

OUT OF LOVE

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Yaakov (Jacob) on his way to the home of his uncle, Lavan (Laban), came to a well, where he would soon meet his future wife, Rachel. As he approached, he noticed shepherds gathered around it. "And Yaakov said to them, 'Brothers! Where are you from?'" (Beraishis/Genesis 29:4) Why did Yaakov address these complete strangers, "brothers"?

The Talmud (Erchin 16b) teaches "To what extent does one rebuke? Rav says: until the recipient hits you; Shmuel says: until the recipient curses you." Since there is a specific Torah commandment to rebuke one who is doing wrong, how is one absolved simply because of the recipient's negative reaction?

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky (1) explains that the true key to proper and healthy rebuke is to maintain a complete feeling of love for the recipient throughout the admonishment. Furthermore, even if one can maintain a feeling of love, if the recipient does not feel the love the commandment to rebuke ceases to exist. When the recipient is brought to the point where he may hit or curse, it is clear that the feeling of love is not being transmitted, and thus the admonishment must come to an end.

Our Sages note that Yaakov, as he approached the gathering of shepherds around the well, sensed their apathy in fulfilling their job. He approached them with words of rebuke; however, he knew that he must come to them as a true, loving friend. As such, he opened his remarks by addressing them as "brothers."

Life presents situations where we must clarify to others where they have erred, but it is critical that the rebuke is done out of true love and not personal frustration. If a child, colleague or spouse does not feel the love then not only is the imperative to rebuke questionable, but worse, it could be we who are tragically wrong. How poignant that the Torah teaches us this lesson with Yaakov at the well, where he is about to meet his wife with whom he will be building his family. This is where the discipline of proper rebuke is most important.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) 1891-1986; Rabbi of Tzitevian, Lithuania and Toronto before becoming Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivta Torah Vodaath in New York City

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