

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Reflection on outrage, chastisement and shame

The expression of outrage, and the words of chastisement that go along with it, are often intended to communicate a moral authority – those utilizing language of outrage, shame, or chastisement will find that it is very effective. Such words make an indelible impression on people's emotions, an impression that gives the speaker the appearance of having a morally correct position. Imagine hearing "Shame on you! Shame on them!" Surely it sounds as though the speaker has a higher awareness of the morality of the situation that perhaps the listener overlooked – and that since the speaker has such a strong view of a moral issue that we do not grasp, perhaps it implies that they are truly on a higher level deserving of our respect.

Not necessarily so!

This is the same tactic that emotional abusers use! Such language can be nothing more than a way to lower another person, and not necessarily for the sake of Heaven.

Why is it effective? Words are far more powerful than we realize. A Japanese scientist named Imoto has conducted experiments on inanimate objects that scientifically shows that words have a deleterious affect on water, and because people are 90% water, it is logical to assume that words deeply affect us.

To those seeking to express moral high-ground, we must look to Torah for how to do this. Torah teaches us that spiritually, judgment as well as reward and punishment are the business of the Creator. The Creator alone decided morality and gave it to us in the Torah at Mt. Sinai. This morality is accepted by every major religion as its basis. The role of people is to live up to this morality, to maintain a rapport with the Creator. And we are told that the way to conduct ourselves is by emulating the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy of the Creator – NONE of those attributes includes reward or punishment, but rather guidance and directive to judge each other favorably and be loving, forgiving, patient, forbearing and more to each other. By so doing, we emulate the Creator, Who is able to shepherd everyone in the best manner toward their goals and mission. Rebuke is done only with love in our hearts for the sake of the other person, never for satisfying hate or other selfish motives.

So, when we feel the need to express outrage, we need to recognize that we are faced with a huge challenge because we are being confronted with nothing less than hatred within us and a test to see if we will remember to shine light or fall into the hands of the El Zar, the strange Gd within us. If we desire truly to advance the platform of moral authority, we must take action that brings the characteristics of the Creator into the word by shining light and giving love and kindness, not by damaging words or hurtful actions. Damaging words and hurtful actions signify the opposite of what people hope to accomplish because they create pain and lack, triggering in themselves or others a will to take hurtful vengeance or actions that have the SELF as the benefactor, not the CREATOR as the benefactor. We must move from hate to love if we truly wish to represent the moral absolutes of the Creator.

The Creator does not need people to stand up for moral absolutes by creating harm. The Creator needs people to conform themselves with moral absolutes so that they shine light and bring mercy and kindness into the world when it is the most difficult times to do so, at times of pain, loss and lack. This can be done with words of kindness and rebuke, helping people understand the point of view that we feel expresses the moral absolute. As soon as it slips into hateful rhetoric, it has also slipped from moral absolute to human agenda seeking to be "right" as opposed to seeking the "right way according to the Creator." Effort is in our hands, success is in the hands of the Creator.