

Pardes Rodef Shalom Communities Program

Can We Talk About This? *Tochacha*: A Study Guide for Constructive Communication



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תוכנית קהילות פארדס רודף שלום

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For more information on the Pardes Rodef Shalom Communities Program, please see www.pardes.org.il/prsc

For a *Tochacha* Unit to be used in schools, please see the Pardes Rodef Shalom Schools Program's "A Taste of *Tochacha*" at <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/11/a-taste-of-tochacha/>. More information on the Pardes Rodef Shalom Schools Program can be found at www.pardes.org.il/prss.

Table of Contents

Unit One: The <i>Mitzvah</i> of <i>Tochacha</i>.....	1
Unit Two: Practicing <i>Tochacha</i>.....	8
Unit Three: When to Refrain from <i>Tochacha</i>.....	13
Unit Four: The Inner Work of <i>Tochacha</i>	15

Unit One: The *Mitzvah* of *Tochacha*

1.1. Opening Questions

The Torah commands us to rebuke or admonish people close to us. What does the language of rebuke call to mind for you?

Can you think of a recent difficult conversation, in which you needed to tell someone that they had hurt you or behaved inappropriately? How did the conversation go?

Can you think of a recent conversation in which someone challenged your behavior, letting you know that you had said or done something wrong or hurtful to them? How did that conversation go?

1.2. The *Mitzvah* of *Tochacha*

We now consider the challenging *mitzvah* of *tochacha*, usually translated as “rebuke,” “admonishment,” or more broadly as “constructive communication.”

Text 1a

<p><u>Leviticus 19:17-18</u> Do not hate your kinsman in your heart. Admonish your neighbor but incur no guilt because of them. Do not take vengeance or bear a grudge against one of your people. Love your neighbor as yourself. I am Adonai.</p>	<p><u>ויקרא י"ט, י"ז-י"ח</u> לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך ולא תשא עליו חטא לא-תקום ולא-תטור אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ, וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ: אֲנִי, יְהוָה.</p>
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1.3. Interpretations of the Verses on *Tochacha*

We now delve into several different interpretations of the verses, from classical commentaries.

Text 1b

<p><u>Abraham Ibn Ezra, Leviticus 19:17 (Spain, 1089-1164)</u> “Rebuke” – Perhaps you will suspect her for a matter and it is not so, and this is the reason: “and do not incur guilt because of her” - because you will be punished as a result (of what you do or think) of her.</p>	<p><u>אבן עזרא, ויקרא יט:יז</u> "הוכח תוכיח" – שמא תחשדהו בדבר ולא היה כן, וזה טעם ולא תשא עליו חטא, כי עונש יהיה לך בעבורו.</p>
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What is the reason to engage in the rebuke, according to Ibn Ezra?

Text 1c**Ramban Leviticus 19:17****(Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, Spain, 1194 – 1270)**

And the verse said, “You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart” – when he does something unpleasant to you. Rather, rebuke him (saying), ‘Why did you do this to me?’

“And do not incur guilt because of him” – to cover up the hatred for him in your heart and not to tell him, because in your rebuking him, he will apologize to you or will repent and admit his sin and find atonement.

רמב"ן, ויקרא יט:יז
 ויאמר הכתוב "את
 תשנא את אחיך בלבבך"
 בעשותו לך שלא
 כרצונך, אבל תוכיחנו
 'מדוע ככה עשית עמדי?'
 "ולא תשא עליו חטא"
 – לכסות שנאתו בלבך
 ולא תגיד לו, כי בהוכיחך
 אותו יתנצל לך, או ישוב
 ויתודה חטאו ותכפר לו.

Why engage in the rebuke, according to the Ramban?

Text 1d**Bekhor Shor Leviticus 19:17****(Rabbi Yosef Bekhor Shor, France, 12th Cen.)**

“Do not hate your sibling in your heart” – If your sister does something that upsets you, don’t hate her in your heart. Rather, you should reprove her [that is to say, go over to the person and discuss the matter with her in a respectful manner], and say to her, “Why did you do this to me?” Since it is possible that she never intended what you had thought, or she couldn’t help herself, or she will give you some [other] explanation. And through this [by fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *tochacha*], you will come to realize that she did nothing improper to you. [And in doing so] “You will not sin because of her” – for having baseless hatred towards her.

רבי יוסף בכור שור,
 ויקרא יט:יז
 לא־תִשְׁנָא אֶת־אֲחִיךָ
 בַּלִּבְבְּךָ - שאם עשה לך
 אחיך דבר שקשה
 בעיניך לא תשנאנו בתוך
 לבבך. אלא הוכיחנו,
 ואמר לו "למה עשית לי
 כזאת?" שמא לא נתכוון
 למה שאתה סבור או
 נאנס או שום טעם יש
 בדבר שיאמר לך, ומתוך
 כך תדע שלא עשה עמך
 שלא כהוגן. וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא
 עָלֶיךָ - לשנאתו בחנם.

Why engage in the rebuke, according to the Bekhor Shor?

Text 1e

<p>Rambam, Sefer ha-Mitsvot, positive commandment 205. (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, Egypt, 1135-1204)</p>	<p>רמב"ם, ספר המצוות, מצוות עשה ק"ב. נצטוינו להוכיחו במאמר עד שלא ישאר דבר בנפש.</p>
<p>[In regard to <i>tochacha</i> for interpersonal issues], we are commanded to verbally reprove the person (who hurt you) until there is no remnant [of ill will] left in (your) soul.</p>	

Why engage in the rebuke, according to this section of the Rambam?

Reflection Questions

Which of the four interpretations of the *mitzvah* of *tochacha* do you find most compelling and why?

How might each of these motivations impact the nature and fruitfulness of a challenging conversation?

Do these interpretations shed any light on the conversations you named above?

1.4. The Goals of *Tochacha*

What is the goal and ultimate purpose of *tochacha*? Here we look at underlying assumptions in the sources about the value of this practice.

Text 1f

<p><u>Genesis Rabbah, 54:3</u> (6th Century)</p> <p>And Abraham reproved Avimelech (Gen. 21:25).</p> <p>R. Jose b. R. Hanina said: Reproof leads to love, as it says, "Reprove a wise person, and he will love you." (Proverbs 9:8) Such indeed is R. Jose b. Hanina's view, for he said: Love unaccompanied by reproof is not love.</p> <p>Resh Lakish said: Reproof leads to peace; hence, "And Abraham reproved Avimelech." Such is his view, for he said: Peace unaccompanied by reproof is not peace.</p>	<p><u>בראשית רבה פ' וירא נדג</u> והוכיח אברהם את אבימלך (בראשית כא:כה) אמר ר' יוסי בר' חנינה התוכחת מביאה לידי אהבה הוכח לחכם ויאהבך (משלי ט ח), היא דעתיה דר' יוסי בר' חנינה דאמר כל אהבה שאין עמה תוכחת אינה אהבה, אמר ריש לקיש תוכחת מביאה לידי שלום והוכיח אברהם וגו', היא דעתיה דריש לקיש דאמר כל שלום שאין עמו תוכחת אינו שלום.</p>
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Reflection Questions

At first it seems counter-intuitive that reproof leads to love and to peace. How do you understand these statements?

What experience do you have with relationships (interpersonal or communal) in which conflicts or confrontations are avoided?

In what way are loving relationships diminished by the inability to have challenging conversations? How do relationships grow as a result of honest and painful but loving conversations?

Text 1g

<p><u>Rashbam, Leviticus 19:17</u> (R. Shmuel B. Meir, France, 1085-1158) "You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart" – Do not hate him in your heart, rather rebuke him on what he did, and from this there will be peace.</p>	<p><u>רשב"ם, ויקרא יט:יז</u> אל תשנאהו בלבך, אלא הוכיח תוכיחהו על מה שעשה ומתוך כך יהיה שלום:</p>
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Reflection Questions

How do you understand the connection between holding hate in one's heart and "rebuke"?

In what sense can challenging conversations, as the text says, actually lead to peace among people?

Unit Two: Practicing *Tochacha*

2.1. The challenges of performing the *mitzvah* of *tochacha*

Text 2a

<p><u>Arakhin 16b</u> Rabbi Tarfon said: “I wonder whether there is anyone in this generation who can accept reproof, for if one says to him: “Remove the mote from between your eyes,” he [the other] would answer: “Remove the beam from between your eyes’!” R. Eleazar b. Azariah said: “I wonder if there is one in this generation who knows how to reprove!”</p>	<p><u>ערכין ט"ו, ע"ב.</u> תניא א"ר טרפון תמה אני אם יש בדור הזה שמקבל תוכחה אם אמר לו טול קיסם מבין עיניך אמר לו טול קורה מבין עיניך אמר רבי אלעזר בן עזריה תמיהני אם יש בדור הזה שיודע להוכיח.</p>
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Reflection Questions

How could it be that in the heyday of Rabbinic Judaism, one great rabbi suggests that he doesn't know anyone who can accept *tochacha* non-defensively and another says he doesn't know anyone who can offer it effectively? What does that say about our own generation?

Why do you think it is so difficult to give and receive challenging feedback?

2.2. Guidelines for the practice of *tochacha*

Given what you've read, generate your own set of guidelines for managing difficult conversations productively and in consonance with Jewish values.

Now consider the following guidelines from Jewish sources.

Text 2b

<p><u>Bava Metsi'a 58b</u> A teacher recited before Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzhak: One who embarrasses another in public is like a spiller of blood.</p>	<p><u>רבא מציעא נ"ח, ע"ב.</u> תני תנא קמיה דרב נחמן בר יצחק כל המלבין פני חבירו ברבים כאילו שופך דמים.</p>
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Text 2c

<p><u>Rambam, Hilchot Deot, chapter 6: 6-8</u> [6] When one person wrongs another, the latter should not remain silent and despise the person Rather, s/he is commanded to make the matter known and ask the person: "Why did you do this to me?" "Why did you wrong me regarding that matter?" as [Leviticus 19:17] states: "You shall surely admonish your colleague." ... [7] ...A person who rebukes a colleague - whether because of a [wrong committed] against the person or because of a matter between their colleague and God - should</p>	<p><u>רמב"ם, הלכות דעות ו:ו-ח</u> [ו] כשיחטא איש לאיש לא ישטמנו וישתוק... אלא מצוה עליו להודיעו ולומר לו למה עשית לי כך וכך ולמה חטאת לי בדבר פלוני? שנאמר הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך (ויקרא יט:יז)... [ז] ... המוכיח את חבירו בין בדברים שבינו לבינו, בין בדברים שבינו לבין המקום, צריך להוכיחו בינו לבין עצמו, וידבר לו בנחת</p>
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<p>rebuke the person privately. He/she should speak to the person patiently and gently, informing them that s/he is only making these statements for their colleague's own welfare, to allow them to merit the life of the world to come.... [8] At first, a person who admonishes a colleague should not speak to him/her harshly until the other becomes embarrassed as [Leviticus 19:17] states: "[You should]... not bear a sin because of him." This is what our Sages said: Should you rebuke him to the point that his face changes [color]? The Torah states: "[You should]... not bear a sin because of them."...</p>	<p>ובלשון רכה ויודיעו שאינו אומר לו אלא לטובתו להביאו לחיי העולם הבא.... [ח] המוכיח את חברו תחלה לא ידבר לו קשות עד שיכלימו שנאמר ולא תשא עליו חטא, כך אמרו חכמים יכול אתה מוכיחו ופניו משתנות ת"ל ולא תשא עליו חטא... .</p>
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Text 2d

<p><u>Sefer Orchot Tsaddikim, Sha'ar ha-Ka'as (15th Century)</u> You reprove him gently and privately, and you speak to him in a soft manner... but if you reprove your friend with a loud voice and with anger... He or she will not accept the reproof from you, for this is the nature of human beings -- that when someone confronts one's friend with force, one's friend hardens against the confrontation and will not truly listen. Regarding this, the wise one [Solomon] has said: "The words of the wise are heard when spoken with gentleness" (Kohelet 9:17).</p>	<p><u>ספר אורחות צדיקים שער הכעס</u> תוכיח אותו בנחת ובסתר ותאמר לו בלשון רכה... אבל אם תוכיח את חברך מתחילה בקול רעש ובזעם... לא יקבל תוכחה ממך, כי כן דרך בני אדם—כשאדם בא על חברו בחזקה, אז חברו מתקשה כנגדו ולא ייכנע תחתיו. ועל זה אמר החכם (קהלת ט"ז): "דְּבַרֵי חֲכָמִים, בְּנַחַת נִשְׁמָעִים." .</p>
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Text 2e

<p><u>Derech Eretz Zuta 2:3</u> Listen attentively to the words of the other. Do not be quick to respond and consider your words appropriately.</p>	<p><u>דרך ארץ זוטא ב:ג</u> והקשב אזניך לדברי חבריך, אל תהי נבהל להשיב ותהי מחשב דברים כענין.</p>
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Text 2f

<p><u>Rabbi Zvi H. Weinberger and Rabbi Baruch A. Heifetz, Laws of Interpersonal Relations, Volume 1: Do Not Hate Your Brother in Your Heart. (Tzvat, 1996, in Hebrew)</u> It therefore follows that this <i>mitzvah</i> is fulfilled not only through the reprovener talking but also through listening [i.e., he or she must both speak and listen]. The reprovener must be prepared to listen to the response of one's friend, for as long as one is only coming to talk and berate one's friend, and one is not prepared to listen and accept what the friend has to say back and the explanation that he or she may offer—the reprovener does not fulfill the <i>mitzvah</i>.</p>	<p><u>צבי וינברגר, וברוך חפץ, ספר לימוד להלכות בין אדם לחבירו: כרך א' – לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך.</u> <u>(צפת: מכון תורת האדם לאדם, תשנ"ו)</u> ולכן מסתבר שמצוה זאת מתקיימת גם ע"י [= על ידי] שמיעת האוזן של המוכיח, ולא רק בדיבור פיו. ולכן צריך המוכיח להיות מוכן לשמוע תשובת חבירו, וכל עוד שבא רק לומר ולגעור בחבירו ואינו ערוך לשמיעה ולקבל תשובתו של חבירו והתנצלותו—אינו מקיים המצוה.</p>
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Reflection Questions

Having read these sources, what would you add to your own guidelines?

How might these guidelines have affected the conversations you described at the start of this exercise?

Unit Three: When to Refrain from *Tochacha*

Reflection Questions

What questions do you ask yourself before challenging another on their behavior?

How do you decide when it is better to express the challenge and when it is best to refrain?

Consider the following sources:

Text 3a

<p><u>Rambam, Hilchot Deot, Chapter 6:9</u> [9] It is pious behavior if a person who was wronged by a colleague would rather not admonish him/her or mention the matter at all because the person who wronged him/her was very boorish or because he/she was mentally disturbed, [provided] he/she forgives the other totally without bearing any feelings of hate or admonishing him or her. The Torah is concerned only with those who carry feelings of hate.</p>	<p><u>רמב"ם, הלכות דעות ו:ט</u> [ט] מי שחטא עליו חברו ולא רצה להוכיחו ולא לדבר לו כלום, מפני שהיה החוטא הדיוט ביותר או שהייתה דעתו משובשת, ומחל לו בליבו, ולא שטמו ולא הוכיחו--הרי זו מידת חסידות: לא הקפידה תורה, אלא על המשטמה.</p>
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Text 3b

Rabbi Moshe Hayim Luzzatto, Mesillat Yesharim/ Path of the Righteous, ch. 20 (Italy, 1707-1746)

The Torah has commanded us, "Reprove your fellow." (Lev. 19:17) How often does a person rebuke sinners at a time or place in which one's words will not be heard, so that they pay no attention to what is said, thereby causing them to multiply their wickedness and to desecrate the name [of the Eternal], adding rebellion to the sins [already committed]? In a case of this kind, it is the path of piety to remain silent. "As it is our duty to speak when we are likely to be heeded," say our sages, "so is it our duty to be silent when we are not likely to be heeded." (B. Talmud Yevamot 65b)

משה חיים לוצטו, מסילת ישרים, כ'.
הנה התורה צותה (ויקרא י"ט):
"הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך", וכמה
פעמים יכנס אדם להוכיח חטאים
במקום או בזמן שאין דבריו נשמעים
וגורם להם להתפרץ יותר ברשעם
ולחלל ה' להוסיף על חטאתם פשע,
הנה בכיוצא בזה אינו מן החסידות
אלא לשתוק. וכך אמרו ז"ל (יבמות
ס"ה ע"ב): כשם שמצוה לומר דבר
הנשמע, כך מצוה שלא לומר את
שאינו נשמע. ואמר רבי אילעא משום
ר' אלעזר בר' שמעון כשם שמצוה על
אדם לומר דבר הנשמע כך מצוה על
אדם שלא לומר דבר שאינו נשמע.

Unit Four: The Inner Work of *Tochacha*

Reflection Questions

Can you think of an occasion when you challenged someone and it went badly because you hadn't explored your own feelings first?

What needs to happen inside for you to know that you are coming from a good place in offering your challenge?

Text 4a

Rabbi Yitschak of Corbeil, *Sefer Mitsvot Katan*,
Mitzvah 9 (France, d.1280,)

[There is a *mitzvah*] to “cut away” the “barrier of one’s heart,” as it states (Deuteronomy 10:16), “You shall cut away the barrier of your heart.”

The explanation [of what it means to “cut away the barrier of your heart”] is that one should love [receiving constructive] *tochacha* and love the person who is giving *tochacha*. Also Solomon wrote (Proverbs 9:8), “Reprove a wise man and he will love you.” And when it comes to this *mitzvah*, there is a [corresponding] negative commandment, as it states

רבי יצחק מקורביל, ספר מצוות קטן, מצוה ט
שנאמר: (דברים י:טז) "ומלתם את ערלת לבבכם".
למול ערלת לב, פירוש: לאהוב את התוכחות ולאהוב מי שיוכיחנו. וגם שלמה המלך ע"ה [עליו השלום] כתב בספרו (משלי ט:ח), "הוכח לחכם ויאהבך".
ובמצוה זו יש לאו, שנאמר

(Deuteronomy 10:16), “and you shall no longer stiffen your neck” [that one should not reject constructive criticism].

(דברים י:טז) "וּפְרַפְּךָ לֹא תִקְשׁוּ עוֹד."

Text 4b

Itturei Torah, vol. 4, p. 112

First rebuke yourself and only then your neighbor. For it will become clear that you, too, have a share in his/her transgression. “And do not place on him sin” (Lev. 19:17)—do not place the burden of sin only on him. (This is taught in the name of the Ba'al Shem Tov.) The rebuker from Polnoye further explained: “If your fellow has sinned, know that you, too, are not entirely innocent of that same sin. You are his (or her) partner in this transgression, if not in actual deed, then in thought and intention.”

עיטורי תורה, כרך ד', 112

ראשית הוכח לעצמך, ואחר כך את עמיתך ויתברר שיש לך גם כן חלק בחטאו. ולא תשא עליו חטא, ולא תעמיס את החטא רק עליו. (בשם הבעשיט) והמוכיח מפולגנא מוסיף ומסביר, אם חברך חטא דע לך, שאף אתה אינך נקי לגמרי מאותו חטא; שותף אתה לו בעבירה זו, אם לא במעשה אפשר במחשבה ובהרהור.

Text 4c

Toldot Ya'akov Yosef, Chayye Sarah-b
(Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonne,
1710–1784)

“I place God before me always.”
 (Psalms 16:8). “Before me” – “*lenegdi*”
 – from the word “*negdi’ut*” –
 “opposition.” And I have heard that the
 person should return to himself/herself,
 for he/she has gone far from the
 Blessed One. It seems to me,
 according to what I have received from
 my teachers and friends, that one
 should behave compassionately with
 every person. Even when one sees
 something ugly in another person, one
 should give heart to the fact that there,
 too, dwells the name of the Blessed
 One, for there is no place empty of
 God. Therefore it is for one’s own good,
 for there is in you, too, a trace of it, and
 you should give heart, to do *teshuvah*.

ספר תולדות יעקב יוסף פרשת חיי
שרה ב'.

שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד זה כלל גדול
 בתורה ובמעלות הצדיקים וכו' . . .
 לנגדי משמע שהוא נגדיות, הגם
 דשמעתי שיחזיק האדם את עצמו
 איך רחוק מהשם יתברך וזה שכתוב
 שויתי ה' לנגדי . . . ולי נראה לפי מה
 שקבלתי מרבתי וחברי, איך יתנהג
 במדת רחמים עם כל אדם, וגם
 שרואה באיזה אדם שום דבר מכוער
 יתן לב שגם שם שורה שמו יתברך
 דלית אתר פנוי מיניה ועל כן הוא
 לטובתו, שיש בו גם כן שמץ מנהו,
 ויתן לב לשוב. . .

Reflection Question

What ideas do these last three texts give you about how to look inside before offering words of challenge that may do more harm than good?
