

While *Love your neighbor as yourself* (Lev. 19:18) is often billed as the most important verse in the Bible, we ought to give some attention to the verse that directly precedes it, namely:

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ.
Do not to hate your brother in your heart (19:17a).

It is not difficult to imagine scores of hate scenarios. Genesis brims with brother-hate: Cain kills Abel. Esau despises Jacob. The brothers hate Joseph. For the rest of us though, the Torah recognizes that life is complicated and that the seeds of hatred can find fertile soil in the human heart. To remediate hatred, the Torah tells us to do this:

הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת עֲמִיתְךָ וְלֹא תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חַטָּא.
You shall certainly ? your fellow that you do not bear sin because of him. (19:17b).

How do we translate *הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ-hokhiakh tokhiakh*? Here are several attempts, each with a different nuance:

Translation:	Interpretation:	Simulation:
King James Version: <i>Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour.</i>	A proper upbraiding in a British accent. Formal, stern, yet even-tempered.	<i>I should like to bring to your attention the matter of my utter displeasure.</i>
Everett Fox: <i>Rebuke, yes, rebuke your fellow</i>	A smack in the face.	<i>I hate you and here's why I hate you.</i>
Robert Alter: <i>You shall surely reprove your fellow.</i>	Do a little thinking and then speak to the person properly.	<i>Please join my outside, I need to have a word with you.</i>
Richard Elliott Friedman: <i>You shall criticize your fellow.</i>	The zone that is in between a smack on the face and a quiet word.	<i>I have serious issues with what you did. Let me explain.</i>
Sefaria: <i>Speak, truly speak with your brother.</i>	Earnest but detached from the real rage that might be simmering.	<i>Let's have a heart to heart.</i>
Yiddish: אויסרעדן זאלסטו אויסרעדן דיין חבר (oysredn zolstu, oysredn, dayn haver) <i>You should talk, talk with your friend.</i>	The musicality of this translation gives us the picture of two old Jewish men sitting on a park bench calmly discussing their issue.	<i>Shmerl, I have something I want to tell you. Not a big thing but not a small thing either. It's an important thing. Come let's talk.</i>

Depending on our translation then we have everything from almost dropping-the-gloves to a convivial shmooze. What we are discovering here is that for such an important verse,



it is very hard to pin down exactly what it means. To help us, we turn to three examples of verbs built from the same root as the phrase *הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ* (י.כ.ח.) that will help us understand the range of meaning in this verse.¹

1. Designation: Abraham Dispatches His Servant. When Abraham's servant prays to God for an act of kindness, he tells God that he is going to situate himself by the well, and if the maiden offers him *and his camels* water to drink he will know that that is the woman destined to become Isaac's wife. His words: *הַכַּחֵת לְעַבְדְּךָ לִיְצַחֵק* - *that is the one that you, God, are designating for your servant Isaac* (Gen. 24:14). Far from rebuking and remonstrating or even a shmooze, *הַכַּחֵת* in this instance *is the act of drawing attention*, it is *designation*, a *grand gesture of presentation*. When he later recounts what happened to Betuel and Lavan, he said that she indeed brought him and his camels water and that at that moment he knew that she was *the one!* *הוּא הַיְחִידָה אֲשֶׁר הָאֱלֹהִים הֵבִיאוּ לִבְנוֹ אֲדֹנָי* - *she is the woman that God has designated for the son of my master* (Gen. 24:44).

2. A Legal Proceeding. In the first chapter of Isaiah, God castigates the people for their sinfulness and then stunningly invites them to engage in a kind of legal proceeding (Isa. 1:8): *בָּא וְנִדְבַחְךָ* - *come now and let us engage-in-a-kind-of-litigation*. The purpose of this litigation is to end a state of belligerence and remake the relationship. The verb that is used here, *נִדְבַחְךָ*, makes us imagine that God and the people are resolved to reconcile their differences as if they were positioned across from each other in a fervent negotiation and make a deal.

3. To Correct the Other. Proverbs 3:12 is often quoted to shed light on God's relationship with us: *כִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֵאָהֵב ה'* - *For whom God loves he corrects*. We note that the idea of "correction" may still be inadequate. A "correction" is gentler than a "rebuke" or a "reproach" but it is also not a "litigation" or a "demonstration." This verse though, underscores the centrality of the relationship between God and the "correctee". *The activity designated by the word הַכִּיתִּי is part of a relationship that is grounded in mutuality and love*. In Proverbs, a loving God "corrects" you. If we assume that God loves all of us unconditionally, then we ought to conclude that God is always "correcting" us in whatever form that takes.

Given these different shadings for *הַכִּיתִּי* how should we interpret Lev. 19:17?

¹ According to the online concordance at alhatorah.org, there are 59 different verbs built from the root י.כ.ח.

1. We rely on a premise: a pre-existing relationship has gone sour. Because the text says **your brother** we can assume that, at the very least, the person we are hating is someone we know or are related to. You can't hate someone that you don't have a relationship with.

2. The hatred is **in your heart**, which means it is internal, unexpressed, and unarticulated. Something has happened and the hater is concealing that hate.

3. The Torah is commanding us in such a circumstance **to bring the feeling out from the concealment** and into the open. It doesn't give us the script for this - we wish it did! - but it does convey to us that the way to do this is through a type of invitation to engage in a negotiation. **Rather than rebuke, remonstrate, or reproach, it is saying to us: Open up a dialogue. Issue your charge, the thing that you want to litigate or negotiate and be open to the possibility of reconciliation.** In the power dynamics of this relationship, by concealing your feelings which we hope are only temporary you are subjecting the other person to uncertainty and unease. **It is your responsibility here to bring what you are concealing out into the open.**

4. But the mitzvah also includes this most important proviso: **וְלֹא תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חַטָּאת** - which for now we will translate provisionally as: **so you shall not bear sin over him.**² "Burden" or "weight" is the dominant sin-metaphor in the Torah. The sinner "carries" the sin as if it were a heavy parcel on his back. The more sins, the more parcels, the more parcels the less you are able to move about freely until ultimately you are crushed by sin. Repentance and atonement "lift" the parcels off the sinner's back.

These four words have inspired enough rabbinic and medieval commentary to fill a whole night of study!³ However, it seems to me that the plain reading of this text is as follows: **Hating someone in your heart is forbidden. You have to disclose that hatred. By doing so, by putting everything out in the open so that you can work out, litigate, or correct the situation, morally or otherwise, you will "lift" the sin of the sin of hating that other person from your back. By working out your situation with that person, you will no longer be "carrying" a sin on account of your hatred of him.** Or to put it in more hortatory language: **Don't hate someone deep down in your heart. Don't conceal a secret hatred for someone else. That, says**

²Richard Elliott Friedman's translation. Robert Alter: **(you shall) not bear guilt because of him.** JPS: **Incur no guilt because of him.** Everett Fox: **You shall not bear sin because of him - note: because you did not alert him to the consequences of his behavior.** Yiddish: **כדי זאלסט ניט אַ זינד באַקומען אויב ער איז אַ זינדליך ווייל ער האט דאך נישט געזאגט דעם אַנדרן פּערזאָן וואָס ער האט אים געוויינט.** (It's all in the syntax. The Yiddish syntax softens the tone, and it comes off more as a common-sense suggestion for menschiness than a biblical commandment!)

³Just a quick glance at two major commentaries: For Rashi these words are a guardrail. He says: **לֹא תִלְבִּין אֶת פְּנֵיו** **דֹּם בְּרִיבִים** - **do not cause his face to whiten in public.** Which is another way of saying, **do not humiliate him, because if**

the Torah, is a sin. But life is filled with so many twists and turns. What if, for some unfortunate reason, you do end up hating someone, someone who was once your friend? Well, the Torah is telling us that you have to take the challenging step to reveal that feeling. To put everything out in the open, no matter how hard that is. That is not a suggestion. That is a commandment! **הוֹקֵחַ הוֹקֵחַ תּוֹכֵחַ אֶת עַמִּיתְךָ**. **But how do you do that? Here the Torah does not give us a script. But it is the hater that has to take the initiative.** We take **הוֹקֵחַ תּוֹכֵחַ** to mean **disclosure, litigation, argumentation, negotiation, and hopefully, reconciliation.** And when you achieve that reconciliation, you will, as a consequence of the process, "unload" the heavy burden of the sin of hatred that you were carrying up until now. But as usual, there's more. As a hater, you might be tempted to settle scores. Therefore, the verse that follows this prohibition against hating in your heart goes one step further, anticipating what may ensue even after a reconciliation: **You are not to take-vengeance, you are not to retain-anger against the sons of your kinspeople—but be loving to your neighbor (love your neighbor) [as one] like yourself; I am God.** The tradition eventually places **Love your neighbor** as one of the core, if not **the** core principles of the Torah. But we ought to read the commandment to **Love your neighbor** also within the context of the commonplace challenges of all deep human relationships. **What the Torah is teaching us is that human relationships require constant calibration and adjudication.** They depend on the way we understand what is in our own hearts and the need to disclose what can be hidden in them. Love of others is not just an imperative. It is - most importantly - a byproduct of being an open, deep, intuitive, conscientious human being. If you hate another person but learn how to disclose that hate, if you alleviate your burden of sin, if you desist from settling scores, you will, in the end, be a person that loves their neighbor as themselves, just as the Torah commands us all to be.

SHABBAT SHALOM!

This Parasha sheet is sponsored by Linda Tondow and family to commemorate the 2nd Yahrzeit of her husband, Alvin Tondow, z"l.

you are indiscrete in the way you offer your response to him, you will incur a sin. For Ramban this means that you will be sinning by: **covering up your hatred for him in your heart. Moreover, it is by your putting this in the open with him, that he will apologize to you, or repent, and own up to the sin that he has committed (against you) and gain atonement.** In other words, Rashi is concerned about the "how" and Ramban is concerned about the "what". Rashi: Don't confront the other person sinfully. Ramban: Don't keep sinning by hating the other person. If you don't disclose your hatred to your friend and explain why it is that you are now so negatively disposed to him, you will end up "carrying" the weight of the sin that caused the rupture between the two of you in the first place.