



Shabbat Table Discussions

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CENTER FOR THE JEWISH FUTURE

AHAVAT YISRAEL

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R. Avraham Y. Kook was known for his love of all Jews. Despite pressure from his colleagues to distance himself from the secular Zionist movement, he embraced them and declared that they played a very important role in building the Land of Israel and one should treat them with love and respect.¹ In one instance, R. Kook was asked to protest soccer games that were taking place on Shabbat. He refused to criticize them and instead focused on the benefits that these games provide to society.² He also loved and respected his detractors. One time, a group of extremists poured waste water on him in public. When someone tried to encourage him to press charges, R. Kook responded that he has too much love for these Jews to press charges against them.³

There is a custom that appears in a number of siddurim (prayer books) to recite the following before morning prayers:

I accept upon myself the positive commandment to love one's neighbor like oneself.

הריני מקבל עלי מצות עשה של
ואהבת לרעך כמוך.

Ahavat Yisrael, love of all Jews, is something we all value and we should love and show respect to every Jew, even when we disagree with their opinions or values. *Ahavat Yisrael* also compels us to teach others about the ideas we treasure because if we value something, we want those who we love to benefit from it as well. How do we balance loving and respecting those who have different ways of life with our desire to introduce them to that which we find meaningful?

Let's look at the following scenarios:

CASE ONE

You are spending Shabbat with friends or relatives who don't observe Shabbat the same way you do. You feel bad that they don't appreciate Shabbat as you do. How can you share your appreciation of Shabbat without offending them?

CASE TWO

A good friend strongly disagrees with you about a certain issue and every time this issue comes up, it is usually followed by a heated debate. You are both passionate about this issue and it is a major part of your lives. How can you civilly discuss the issue without it affecting your friendship?

CASE THREE

You find yourself in a place where you clearly stand out from everyone else and it seems as if the people are looking down on you and talking down to you. What is the appropriate way to react?

Our Responsibility for the Actions of Other Jews (Case #1)

Our obligation to look after the spiritual wellbeing of others is based on two concepts: *arevut* and *tochachah*. *Arevut*, derived from the word *arev* (guarantor) informs us that every Jew is responsible for the actions of every other Jew:

[The verse (Vayikra 26:37) states] "They will stumble upon each other," because of the sin of the other. This teaches that everyone is responsible for each other.

Sanhedrin 27b

"וכשלו איש באחיו" איש בעון אחיו מלמד שכולן ערבים זה בזה.
סנהדרין כז:

Tochachah is literally translated as rebuke and it focuses on our mandate to correct misdeeds or behaviors of a fellow Jew. Rabbeinu Yonah, *Sha'arei Teshuva* 3:72, writes that the mitzvah of *tochachah* is one aspect of the broader concept of *arevut*.

The Talmud recognizes the challenges of effectively rebuking someone by stating that one may not embarrass the violator and that already in Talmudic times, people didn't know how to properly rebuke.⁴ The Talmud also states that sometimes, it is better to remain silent:

R. Ila'a said in the name of R. Elazar b. R. Shimon: Just as there is a mitzvah to say something that will be received, there is also a mitzvah to refrain from saying something that won't be received.

Yevamot 65b

אמר רבי אילעא משום ר' אלעזר בר' שמעון כשם שמצוה על אדם לומר דבר הנשמע כך מצוה על אדם שלא לומר דבר שאינו נשמע.
יבמות סה:

Questions for the Table

- Can we really know if our words will be received warmly? How can we determine what is appropriate?
- The Talmud⁵ states that one should be very persistent in rebuking the transgressor, even to (at least) the point where the transgressor is agitated. Does that idea contradict the idea that one should only rebuke when it is going to be received? Why or why not?

If one knows that their words won't be accepted, they should not rebuke. When the rabbis stated that one should be persistent to the point where the sinner is agitated, they were discussing one family member rebuking another such as a parent, child or sibling, ... because in these cases there is already established love and the sinner can tolerate anything except harsh rebuke ... However, one should not rebuke other people [persistently] because the rebuke is going to cause hatred and persistent rebuke to the point of agitation will cause the sinner to do something bad and take revenge [such that the attempt at rebuke] will make things worse.

R. Yehuda HaChasid, Sefer Chasidim, no. 413

מי שידוע שלא יקבלו דבריו אין להוכיח ואשר אמרו עד נזיפה מדבר כשהבן מוכיח את האב או האם את הבן או אחיו ... לפי שלבו גס בו ואוהבו רק דברים קשים אינו יכול לסבול ... אבל אם היה איש אחר שאם יוכיחנו ישנאנו ואם התכוין להכעיסו יעשה רע וגם ינקום עד שיבא לידי רע יותר אין להוכיחו.
הרב יהודה החסיד, ספר חסידים ס' תיג

If one sees a friend sin or follow an improper path, there is a commandment to bring them back to proper ways and inform them about their sins as it states (Vayikra 19:17) "You shall surely

הרואה חבירו חוטא או שהלך בדרך לא טובה מצוה להחזירו למוטב ולהודיעו שהוא חוטא על עצמו במעשיו הרעים

rebuke your friend." When one rebukes a friend, whether on interpersonal matters or on ritual matters, one should do so privately and speak gently using soft language, informing the sinner that the rebuke is for their benefit to bring them to the World to Come.⁶

Rambam, Hilchot Dei'ot 6:7

שנאמר הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך. המוכיח את חברו 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.
רמב"ם הל' דעות ו:ז

Questions for the Table

- How do you think R. Yehuda HaChasid's comments apply to non-immediate relatives? To friends?
- According to Rambam, what is the ultimate goal of rebuking someone? How does the goal relate to Rambam's gentle and soft approach?

Disagreeing with Love (Case #2)

Until now, we have been discussing one person sharing an idea with someone else. Debating with others is also a good way to exchange ideas and opinions. However, we are met with the same challenge (as with rebuking): to not alienate family, friends or others in discussing issues. What should we look for in a conversation that will indicate whether it is healthy or not? There are two comments on the following Mishna that address this question:

Any dispute that is for the sake of heaven will eventually have a lasting result and [any dispute] that is not for the sake of heaven will not have a lasting result. What is [an example of] a dispute that is for the sake of heaven? The dispute between Hillel and Shammai. [What is an example of] a dispute that is not for the sake of heaven? The dispute of Korach and his followers.

Pirkei Avot 5:17

כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים, סופה להתקיים; ושאינה לשם שמים, אין סופה להתקיים. איזו היא מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים, זו מחלוקת הלל ושמאי; ושאינה לשם שמים, זו מחלוקת קרח ועדתו.
אבות ה:יז

Question for the Table

- How does one determine if a dispute is "for the sake of heaven"?

If the other person disagrees, not for the purpose of pride or victory but to find out the truth, their ideas will endure because the truth will prevail. When the dispute is not for the sake of heaven but for the purpose of pride and victory, it will not endure.

R. Menachem Meiri, Beit HaBechira, Avot 5:17

שאם זה השני משיב וחולק שלא בדרך קנטור ונצוח אלא להודעת האמת סופו שיתקיימו דבריו, כי האמת יעשה דרכו, אבל כשאינה לשם שמים אלא דמשיב וחולק דרך קנטור ונצוח אין סופה להתקיים.
הרב מנחם מאירי, בית הבחירה, אבות ה:יז

As a general rule, in every dispute, one is enticed to think that it is for the sake of heaven and God forbid that one should think that it is not for the sake of heaven. If so, how should one know if it is really for the sake of heaven? One

כללו של דבר אין לך מחלוקת שאין יצר הרע מפתהו ואומר שכל הכונה לשם שמים, וחס ושלום לומר על מחלוקת שהיא שלא לשם שמים, רק א"כ במה ידע איפוא האמת אם היא באמת לשם שמים או לא. בזאת יודע, אי המחולקים ובעלי ריבות –

will know, if the disputing parties- with the exception of the matter of dispute- are absolute friends. However, if they are enemies and harbor hatred against each other as a result of the dispute, it is not for the sake of heaven.

R. Yonatan Eibeschitz, Ye'arot Devash 2:8

זולת הדבר שחלקו בו ומנגדים זה לזה- הם אוהבים גמורים בלב ונפש, זהו אות שמחלוקתם לשם שמים. אבל אם אויבים ונוטרים שנאה זה לזה על ידי מחלוקת, זהו שלא לשם שמים.
הרב יונתן אייבשיץ, יערות דבש ב:ח

Application to Case #2

- How can one combine the comments of R. Meiri and R. Eibeschitz to make sure that discussions remain civil?
- If one is in a debate where the other party is not interested in hearing both sides or is confrontational, what should one do?

Unconditional Love (Case #3)

In a perfect world, everyone we encounter would follow these ideas (mentioned by R. Meiri and R. Eibeschitz). Unfortunately, there are people who disagree with our opinions or values and are not interested in civil dialogue. How do we respond to such criticism? Should our reaction have a different tone than an ordinary discussion? The Talmud has the following observation:

Those who are shamed and don't shame others, they listen to others mock them and don't respond, do everything out of love and are content even when suffering, the verse states about them (Shoftim 5:31) "Those who love God are compared to the sun as it powerfully rises."

Yoma 23a

הנעלבין ואינן עולבין, שומעין חרפתן ואינן משיבין, עושין מאהבה ושמחין ביסורין עליהן הכתוב אומר: "ואהביו כצאת השמש בגברתו."
יומא כג.

Application to Case #3

- Does the Talmud recommend that one refrain from any response or only certain types of responses?
- Why do you think someone who doesn't shame others in response is compared to the sun?

Conclusion

Ahavat Yisrael demands that we express our love and respect for our fellow Jews and at the same time, share the ideas we treasure with them. These two notions complement each other because people will only be receptive to what we say when there is mutual love and respect. Rebuke can be constructive when it is done with great sensitivity and discussions must strive for seeking the truth and furthering the friendship of the people involved. Our *ahavat Yisrael* must be indiscriminate and extend even to those who don't reciprocate. Just as the sun (from the previous source) follows a natural pattern and doesn't change under any circumstances, we too, should have a natural disposition towards loving and respecting all Jews, especially when responding to criticism. Let's conclude with the words of R. Naftali Z.Y. Berlin (Netziv):

This is what made our forefathers praiseworthy. In addition to being the most righteous, pious, lovers of God possible, they were also just, meaning that they acted [justly] with the nations of the world, even

וזה היה שבח האבות שמלבד שהיו צדיקים וחסידים ואוהבי ה' באופן היותר אפשר, עוד היו ישרים, היינו שהתנהגו עם אומות

the despicable idol worshippers. They showed love for them and looked out for their wellbeing because that is how the world is sustained.

Ha'Amek Davar, Introduction to Bereishit

עולם אפילו עובדי אלילים מכוערים. מ"מ
היו עמם באהבה וחשו לטובתם כאשר היא
קיום הבריאה.
העמק דבר, הקדמה לספר בראשית

Compiled by Rabbi Josh Flug, Director of Torah Research, Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF AUTHORS CITED

Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerona (d. 1263) was a Spanish scholar. He is most well known for his ethical works such as *Sha'arei Teshuva* and his *Commentary on Pirkei Avot*. He originally opposed the philosophical works of Rambam, but he viewed the burning of the Talmud in 1242 as a sign that he was incorrect in opposing Rambam's philosophical works.

R. Yehuda ben Shmuel of Regensburg (also known as R. Yehuda HaChasid, 1140-1217) was a German scholar who was the first of the "*Chasidei Ashkenaz*," those who followed a mystical approach to daily observance and ethics. *Sefer Chasidim* records many of his ideas.

R. Moshe ben Maimon (also known as Rambam and Maimonides, 1138-1204) is one of the most famous rabbis in Jewish history. His works on Jewish law and Jewish philosophy are extremely influential and are studied regularly by students of Jewish law and philosophy. He began his life in Cordoba, Spain but eventually settled in Egypt.

R. Menachem Meiri (1249-1306) was a Spanish scholar. He is most well known for his *Beit HaBechirah*, a commentary on the Talmud. He was heavily influenced by the teachings of Rambam.

R. Yonatan Eibeschitz (1690-1764) was the rabbi of the "Three Communities" (Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbek) in Germany. He authored works on many areas of Judaism including, Talmud, Jewish law, homiletics, commentary on Torah and Kabbalah.

R. Naftali Z.Y. Berlin (also known as the Netziv 1816-1893) was born in Mir, Russia. He was a rosh yeshiva of the yeshiva in Volozhin and was a prolific author, writing works such as *Ha'Amek She'eila*, a commentary on *She'ltot D'Rav Achai*, *Ha'Amek Davar*, a commentary on the Torah and *Meishiv Davar*, a collection of responsa.

¹ Niv Navon, "HaRav Kook Mekubal al Kulam," available at: <http://www.kab.co.il/kabbalah/מקובל-על-כולם>.

² R. Kook, *Orot* pg. 80.

³ <http://ravkooktorah.org/KDOSHM62.htm>.

⁴ *Erchin* 16b: ... יכול אפילו משתנים פניו תלמוד לומר לא תשא עליו חטא תניא אמר רבי טרפון תמה אני אם יש בדור הזה שמקבל תוכחה אמר רבי אלעזר בן עזריה תמיהני אם יש בדור הזה שיודע להוכיח אמר רבי אלעזר בן עזריה תמיהני אם יש בדור הזה שיודע להוכיח

Should [the requirement to rebuke] apply even if the sinner is going to be embarrassed? The [end of the] verse [about rebuke (Vayikra 19:17)] states "and you will not bear a sin because of them" [implying that you should not embarrass them]. It was taught: R. Tarfon said, "I wonder if there is anyone in this generation who is receptive to rebuke" ... R. Elazar b. Azariah said "I wonder if there is anyone in this generation who is capable of rebuking properly."

⁵ *Erchin* 16b: מנין לרואה בחבירו דבר מגונה שחייב להוכיחו שנאמר הוכח תוכיח הוכיחו ולא קבל מנין שיהזור ויוכיחו תלמוד לומר תוכיח מכל מקום ... עד היכן תוכחה רב אמר עד הכאה ושמאל אמר עד קללה ורבי יוחנן אמר עד נזיפה

How do we know that if one sees one's friend doing something wrong that there is an obligation to rebuke? The verse (Vayikra 19:17) states "you shall surely rebuke your friend." If the first attempt at rebuke didn't work, how do we know that one must try again? The verse states "surely rebuke" [implying] that one must keep trying ... How far must one persist in one's rebuke? Rav stated until [the transgressor is prepared to] hit [the rebuker]. Shmuel stated until [the transgressor is prepared to] curse. R. Yochanan stated until [the transgressor is] agitated.

⁶ At the end of the passage, Rambam takes a different approach than *Sefer Chasidim* regarding how persistent one should be with regards to rebuke. *Mishna Berurah, Bei'ur Halacha* 608:2, s.v. *Chayav*, seems to codify the opinion of *Sefer Chasidim*.