

# Rebuke and Human Dignity

## Jewish Ethics: Lesson 2

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### Areivut

1) And they shall stumble one upon another (Leviticus 26:37), meaning, one [will stumble] through the sin of the other, which teaches that all are held responsible for one another. (Talmud, Sanhedrin 27b)

### Tochacha

2) You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your fellow, but you shall not bear a sin on his account. (Leviticus 19:17)

### Extent of Duty

3) How far does rebuke extend? Rav said: To the point of hitting. And Shmuel said: To the point of cursing. And Rabbi Yochanan said: To the point of reprimand. (Talmud, Erechin 16b)

### How to rebuke

4) Rav Ile'a further stated in the name of Rav Elazar son of Rav Shimon: As one is commanded to say that which will be obeyed, so is one commanded not to say that which will not be obeyed. Rav Abba stated: It is a duty; for it is said in Scripture (Proverbs 9:8), Reprove not a scorner lest he hate you; reprove a wise man and he will love you. (Talmud, Yevamot 65b)

### A Critical Point of View

5) It was taught that Rabbi Tarfon said, "I would be surprised if anyone in this generation can take rebuke. You tell a person to take a stick out of their mouth and they'll tell you to take a board between your eyes." Rabbi Eliezer Ben Azarya said, "I'd be surprised if anyone in this generation knows how to criticize."

6) Rabbi Yochanan Ben Nuri said, "I swear that when Akiva and I were before Rabbi Gamliel, I would accuse him, but he even showered me more with love, as it is written "Do not rebuke a fool for he will hate you, rebuke a wise person and he will love you." (Erechin ibid.)

7) We have learned: One may not clap the hands or slap the thighs or dance. And yet today we see people doing this and we do not take them to task!... Here also [I say]: Let Israel go their way; it is better that they should err in ignorance than deliberately. (Talmud, Beitza 30a)

### Emotional Homicide

8) From which verse do we know that if we see something repulsive in another we are obliged to correct it? "...one shall certainly rebuke..." What happens if one was rebuked and did not respond that you are obliged to repeat? [The word rebuke is repeated in the verse] It is written, "You shall certainly rebuke." As much as it takes. Maybe one can rebuke until the person blanches? The verse states: Don't carry his sin." (Erechin ibid.)

9) Rabbi Elazar of Modi'in would say: One who...humiliates his friend in public, although he may possess Torah knowledge and good deeds, he has no share in the World to Come. (Mishneh, Avot 3:11)

10) Better had a man throw himself into a fiery furnace than publicly put his neighbor to shame. Whence do we know it? — From Tamar. For it is written (Genesis 38:25), when she was brought forth, she sent to her father-in-law [etc]. (Talmud, Bava Metzia 59a)

### Tzelem Elokim

11) Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of G-d]; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to him that he was created in the image, as it is says (Genesis 9:6), "For in the image of G-d, He made man." (Mishneh, Avot 3:14)

### Human Dignity

12) Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: If one finds mixed kinds in his garment, he takes it off even in the street. What is the reason? [It says]: There is neither wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord (Proverbs 21:30), wherever a profanation of God's name is involved no respect is paid to a teacher. (Talmud, Berachot 19b)

13) All of the above measures should be applied according to the judge's perception that it is appropriate that the violator be punished in this manner or the situation at large requires it. All of his deeds should be for the sake of heaven and the honor of people at large should not be light in his eyes. For consideration of their honor overrides the observance of a Rabbinic prohibition. Certainly, this applies with regard to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who uphold the Torah of truth. He must take care not to ruin their honor and act only to increase the honor of the Omnipresent. (Rambam, Laws of Sanhedrin 24:10)

### Rabbinic Institutions

14) The Rabbis taught in a Baraisa: Originally, [when] they would deliver [food] to a house of mourning, the wealthy [would deliver it] in baskets of silver and gold, and the poor in baskets of peeled willow twigs [the Rabbis therefore] instituted that all should bring in baskets of peeled willow twigs, out of concern for the honor of the poor. (Talmud, Moed Katan 27a)

15) The Rabbis taught in a Baraisa: The king's daughter would borrow [a white garment] from the Kohen Gadol's daughter, the Kohen Gadol's daughter from the deputy Kohen Gadol's daughter... and all other Jews would borrow from one another so that [a poor girl] who had no [beautiful clothing of her own] would not be embarrassed. (Talmud, Ta'anis 31a)