not be listened to'? In order to fulfill the mitzvah properly, one obviously has to go to the house of the person who will not listen, and there refrain from speaking to him. And that is exactly what I did."

"Perhaps, rebbe," said the bank manager, "you would be so good to tell me what this thing is? Who knows, perhaps I will listen?"

"I am afraid you won't," said the rebbe.

The longer the rebbe refused, the greater grew the curiosity of the other to know the secret:

he continued to press the rebbe to reveal "that which would not be listened to."

"Very well," said the rebbe finally. "A certain penniless widow owes your bank quite a sum for the mortgage of her house. Within a few days, your bank is going to dispose of her house by public sale, and she will be out on the street. I had wanted to ask you to overlook her debt, but didn't, because of the mitzvah of `not saying . . .'"

"But what do you expect me to do?" asked the bank manager in amazement.

"Surely you realize that the debt is not owed to me personally, but to the bank, and I am only its manager, and not its owner, and the debt runs into several hundreds, and if. . ."

"It's exactly as I said all along," the rebbe interrupted, "that you would not want to hear."

With that he ended the conversation and walked away.

The bank manager went back into his house, but the rebbe's words found their way into his heart and gave him no rest until he paid the widow's debt out of his own pocket.

(Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, *A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Torah*, pages 189-191)

Tocheicha Workshop conducted by Nathan the Prophet

Nathan confronts King David - II Samuel 12: 1-7

God Sees

But the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of YHWH¹,

Scene 1- God sends a messenger with a parable

12:1 YHWH sent Natan to David,
he came to him and said to him:

“There were two men in a certain town, one rich and one poor.
2 The rich-one had flocks and herds, exceedingly many,
3 while the poor-one had nothing at all except for one little lamb
which he had bought.
He kept-it-alive, and it grew up with him, together with his children:
from his morsel it would eat, from his cup it would drink, in his
bosom it would lie,
it became to him like a daughter/ bat.

4 And there came a traveler (= walker, journey-goer) to the rich
man,
but he thought-it-a-pity to take from his flocks or from his herds, to
make (something ready) for the guest who had come to him,
so he took the poor man's lamb and made-it-ready for the man who
had come to him.”

5 David's anger flared up against the man exceedingly, he said to
Natan:

“By the life of YHWH,
indeed, a son of death is the man who does this!

6 And for the lamb he shall pay fourfold,
because he did this thing, and since he had no pity!”

Mashal followed by Nimshal- The Parable Unmasked

7 Natan said to David: “YOU are the man!”

.....13 David said to Natan: **I have sinned against YHWH!**

¹ II Sam. 11: 23 on the Death of Uriah. Batsheba's husband in
The messenger said to David:

“Indeed, the men were mightier than we, so that there (some) of the king's servants were killed
(in battle), and also your servant Uriah the Hittite died.”

25 David said to the messenger:

“Tell Yo'av (my chief of staff) : ‘Don't let this thing be evil in your eyes,
for such and such [is the way of war], the sword devours!’

Psychodrama as a therapeutic *tocheicha* is an artistic indirect way to raise painful truths from one's past. It was first used in the Tanakh by Joseph. Joseph forced the brothers to relive his own trauma and their own guilt in order to evoke from his brothers recognition and guilt and then remorse and teshuvah. Joseph recapitulates his own history of being kidnapped and sold as a slave in Egypt with his stand-in Benjamim, his younger full brother from Rachel and his father's second favorite.

That was also Shakespeare's ploy in **Hamlet** where the son accuses his mother of collusion with his father's murderer – her brother-in-law and now her second husband who had been poisoned to death. Hamlet writes and stages a play for the court that reenacts the original crime as a piece of cathartic art. The mother sought to turn away from the play and deny her identification with murderer in the play. But Hamlet said:

"You go not until I set up a glass [a mirror] where you may see the inmost part of you."

His mother Gertrud replied: **"Thou turnst my eyes into my very soul!"**

Love Making as a Model for Delivering Criticism By the Hassidic Rebbe Aharon Leib of Primishlan

It is related that when Reb Aharon Leib of Primishlan saw from the face of a person that the latter had committed a wrong, then he would ask the person to meet with him privately. Then, after kind and reassuring words to the person, Reb Aharon would begin his loving rebuke. When asked why he proceeded in such a manner, he replied:

In Psalm 51 it is written:

A Psalm, a Song of David, composed after Nathan the prophet came into him just as he had come from Bathsheva"

What do the words mean? Note them well, for they convey an important teaching. Had Nathan come to David in a judgmental spirit, rebuking him angrily in public, it is possible that he would have failed to achieve his end. Perhaps David would have hardened his heart and closed his ears to the prophet's plea for repentance. Nathan came to David lovingly and privately, just as David had come into Bathsheva.

Thus the prophet's words entered David's heart and he immediately recited this **Psalm of Repentance.**

**GUIDELINES for Tocheicha by Maimonides,
Laws of Character Traits, Book of Knowledge, Mishne Torah Chapter 6:7-8**

7 -He who rebukes another, whether for offenses against the rebuker himself or for sins against God, should administer the rebuke:

- in private,
- speak to the offender gently and tenderly, and
- point out that he is only speaking for the wrongdoer's own good, to secure for him life in the world to come

If the latter accepts the rebuke, well and good. If not, he should be rebuked a second, and a third time. And so one is bound to continue the admonitions, until the sinner assaults the admonisher and says to him "I refuse to listen." Whoever is in a position to prevent wrongdoing and does not do so is responsible for the iniquity of all the wrong doers whom he might have restrained.

8- He who rebukes another must not at first speak to the offender harshly so as to put him to shame, as it is said, "*And you shall not incur a sin because of him*" (Lev. 19:17). Our rabbis explained this text as follows: "Since it might have been supposed that you are to rebuke the sinner till he changes color, therefore it is said '*And you shall not incur sin because of him.*'"

Hence the inference that it is forbidden to cause a fellow Jew shame, especially in public.

...The rabbis said, "He who shames another in public has no portion in the world to come."

One ought, therefore, to beware of publicly shaming anyone, whether he be young or old.

One should not call a person by a name of which he feels ashamed nor relate anything in his presence which humiliates him. This applies to matters between man and man.

But in regard to duties to God, if an individual, after having been privately rebuked, does not repent, he should be shamed in public; his sin should be openly declared; he is to be reviled, affronted, and cursed till he returns to the right course. This was **the method** followed by all the prophets of Israel.

6 - If the offender repents and pleads for forgiveness, he should be forgiven. The forgiver should not be obdurate, as it is said, "And Abraham prayed to God (for Abimelech who had taken Sarah his wife into his harem)" (Gen. 20:17).

9 - If one who has been wronged by another does not wish to rebuke or speak to the offender because the latter is a very common person or mentally defective, and if he has sincerely forgiven him, and neither bears him ill-will nor rebukes him - he acts according to the standard of saints. All that the Torah objects to is harboring ill-will.

Josephus writes: Nathan chooses to postpone the delivery of the angry Divine word of punishment for the killing of Uriah and the stealing of his wife Batsheba, until David's heart is ready to accept it.

Now Nathan was a fair and prudent man; and considering that kings, when they fall into a passion, are guided more by that passion than they are by justice, he resolved to conceal the threatenings that proceeded from God, and made a good-natured discourse to him. (Josephus, *Antiquities* 7:7)

TOP TWENTY - Most Effective Techniques demonstrated by Nathan the prophet and God:

- 1- Approaching David in private.
- 2- Speaking to him gently in a nonaccusatory manner – at least to begin with.
- 3- Not calling him names.
- 4- God chose to send a messenger rather speak directly since God was very insulted and hurt by what David had done – seeing it as betrayal and a desecration of God's good name and as an act of ingratitude despite all God had given him
- 5- God chose an expert in the art of communication – a prophet to use artistic means and diplomatic speech to make his point
- 6- Nathan posed himself as asking for David to sit in judgment of others thus avoiding David's defensive reaction to criticism
- 7- Nathan told him a story rather than giving the message, straight away. That caught David's ear as do all stories and put him in a frame of mind of sympathetic listening
- 8- The story led David to use his imagination to identify with the characters. This was a "tear jerker" story onesidedly presenting the callousness of the rich man and tenderheartedness of the poorman
Thus David could be both objective and neutral in his judgment since the story did not seem to be about David himself and at the same time to be subjectively and emotionally moved to empathize with the victim and his lamb.
- 9- God choose a prophet with a long and positive relationship with the one being criticized. Nathan in II Sam 7 informed David that God had chosen Israel, Jerusalem and David's dynasty forever
- 10- David is placed in the role of the judge and of king, so he is officially called upon to judge objectively but also as the king to guarantee that justice be executed through out his kingdom. The passion for justice complements the cool analytic approach to what happened.
- 11- David was invited to judge someone else and then he was asked to be consistent and not to be hypocritical and to judge himself by the standards.
Thus David was forced to pass sentence on himself rather than being confronted with an accusation and a punishment which might have evoked from him a plea for mercy or rationalizations. In short David was not at first confronted with God's judgment from the outside but with his own words of condemnation for a crime that is revealed as identical with his own. It is easier to condemn oneself than to accept other people's finger pointing
- 12- Nathan at the end revealed that the story was not a report of a literal incident but a parable for David's own crimes. Then David had to reflect on the story and apply it by interpretation to himself. The intellectual effort to decipher the parable from one hint – "you are the man!" – contributes to David's own self-reflection as he sees himself through his own eyes as a judge.
- 13- Nathan managed to "manage –up" the ladder from a public servant to king, from prophet to royalty, so the king would listen to a subordinate who has caught him red-handed
- 14- Nathan applied the technique of **psycho drama** i.e reenacting a real life trauma (which one tends to deny or repress) before the original participant.

Failing to Communicate with our Fellow

a. The Credentials of the Moralist -Talmud Arakin 16b

R. Tarfon said, I wonder whether there is any one in this generation who accepts reproof.

For if one says to him: Remove the mote from between your eyes, he would answer: Remove the beam from between your eyes!

R. Johanan b. Nuri said: I call heaven and earth to witness for me that often was Akiba punished through me because I used to complain against him before our Rabban Gamaliel ben Rabbi and all the more he showered love upon me, to make true what has been said: "Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate you. Reprove a wise person and he will love you." (Proverbs 9).

R. Elazar b. Azariah said: I wonder if there is one in this generation who knows how to reprove!

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah: I wonder whether there is anyone in this generation worthy to reprove others.

b. "People in Glass Houses Shouldn't throw Stones" - Talmud Baba Metzia

Resh Lakish explained the verse in the prophet Tzefania 2:1 "Decorate yourself and then decorate others" – to mean mend your own ways first and then those of others. (Talmud Baba Metzia 107b).

Rabbi Natan: Don't remark on another's disability or blemish if you have the same one. (Talmud Baba Metzia 59b)

c. Baal Shem Tov: How can you preach to others?--Iturei Soferim Anthology

Once the Baal Shem Tov challenged one of the great rabbis of his generation: "How can you preach to others when all your life you never knew what sin was.

You are not sufficiently involved with people and sociable enough to know what their sins are. "Reprove your fellow" means reprove someone similar to you.

d. R. Yehuda Leib the Preacher of Poland: The Emotional Lithmus Test

"Don't hate your brother in your heart, reprove your fellow man..." (Leviticus 19).

The critic must first examine himself to discover what he feels toward his fellow man. Only then when he is certain that there is no hate for his brother in his heart may he rebuke him.

Building a Relationship Across a Moral Abyss

a. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev: Preaching Good Things

There are two types of moral preacher. One preaches the good things of each person ...

and the other preaches with harsh words that shame.....

The preachers of good things elevate the soul of man.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov's teaching of *AZAMRA*

(Likutey Moharan I:282)

Azamra l'Elokai be-odee!

"I will sing to my God as long as I live!" (Psalm 146:2).

KNOW that you must judge all people favorably. This applies even to the worst of people. You must search until you find some little bit of good in them. In that good place inside them, they are not bad! If you can just find this little bit of good and judge them favorably, you really can elevate them and swing the scales of judgment in their favor. This way you can bring them back to God

This teaching is contained in the words of King David in the Psalms: "And in just a little bit (*ve-OD me-at*) there's no sinner; when you think about his place, he won't be there" (Psalm 37:10). King David is teaching us to judge everyone favorably. Even if you consider someone to be totally bad, you must still search until you find some little bit of good in him.

b. Aaron's White Lies - Avot De Rabbi Natan 12

Rabbi Me'ir says: Why does the verse say, "And he turned away many from iniquity" ?

For when Aaron would walk along the road and meet an evil or wicked man, he would greet him.

On the next day if that man thought to commit a transgression, he would think:

"Woe is me! how shall I lift my eyes afterward and look at Aaron? I would be ashamed before him, for he greeted me:" And thus that man would refrain from transgression.

So, too, when two men had quarreled with each other, Aaron would go and sit down with one of them and say to him: "My son, mark what your fellow is saying! He beats his breast and tears his clothing, saying, 'Woe is me! How shall I lift my eyes and look upon my fellow! I am ashamed before him, for I have treated him badly.' "

He would sit with him until he had removed all rancor from his heart.

Then Aaron would go and sit with the other one and say to him: "My son, mark what your fellow is saying! He beats his breast and tears his clothing,

saying, 'Woe is me! How shall I lift my eyes and look at my fellow! I am ashamed before him, for I have treated him badly.'" He would sit with him until he had removed all rancor from his heart.

When the two men met each other, they would embrace and kiss each other. That is why (upon Aaron's death) it is said: "They wept for Aaron thirty days, even *all* the house of Israel."

c. Rav Isaac Abarbanel: Bad Deeds, not Bad People

It says, "You shall not hate your brother..."

By 'brother' it means that even when a person transgresses, it is not appropriate to hate the person, but only to hate his/her deeds, and the rebuke should be administered in order that the person return to the good.

d. Beruriah's Advice - Talmud Berachot 10 a

There were once some lawless men in the neighborhood of Rabbi Meir who caused him a great deal of trouble. Rabbi Meir accordingly prayed that they should die.

His wife Beruriah said to him: 'How can you think that such a prayer is permitted?... When sins will cease there will be no more wicked men! Rather pray for them that they turn from their ways, and there will be no more wicked.' He did pray on their behalf and they did turn from evil.

e. As a Real Fellow - Maayana shel Torah – Anthology

"Reprove your fellow man" - If you reprove him treat him as a real "fellow" man, as a friend who has a value equal to your own.

"Don't put a sin on him" - Don't treat him as a "sinner" otherwise he will turn away from you completely and you will achieve nothing.

f. From the Heart - Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk

"Things that emerge from the heart may enter the heart", that means those things which emerge from the heart and return to enter the heart of the speaker. For example, the criticism rendered by a friend which affects the critic himself can also have an influence on his friend.

Moral Pathos and Sensitivity to Shame

a. Zusya and the Sinner

Once Rabbi Zusya came to an inn, and on the forehead of the innkeeper he saw long years of sin. For a while he did not rebuke him or even speak to him. But when Zusya was alone in the room which had been assigned to him, the shudder of vicarious experience overcame him in the midst of singing psalms and he cried aloud:

"Zusya, Zusya, you wicked man! What have you done! There is no lie that failed to tempt you, and no crime you have not committed. Zusya, foolish, erring man, what will be the end of this?"

Then he enumerated the sins of the innkeeper, giving the time and place of each, as his own, and sobbed.

The innkeeper had quietly followed this strange man. He stood at the door and heard him. First he was seized with dull dismay, but then penitence and grace were lit within him, and -he woke to God.

b. Between Parent and Child - Maimonides, Laws of Rebellion 6:11

A bastard is bound to honor and reverence his father, although he is not culpable if he strikes or curses him, unless the latter has repented. Even if one's father is a wicked man, a habitual transgressor, it is the duty of the son to honor and reverence him.

"If the child sees the parent violate a commandment, the child should not say: "Father, you have disregarded a mitzvah of the Torah!" Rather the child should say: "Isn't it written thus and thus in the Torah?" - speaking to the parent as though one were consulting, instead of admonishing.

If the parent orders the child to transgress a positive or a negative command set forth in the Bible or even a command which is of rabbinical origin, the child must disregard the order, for it is said:

"You shall fear everyone one's mother, and one's father; but you shall keep My Sabbaths" (Lev. 19:3), that is, all of you are bound to honor Me. (Maimonides, Laws of Rebellion 6:11)

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c. "To Each His Own" - Sefer Hassidim -Germany, 13th century.

A moral critic must shape his message according to the traits of the one being reprov'd.

If he is easy going be easy going, if tough be tough.

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d. "Know Your Self" - Gaon of Vilna (Iturei Soferim)

One should not speak harshly in criticising another for he will not listen to harsh words. Speak gently. However, if one's nature is such that one is incapable of speaking gently in rebuke, then one is exempt from the obligation to reprove others.

e.. Indirection - Sefardi anthology - Meam Loez in Leviticus 19:17

If the wrongdoer is very easily shamed by even the smallest things that people remark, then do not make the critique explicit from the beginning.

Enter into a conversation and in the middle talk about how a certain thing happened to you. He will understand by himself.

If that fails talk directly about the problem. That is the point of "reprove and reprove" in the verse - first talk obliquely about the criticism, then the second time (if necessary) directly

However some say you should never explicitly mention the wrong doing not even the third time, as hinted by the rest of the verse, "reprove and reprove ...but don't place the sin on him"

The Place Where We are Right

From the place where we are right
Flowers will never grow
In the spring.

The place where we are right
Is hard and trampled
Like a yard.

But doubts and loves
Dig up the world
Like a mole, a plow.
And a whisper will be heard in the place
Where the ruined
House once stood

Yebuda Amichai

Appendix : The Appearance of Humility:

“I was not content with being in the right when discussing any Point, but was overbearing and rather insolent.”

Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*

My List of Virtues contain'd at first but twelve: But a Quaker Friend having kindly inform'd me that I was generally thought proud; that my Pride show'd itself frequently in Conversation; that I was not content with being in the right when discussing any Point, but was overbearing and rather insolent; of which he convinc'd me by mentioning several Instances; I determin'd endeavouring to cure myself if I could of this Vice or Folly among the rest, and I added **Humility** to my List, giving an extensive Meaning to the Word.

I cannot boast of much Success in acquiring the Reality of this Virtue; but I had a good deal with regard to the Appearance of it. I made it a Rule to forbear all direct Contradiction to the Sentiments of others, and all positive Assertion of my own. ..and the Use of every Word or Expression in the Language that imported a fix'd Opinion; such as “certainly, undoubtedly,” &c. and I adopted instead of them, I conceive, I apprehend, or I imagine a thing to be so or so, or it so appears to me at present. When another asserted something, that I thought an Error, **I deny'd my self the Pleasure of contradicting him abruptly. and of showing immediately some Absurdity in his Proposition; and in answering I began by observing that in certain Cases or Circumstances his Opinion would be right**, but that in the present case there appear'd or seem'd to me some Difference, &c. I soon found the Advantage of this change in my Manners. The Conversations I engag'd in went on more pleasantly. The modest way in which I propos'd my Opinions, procur'd them a readier Reception and less Contradiction; I had less Mortification when I was found to be in the wrong, and I more easily prevail'd with others to give up their Mistakes and join with me when I happen'd to be in the right. And this mode, which I at first put on, with some violence to natural Inclination, became at length so easy and so habitual to me. that perhaps for these Fifty Years past no one has ever heard a dogmatical Expression escape me.

Appendix: Teaching that Follows Listening – Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela as boy learned how **leadership was related to listening** from the tribal leaders of the Xhosa. “On these occasions, the regent was surrounded by his group of councilors of high rank who functioned as the regent's parliament and judiciary. They were wise men who retained the knowledge of tribal history and custom in their heads and whose opinions carried great weight.

Letters advising these chiefs and headmen of a meeting were dispatched from the regent, and soon the Great Place became alive with important visitors and travelers from all over Thembuland. The guests would gather in the courtyard in front of the regent's house and he would open the meeting by thanking everyone for coming and explaining why he had summoned them. From that point on, **he would not utter another word until the meeting was nearing its end.**

Everyone who wanted to speak did so. It was democracy in its purest form. There may have been a hierarchy of importance among the speakers, but everyone was heard, chief and subject, warrior and medicine man, shopkeeper and farmer, landowner and laborer. People spoke without interruption and the meetings lasted for many hours. The foundation of self-government was that all men were free to voice their opinions and equal in their value as citizens. (Women, I am afraid, were deemed second-class citizens.)

A great banquet was served during the day, and I often gave myself a bellyache by eating too much while listening to speaker after speaker. I noticed how some speakers rambled and never seemed to get to the point. I grasped how others came to the matter at hand directly, and who made a set of arguments succinctly and cogently. I observed how some speakers used emotion and dramatic language, and tried to move the audience with such techniques, while other speakers were sober and even, and shunned emotion.

At first, I was astonished by the vehemence - and candor - with which people criticized the regent. He was not above criticism - in fact, he was often the principal target of it. But no matter how flagrant the charge, the regent simply listened, not defending himself, showing no emotion at all.

The meetings would continue until some kind of consensus was reached. They ended in unanimity or not at all. Unanimity, however, might be an agreement to disagree, to wait for a more propitious time to propose a solution. Democracy meant all men were to be heard, and a decision was taken together as a people. Majority rule was a foreign notion. A minority was not to be crushed by a majority.

Only at the end of the meeting, as the sun was setting, would the regent speak. His purpose was to sum up what had been said and form some consensus among the diverse opinions. But no conclusion was forced on people who disagreed. If no agreement could be reached, another meeting would be held. At the very end of the council, a praise-singer or poet would deliver a panegyric to the ancient kings, and a mixture of compliments to and satire on the present chiefs, and the audience, led by the regent, would roar with laughter.

As a leader, I have always followed the principles I first saw demonstrated by the regent at the Great Place. I have always endeavored to listen to what each and every person in a discussion had to say before venturing my own opinion. Oftentimes, my own opinion will simply represent a consensus of what I heard in the discussion. I always remember the regent's axiom: a leader, he said, is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind.” (Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 21-22)

רמב"ם יד החזקה - הלכות דעות פרק ו

(ו) כשיחטא איש לאיש לא ישטמנו וישתוק כמו שנאמר ברשעים ולא דבר אבשלום את אמנון מאומה למרע ועד טוב כי שנה אבשלום את אמנון אלא מצוה עליו להודיעו ולומר לו למה עשית לי כך וכך ולמה חטאת לי בדבר פלוני שנאמר הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך ואם חזר ובקש ממנו למחול לו צריך למחול ולא יהא המוחל אכזרי שנאמר ויתפלל אברהם אל האלהים:
(ז) הרואה חבירו שחטא או שהלך בדרך לא טובה מצוה להחזירו למוטב ולהודיעו שהוא חוטא על עצמו במעשיו הרעים שנאמר הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך המוכיח את חבירו בין בדברים שבינו לבינו בין בדברים שבינו לבין המקום צריך להוכיחו בינו לבין עצמו וידבר לו בנחת ובלשון רכה ויודיעו שאינו אומר לו אלא לטובתו להביאו לחיי העולם הבא אם קיבל ממנו מוטב ואם לאו יוכיחו פעם שניה ושלישית וכן תמיד חייב אדם להוכיחו עד שיכהה החוטא ויאמר לו איני שומע וכל שאפשר בידו למחות ואינו מוחה הוא נתפש בעון אלו כיון שאפשר לו למחות בהם:

(ח) המוכיח את חבירו תחלה לא ידבר לו קשות עד שיכלימו שנאמר ולא תשא עליו חטא כך אמרו חכמים יכול אתה מוכיחו ופניו משתנות ת"ל ולא תשא עליו חטא מכאן שאסור לאדם להכלים את ישראל וכל שכן ברבים אע"פ שהמכלים את חבירו אינו לוקה עליו עון גדול הוא כך אמרו חכמים המלבין פני חבירו ברבים אין לו חלק לעולם הבא לפיכך צריך אדם להזהר שלא לבייש חבירו ברבים בין קטן בין גדול ולא יקרא לו בשם שהוא בוש ממנו ולא יספר לפניו דבר שהוא בוש ממנו במה דברים אמורים בדברים שבינו אדם לחבירו אבל בדברי שמים אם לא חזר בו בסתר מכלימין אותו ברבים ומפרסמים חטאו ומחרפים אותו בפניו ומבזין ומקללין אותו עד שיחזור למוטב כמו שעשו כל הנביאים בישראל:
(ט) מי שחטא עליו חבירו ולא רצה להוכיחו ולא לדבר לו כלום מפני שהיה החוטא הדיוט ביותר או שהיתה דעתו משובשת ומחל לו בלבו ולא שטמו ולא הוכיחו הרי זו מדת חסידות לא הקפידה תורה אלא על המשטמה:

והוכיח אברהם את אבימלך.

א"ר יוסי בר חנינא התוכחת מביאה לידי אהבה שנאמר (משלי ט) הוכח לחכם ויאהבך היא דעתיה דרבי יוסי בר חנינא דאמר כל אהבה שאין עמה תוכחה אינה אהבה

אמר ריש לקיש תוכחה מביאה לידי שלום - והוכיח אברהם את אבימלך
היא דעתיה דאמר כל שלום שאין עמו תוכחה אינו שלום-- מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה נד פסקה ג

כל מי שאפשר למחות לאנשי ביתו ולא מיחה נתפס על אנשי ביתו
באנשי עירו נתפס על אנשי עירו
בכל העולם כולו נתפס על כל העולם כולו -- תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף נד/ב

ואמר ר' אלעא משום ר' יהודה בר' שמעון -
כשם שמצוה על אדם לומר דבר הנשמע, כך מצוה על האדם שלא לומר דבר שאינו נשמע,
ר' אבא אומר חובה, שנא' אל תוכח לץ פן ישנאך הוכח לחכם ויאהבך. יבמות דף כא/ב