

Good Shabbos Everyone. Sometimes in life we see Jews who are not behaving according to the Torah. What should we do? Should we correct them and risk offending them? Or, should we be silent, in order to keep the peace? This week we will discuss our obligation to correct others when we see them acting in violation of the Torah.

In general, whenever someone's misbehavior violates a mitzvah which is clearly stated in the Torah, such as keeping Shabbos, we are commanded to correct that person, as the verse states, "You shall surely correct your fellow..." (Vayikra, 19:17) So for example, if we see someone lighting a stove on Shabbos, we must tell them that it is forbidden to do so, because the Torah clearly states, "... You shall not kindle any fire in your dwelling place on the Shabbos day." (Shemos 35,3)

However, there are times when it is preferable not to correct others. For example, when the misbehavior violates a mitzvah, which is not clearly stated in the Torah and which is a mitzvah that many people are lax in observing, it may actually be preferable not to correct the violator. (Shulchan Aruch, Rama 608:2) The Shulchan Aruch brings the following example: many people are unaware of the mitzvah to begin the Yom Kippur fast several minutes before dusk; instead, many people eat up until dark. Because this misbehavior is so wide-spread, it is very possible that one would not listen to rebuke on this matter. Therefore, in this case, it would be preferable not to correct a fellow Jew by telling them to stop eating several minutes before dusk. It is better that the person sin unknowingly. (Shulchan Aruch, Rama 608:2) **IN ANY CASE, WHEN WE ARE IN DOUBT AS TO OUR OBLIGATION TO REBUKE A FELLOW JEW, WE SHOULD ASK A COMPETENT HALACHIC AUTHORITY.**

Apropos to this issue, the Sages teach us a general rule: "just as it is a mitzvah to say something which will be accepted by the hearer, so too is it a mitzvah not to say something which will not be accepted by the hearer." (Yavomos 65b) Because, if we know that the listener of the rebuke will not accept the rebuke, we will in effect cause that person to violate the Torah knowingly, which is a much graver level of Torah violation than violating the Torah unknowingly. However, it must be stressed that according to the Rama on Shulchan Aruch (608:2), when the mitzvah involved is a mitzvah clearly stated in the Torah, such as Shabbos, one must rebuke the Shabbos violator even if the violator will not listen to the rebuke.

We read about this concept in the weekly Torah portion Vaera. Hashem commands Moshe Rabeinu (our teacher) to implore Pharaoh to release the Bnai Yisroel from Mitzraim (Egypt). Moshe refuses to accept Hashem's assignment to go to Pharaoh. Moshe says to Hashem "...the Bnai Yisroel did not listen to me, why should Pharaoh listen to me, for my lips are stopped up." (Shemos 6:12)

Perhaps, Moshe was alluding to the issue we discussed above: "just as it is a mitzvah to say something which will be accepted by the hearer, so too is it a mitzvah not to say something which will not be accepted by the hearer." The following story illustrates this concept.

Reb Yisroel of Vizhnitz was in the habit of strolling with his gabbai - attendant for half an hour every evening. On one such occasion they reached the house of a certain wealthy bank manager who was a maskil, a follower of the "Enlightenment" movement - in a word, he was a man who definitely was not a chassid of the Rebbe.

Reb Yisroel knocked on the door, and when a servant opened it, entered the house. The gabbai did not begin to understand the reason for this unexpected visit but, without asking a word, followed the rebbe inside. The host received his distinguished guest with all the marks of respect and politeness dictated by such an occasion; the rebbe for his part took the seat that was offered him, and sat for quite some time without saying a word.

Considering that it would be rude to ask the rebbe directly about the purpose of his visit, the host whispered his question to the gabbai, but the gabbai did not answer the host. At length the rebbe offered him his farewells, and rose to leave.

As a mark of respect, the host accompanied him in silence all the way to his home, but at the last minute, when he was about to leave, his understandable curiosity got the better of him, and he turned to the tzaddik: "Rebbe, pardon my question, but it would hardly have been proper for me to ask when we were in my home, so I am taking the liberty of asking now: why did you honor me with a visit?"

"I went to your house in order to fulfill a mitzvah," answered the rebbe, "and thank G-d I was able to fulfill it." "Which mitzvah?" asked the bank manager.

The rebbe explained: "Our Sages teach that 'Just as it is a mitzvah to say that which will be heard, so is it a mitzvah not to say that which will not be listened to.' Now if I remain in my house and you remain in yours, I cannot fulfill the mitzvah of refraining from telling you 'that which will not be listened to.' In order to fulfill the mitzvah properly, one obviously has to go to the house of the man who will not listen, and there refrain from speaking to him. And that is exactly what I did."

"Perhaps, rebbe," said the bank manager, "you would be so good as to tell me what this thing is? Who knows, perhaps I will listen?" "I am afraid not," said the rebbe. "I am certain that you will not." And the longer the rebbe refused, the greater grew the curiosity of the other to know his secret, and he continued to press him to reveal "that which would not be listened to."

"Very well," said the rebbe at length. "A certain penniless widow owes your bank quite a sum for the mortgage of her house. Within a few days your bank is going to dispose of her house by public sale, and she will be out on the street. I had wanted to ask you to overlook her debt, but didn't - because of that mitzvah of 'not saying.'"

"But how is such a thing possible?" asked the bank manager in amazement. "Surely you realize that the debt is not owed to me personally, but to the bank, and I am only its manager, not its proprietor, and the debt runs into several hundreds, and if so..."

The rebbe interrupted him: "It is exactly as I said all along - that you would not want to hear." With that he ended the conversation and entered his house. The bank manager also went home - but the rebbe's words found their way into his heart and gave him no rest, until he paid up the widow's debt out of his own pocket. (From, A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Torah, R. Zevin, p.189) **Good Shabbos Everyone.**