

Parshas Kedoshim begins with the pasuk: וְדַבֵּר אֶל כָּל עַדְת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. Rashi brings down from a מדרש רבה: מִלְּמַד - This comes to teach us; שְׁנֵאֲמָרָה פֶּרֶשָׁה זוֹ בְּהִקְהָל - This פרשה of פרשה has to be said in public; מִכִּנְיָ שָׂרֵב גּוֹפֵי תוֹרָה תְּלוּיִין בָּהּ - because the majority, the essence, the "rov" of the תורה's foundational principles are found in this little פרשה of קדושים. There are so many fantastic and important הלכות and יסודות of מוסר in this פרשה that it's worth spending a lifetime reading קדושים. We're going to do one line of this wonderful פרשה, and that line is (19:17) הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת עֲמִיתְךָ - You should give מוסר to your fellow man; וְלֹא תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חֲטָא - and do not bear a sin because of him. The simple פשט is that if someone else does an עבירה, it affects the entire ישראל כולל. We're all responsible for one another. But all the מפרשים point out that when you give תוכחה, don't do it in a way that is itself an עבירה. Rashi explains that even though we are commanded to rebuke someone for doing wrong, we are not to do so in a way that embarrasses him. To embarrass someone - even when he is clearly in the wrong - is itself a serious עבירה.

Here's a short and beautiful story that illustrates this point. It was תשעה באב, and יצחק, a chassidish man who lived in Brooklyn, opened his grocery store after the fast to allow people to buy food for breaking their fast. Two customers soon entered: a neighborhood rav and a non-religious Israeli girl. The girl filled her cart with cookies, sodas, and snacks. When she got to the counter, she said, defiantly, "I am not fasting. I had a cup of coffee this morning."

יצחק responded gently, "Well, you did break your fast, but you would still get a מצוה if you refrain from eating from now until nightfall."

The girl was visibly surprised by יצחק's soft and sincere reply. She turned to the rav, who was nearby, and asked, "What do you say?"

The rav answered in a similarly gentle and kind tone. "The man is right. It will be a מצוה for you not to eat the rest of the day."

[One of the most important ספרים that I own - and that anyone could own - is the ערוך השולחן. The ערוך השולחן was the פוסק הדור before the משנה ברורה for over a hundred years. It was the standard for how we practiced, learned, and followed הלכה. The ערוך השולחן writes that if there's a day designated as a תענית, and someone forgot and ate - or even ate intentionally - whether they ate a little or a lot, what's done is done. The עבירה is there. But nevertheless, the person must fast the remainder of the day. So what the storekeeper and the rav were saying was firmly grounded in הלכה.]

Without saying a word, the girl returned all the items to the shelves and left the store.

The next day, she returned. She told יצחק that she hadn't eaten for the rest of the day. In fact, she had even refrained from eating for a few hours into the night as a form of atonement for having eaten earlier. She said, "The way you and the rav spoke to me really moved me. I promised myself I would never again eat on תשעה באב."

Look at that. To get someone to make such a change in behavior - all through a few gentle, kind, and sincerely spoken words. A tremendous accomplishment. A מוסר for all of us. When we are in a position to tell someone else what to do, we should first pause and ask ourselves: "Am I really worthy of telling them what to do?" But if we truly feel the חיוב, the obligation, to fulfill the מצוה of עֲמִיתְךָ אֶת עֲמִיתְךָ, then let us be careful to fulfill the second half of the pasuk as well: וְלֹא תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חֲטָא. Don't commit an עבירה in the process. Instead, do it in a sweet way, a kind way. Do it in a way that shows you really love every other Yid.

