

The Right Way To Rebuke

written by Yehudis Golshevsky
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Reb Michel Zlotchover arrived in Koretz to give a rousing lecture to inspire the local Jews to improve their ways. But his powerful discourse and sharp words hit the simple folk hard. They saw how far they were from genuine closeness to God and fell into a kind of collective despair.

Reb Pinchas of Koretz was present during the speech. When Reb Michel finished, Reb Pinchas took the visitor to task. “Why do you rebuke them so harshly? Look at these poor Jews. They are destitute—they don’t even own proper clothes and shoes—yet they are here. Do you see the weather outside? It’s freezing, yet with their patched, broken shoes and thin clothes they brave the snow every day, and arrive for prayers exactly on time.

“Instead of admonishing them, you should go to the holy ark,

open it, and cry to God. Tell Him to behold His precious, downtrodden children, and bring Mashiach to redeem them! Why should you reprove them?"

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Rebbe Nachman also spoke of the importance of offering rebuke in just the right way. Reb Levi Yitzchok Bender said, "Many people joined Rebbe Nachman for his last Rosh HaShanah. Two and a half weeks before he departed this world, he gave his last discourse. Breslover chassidim called this lesson Rebbe Nachman's 'last will and testament,' and learned crucial practical lessons about how to interact with others.

"We should be very vigilant to love our fellows, never insulting another human being. Even if we see people doing wrong, we should make sure that we never rebuke them in a manner that pushes them down so that it's harder to improve. Instead, we have to speak in a way that uplifts them and shows that they are above such behavior."

"But how can one learn when and how to rebuke properly?" someone wondered aloud.

Reb Levi Yitzchak gave a characteristically clear reply. "The simple yet complex answer is: pray. Ask God for assistance to understand when to rebuke and when to remain silent. Even when it is clear to you that you must reprove your fellow, beg the Almighty to show you the right time and manner to say your words, so they will really be constructive criticism."

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh III:61, 71, and VI, 285