

Let's begin with a definition of a term: **תוכחה**-*tokhaha* is a **rebuke**. The obligation to rebuke one's fellow is found here:

לֹא תִשְׂנֵא אֶת אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְךָ הַכֹּחֵת תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת עַמִּיתְךָ וְלֹא תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חֲטָא. (ויקרא יט:יז)

**You are not to hate your brother in your heart; rebuke, yes, rebuke your fellow, that you not bear sin because of him!** (Lev. 19:17)

Without going into the issues too deeply, what Leviticus is saying is that if you are upset with someone and have something to say to that person to get it off your chest, by all means say it, but don't be sinful. Rashi adds some clarity:

לֹא תִלְבִּין אֶת פְּנֵיו בְּרִבִּים.

**Do not embarrass the person in public.**

Thus, when you rebuke someone, you must still take pains to be compassionate. Here is another source on the subject:

כִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֶאֱהָב ה' יוֹכִיחַ וְכָאֵב אֶת בֶּן יִרְצֶה. (משלי ג:יב)

**For whom the LORD loves, He rebukes, As a father the son whom he favors.** (Proverbs 3:12)

Is love, a prerequisite for a rebuke? This seems counter-intuitive. On the one hand, a rebuke is a very stern form of communication. We would think that only people who hate us want to rebuke us. But once we understand that the aim of a proper rebuke is to mend a relationship, then a proper rebuke **davka** makes sense. To rebuke someone without caring about the relationship is simply another form of bullying. But a proper rebuke honors the other's vulnerability and **their** willingness to mend the relationship. When Moses reviews Israel's history in the beginning of the book of *D'varim*, he is, in part, rebuking Israel. The rabbis were attentive to this and because they understood the word **הַדְּבָרִים** to mean **the rebukes** (and not simply the *things* or the *statements of Moses*) they interpreted the opening words of the book, **אלה הדברים**-*Eleh ha-dvarim* to mean, **These are the rebukes that Moses spoke**. The midrash:

מֶה תִּלְמֹד לֵאמֹר אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה? מִלֵּמַד שֶׁהֵיוּ דְּבָרֵי תוֹכְחוֹת. (ספרי דברים א:ב)

**What is the intent of the Torah's words, *eleh hadvarim*, these are the words that Moses spoke? This teaches us that these words were words of rebuke.** (Sifrei Devarim 1:2)

Why does the Torah have to say, **These are the words that Moses spoke**, when we know that Moses basically *spoke* the entire Torah?! Why does the Torah specify, **davka** here, that **these** are the **words** that Moses spoke? The answer is because **these words, eleh hadvarim** - are not just ordinary words. **These words are words of rebuke**. And if you read the book of Deuteronomy closely, you will see that there are many words of rebuke. Including this one in Chapter 1:

אֵיכָה אֲשָׂא לְבַדִּי טַרְחָם וּמִשְׁאָכָם וְרִיבָם. (דב' א:יב)

**How can I carry, I alone, your load, your burden, your quarreling?** (Deut. 1:12)

And this one also in Chapter 1:

וְלֹא אָבִיתֶם לַעֲלֹת וּתְמַרְוּ אֶת פִּי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. (א:כו)

**Yet you were not willing to go up; you rebelled against the order of the Lord your God.** (1:26).

Enter Rabbi Aha son of Rabbi Hanina with a midrash:

**אלה הדברים**. אָמַר רַבִּי אֶהָא בְּרַבִּי חֲנִינָא: רְאוּיֹת הֵיוּ הַתּוֹכְחוֹת לֵאמֹר מִפִּי בִלְעָם, וְהַבְּרָכוֹת מִפִּי מֹשֶׁה. אֵלֶּה אֵלֶּה הַתּוֹכְחוֹת בִּלְעָם, הֵיוּ אֲמוֹת הָעוֹלָם אוֹמְרִים: "שׁוֹנֵא מוֹכִיחֵנו." וְאֵלֶּה הַבְּרָכָה מֹשֶׁה, הֵיוּ אֲמוֹת הָעוֹלָם אוֹמְרִים: "אוֹהֵב בְּרַכָּנוּ." אָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יוֹכִיחַ מֹשֶׁה שְׂאוֹהֵב, וְיִבְרַךְ בִּלְעָם שְׂשׂוֹנֵא, כְּדִי שִׁיתְּבָרְרוּ הַבְּרָכוֹת וְהַתּוֹכְחוֹת בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל. (דברים רבה א:ד)

***Eleh ha'dvarim. These are the words (i.e. the rebukes)***

***that Moses spoke to all of Israel. R. Aha son of R.***

***Hanina said: It would have been more fitting if Bil'am***

***had rebuked Israel (rather than Moses). And it would***

***have been more fitting if Moses had blessed Israel***

***(rather than Bil'am). However, if Bil'am had rebuked***

***Israel, Israel would have claimed: "Someone who hates***

***us is rebuking us!" And if Moses would have blessed***

***them, the nations of the world would have claimed:***

***"Someone who loves them has blessed them!"***

***Therefore, God said: Let Moses be the one to rebuke***

***them because (davka!) he loves them! And let Bil'am***

***bless them because (davka!) he hates them! In that way***

***it will be clear and beyond reproach that Israel deserves***

***these blessings and curses.*** (Devarim Rabbah 1:4)

**Explanation:** According to R. Aha, we generally expect someone who hates us to rebuke us and someone who loves us to bless us. But what took place was the opposite. Bil'am, who hated Israel<sup>1</sup>, should have appropriately been the one to rebuke Israel, but he ended up blessing Israel! And Moses, who loved his people, should have appropriately blessed Israel, and instead he ended up rebuking Israel! **And davka, because the natural dispositions of Bil'am and Moses were opposite to their messages, their respective blessings and rebukes had much more weight to them.**

**Davka** is, **davka**, a hard word to translate. The closest we can get in English is "**especially**" in the sense of where what is being described is generally opposite to what is expected. But that translation **davka** lacks the urgency, directness, and irony of the original Aramaic. R. Aha is offering us a **davka** argument. **Blessings from someone who is hateful, or rebukes from someone who is loving davka carry more weight.** The Talmud is filled with **davka** examples. **Honoring and Revering Parents.** In the 5th commandment, **Honor your father and mother**, (Exod. 20:11) **father** precedes **mother**. But elsewhere, when we are commanded to revere our parents, **A person—his mother and his father you are to revere** (Lev. 19:3) **mother** precedes **father**.

The talmud deals with that in a **davka** argument.

<sup>1</sup> Not a difficult conclusion since he lent out his prophetic services to curse Israel, and because later he tried to entice

Israel to idolatry and immoral sexual behavior (Num. 25:1-3). Not a friend.

רבי אומר: גלוי ונדוע לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם שכן מכבד את אמו יותר מאביו, מפני שמשדלתו בדברים. לפיכך הקדים הקדוש ברוך הוא כיבוד אב לכיבוד אם. וגלוי ונדוע לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם שכן מתקרא מאביו יותר מאמו, מפני שמלמדו תורה, לפיכך הקדים הקדוש ברוך הוא מורה האם למורה האב. (קידושין לא.)

*Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi says: It is revealed and known before the One Who spoke and the world came into being that a son honors his mother more than he honors his father, because she persuades him with many statements of encouragement and does not treat him harshly. Therefore, in the mitzva of: "Honor your father and your mother" God preceded the mention of the honor due one's father before mentioning the honor due one's mother. Similarly, it is revealed and known before the One Who spoke and the world came into being that a son fears his father more than his mother, because his father teaches him Torah, and consequently he is strict with him. Therefore, in the verse: "A man shall fear his mother and his father", the God preceded the mention of fear of the mother before the mention of fear of the father. (Kiddushin 31a)*

In other words: In the worldview of R. Yehuda HaNassi *mothers are generally loving and compassionate while fathers are stern disciplinarians. One's natural tendency would be to honor the loving and compassionate parent, the mother, and revere the stern disciplinarian, the father.* It precisely because of that, that the Torah *davka* reverses the order in both of those commandments. *Honor, davka, your father and mother* (in *davka* that order) - because you naturally *fear* your father more than your mother. *Revere davka, your mother and father* (in *davka* that order) - because you tend to *honor* your mother more than your father. **Hillel and Shammai.** Hillel is kind and patient. Shammai is strict and uncompromising. This characterization is based on well-known stories, like the story of the proselyte who comes before both of them wanting to convert to Judaism on condition that they teach him the Torah while *standing on one foot*. Shammai rejects him, while Hillel accepts him saying: *What is hateful to you do not do unto your neighbor. That is the Torah, the rest is commentary. Go and learn.* But it shouldn't surprise us that there are examples of Shammai, *davka* Shammai (!), being gracious and Hillel, *davka* Hillel (!), being caustic and critical. Here is one of Shammai's most famous sayings:

והוי מקבל את כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות: (אבות א:טו)

*Receive all people with a pleasant countenance. (Avot 1:15)*

Hardly what one would expect to hear from a strict old coot. And in one instance, Hillel lost his temper and rebuked his colleagues. After examining the laws of the Passover sacrifice for an entire day, and faced with what he thought were lazy questions, he blasted them with the following jewel:

מי גרם לכם שאעלה מבבל ואהיה נשיא עליכם — עצלות שהיתה בקרבם... (פסחים טו.)

*What caused this to happen to you, that I should come up from Babylonia and become Nasi over you? It was the laziness in you...<sup>2</sup> (Pesachim 66a)*

**As we mark 666 days, we pray for the return of the hostages, and an end to the war, and an alleviation of the terrible humanitarian crisis. May God comfort the bereaved, protect the IDF, and heal the wounded.**

<sup>2</sup> He is referring to the fact that his colleagues Eretz Yisrael did not know the obvious answers to their questions

*Davka*, because Hillel is always perceived to be patient and compassionate, his rebuke carried so much more weight. We could all, *davka*, bring our own examples of this type of argument. Here are just a few: **Nixon Goes to China.** Richard Nixon had been a lifelong Cold Warrior. It was *davka* Nixon who could pull that off because of his fierce anti-communism.



**Begin and Sadat.** Prior to being elected in 1977, Begin had spent 30 years as an opposition leader in Israel's governments. His unwavering territorial maximalism of gave him tremendous credibility among the right wing the Israeli electorate. And yet, it was *davka* Begin, who argued compellingly for Israel to cede the Sinai Peninsula for the sake of peace. **Ariel Sharon and the Unilateral Disengagement from Gaza.** This August marks 20 years since Israel's disengagement from Gaza. Sharon, a hero of the Yom Kippur War, had long established himself as a tough politician and as an architect of Israel's settlement policy. But at heart, he was a pragmatist. He saw Israel's presence in Gaza as unsustainable. It was *davka* Sharon, who could make the case for disengagement. *In each of these cases the person we would least likely expect ends up being the one, davka, to create lasting impact.*

(We could come up with more: **Lincoln, davka** the cautious moderate whose moral clarity resulted in the Emancipation Proclamation; **FDR, davka** a product of great wealth and privilege who promulgated the New Deal; **Lyndon Johnson, davka**, raised in segregation and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. **Bob Dylan, davka**, the ultimate symbol of folk music, who leveraged his credibility and "went electric" for the sake of his artistic integrity.)

Back to R. Aha. Rabbi Aha's interpretation is not a frivolous exercise in comparing Moses and Bil'am. *Rather, it opens us up to a larger question of who has credibility, and davka, the essence of integrity, authenticity, altruism and moral courage.* Moses, the devoted leader of Israel is the one from whom we would expect blessings, not rebukes. But it is *davka*, because of his integrity and steadfastness, that his *תוכחה-tokhaha* carries tremendous weight. Because these rebukes were part of his last words to Israel, they were delivered with the intent to inspire the soul, and not to crush it. To build up, not to take down. His *תוכחה-tokhaha* emanating from a place of honesty and truth, was not an expression of anger but *davka*, an expression of love and devotion to Israel.

**Shabbat Shalom!**

because they were not attentive to their masters Shemaya and Avtalyon. Hillel rebukes them because of their laziness.