

## Responding to Insult

### ∞ 28.162 ∞

The instant a person shames or insults you, you are permitted to shame and insult him in return. At the time it happens, you are not expected to be unaffected,<sup>302</sup> and it is human nature

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301. See *Sefer Chareidim* mitzvah 35 and *Aruch HaShulchan, Yoreh Deah* 240.

302. *Chafetz Chaim (Pesicha, Lavin 8–9, Be'er Mayim Chaim)*, see also *Sefer Yera'im* ch. 180. This is practically explicit in Rashi, *Yoma* 23a who writes that, “the incident is kept in his heart and he did not remove it from his mind.” This also appears to be the intent of the *Chinuch* 241–2, and does not include a natural immediate reaction, which is permitted. Also see Rambam, *Hilchos De'os* 7:8, who cites the case of the person who refused to lend to you and then “days later,” came to borrow from you. The Rambam does not write that he came the following day, as he writes with regard to revenge. The sin of bearing a grudge is only after a longer period of time, when he should have already removed it from his heart and forgotten about it.

The *Chinuch* 338 writes that: “The Torah commanded you not to initiate quarrels and shame others. If someone does, you may respond. It is befitting for a wise person to answer intelligently, without becoming

to respond, unless you are blessed with very special character traits. The Torah does not expect the average person<sup>303</sup> to remain imperturbable or indifferent in the face of embarrassment and degradation.<sup>304</sup>

{Others say that such a response violates a negative commandment in the Torah.}<sup>305</sup>

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excessively angry. This way, he successfully shifts the burden back to the one who shamed him.”

The Chinuch adds that: You can learn this from the law in the Torah that allows you to kill a burglar tunneling under your home at night. You are not obliged to permit others to harm you, and you are allowed to protect yourself from them. This includes protecting yourself from those whose mouths are full of treachery. Some people are so very pious, they do not even respond to those who shame them, so as not to get overly angry and allow the situation to deteriorate. About these people our Sages have said, “Those who are shamed and do not respond... and those who love Him are like the mighty rising sun.”

303. Chinuch 338 writes that, the Torah did not command a person to be like a quiet stone in the face of those who shame him. From his words it seems that it is not just that you cannot help yourself and you are not responsible for your sinful response, but that it is not even a sin at all (since you cannot help it). Also see Rivash (responsa 216).

304. If someone hits you, and you *later* respond in kind, you are obliged to pay him for damages inflicted by your hitting him back. This is true, unless you had to hit him back in order to defend yourself or protect yourself for the future. [Rosh in *Bava Kama* 3:13; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, *Choshen Mishpat* 421.]

The *Smah* and *Taz*, *Choshen Mishpat* 421 rule that, if you hit him back in the heat of the fight you do not have to pay for damages, and it is the same as if you embarrassed him immediately after he embarrassed you.

The *Rama*, *Choshen Mishpat* 421 and *Rashal*, (*Yam Shel Shlomo*, *Bava Kama* 3:26) rule that, shaming is the same as hitting. Accordingly, you should be forbidden to respond to shame or physical assault by shaming the offender, but if you do it immediately in the heat of things, you are exempt, and the one who started it all must pay.

305. As it is written, **לא תענה על ריב** — *Do not answer a quarrel*. Rabbeinu Shlomo ben Gevirol, *Azharos*, *Lavin* no. 24, and Rashbatz in *Zohar*

{Some Poskim say one is not allowed to return with an insult, which is a violation of the sin of אונאת דברים — “aggrievance with words.”<sup>306</sup>}

### ∞ 28.163 ∞

You should try not to insult him in return any more severely than he insulted you. Like returning a hit, if you immediately return an insult more than you were insulted you do not have to pay for the difference,<sup>307</sup> but it is proper for you to ask his forgiveness.<sup>308</sup> If you did this when you were not in the heat of things you have to pay for the damages. Even so, the one who started the quarrel is more to blame than the one who over-reacted and is absolutely obliged to ask forgiveness, and

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*HaRakiya*. It might be that even they are only referring to a delayed response, when you are no longer in the heat of things. The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* 32a and 36a and *Tosefta Sanhedrin* ch. 3 explain this verse in reference to special laws related to judges in *beis din*, and not at all to do with not responding to insults and the like.

306. See *Choshen Mishpat* 421:13 and Rosh in *Bava Kama* 32a etc. The *Chavos Yair* ch. 65, argues that essentially you never have an excuse to respond in a forbidden manner just because you are excited. He maintains that a person is responsible for damages that he inflicts in the heat of things, and is forbidden to respond to insults just because he is in distress, unless there is a special rabbinical or community ordinance to the contrary.

307. *Rama*, *Choshen Mishpat* 421:13 — *Mahari Veil* — *Ohr Zarua*.

308. See *Shiyarei Tahara (Bizayon)*. This is because a person by nature gets out of control from being disgraced, and cannot be expected to calibrate his response to match the remark of the aggressor. However, after the aggressor apologizes, the one who over-reacted should also apologize because over-reacting is also improper conduct. If he felt that he had to respond with a greater insult than he received in order to save himself from further embarrassment, he need not apologize at all. When necessary, this is a legitimate way to protect oneself from further aggression, but is not highly righteous.

should be the one to begin the process of appeasement.<sup>309</sup>

This is true even if the one who started it is older and greater than the other one. The Halachah clearly places the responsibility mostly on the instigator, and less on the one who responded improperly.

### ∞ 28.164 ∞

Many say that if someone has sinned by insulting you, he is not considered עמיתו — *amito*, “his fellow Jew” — and there is no sin to embarrass him and to hurt his feelings.<sup>310</sup>

This would permit embarrassing him even at a later date. However, this reason only applies if he insulted or embarrassed him in an offensive manner that everyone knows is forbidden. If he might not realize that he sinned, he is still considered “his fellow,” and one is forbidden to insult or embarrass him. In such a case, after one is no longer in the heat of things, he must either confront him with his grievance against him or forgive him.

As explained further, many Poskim argue that if a person is sinful only with regard to one particular sin, or if he sins out of desire, you are forbidden to bear a grudge or take revenge

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309. See *Yam Shel Shlomo, Bava Kama* 8:42; *Teshuvos Zichron Yehudah*, vol. 1 ch. 201, adds that one must also ask forgiveness for causing him to react improperly.

310. The Torah writes that one shall not aggrieve עמיתו — “his fellow.” With regard to this mitzvah alone, such a person is excluded as explained in *Mitzvos HaLevavos* and others. *Smah, Choshen Mishpat* 228:4, asks, why do *Chazal* say that when he hurt or embarrassed you, you may do the same to him, when even if he hurt or embarrassed someone else, you should be allowed to, since he is no longer included in עמיתו. *Toafos Re'em* (on *Yera'im* 180) answers that when he hurt you, you probably know for sure if he is guilty of *ona'ah* (aggrievance), but if he did it to someone else, you may not be sure that he is really guilty, because it is hard to know the details of what is behind it.

from him. If so, his sin of aggrieving his fellow Jew would not be reason enough to exclude him from the category of “his fellow.” It is proper to be stringent about this.

∞ 28.165 ∞

According to some Poskim, if you can control yourself when insulted or hit, you should do so and you are forbidden to respond in turn. You should not pretend to be unable to control yourself if you really are able to.<sup>311</sup> According to others you are permitted to insult him,<sup>312</sup> but not to hit him.

∞ 28.166 ∞

If you cannot refrain from responding, it is wise to respond in a pleasant way and not to get overly angry. This will save you from shame, and will place the burden on the offender.<sup>313</sup> Often, the most intelligent response to an embarrassing remark is to admit to the remark, as the Gemara advises that, “if someone calls you a donkey, wear a saddle on your back.”<sup>314</sup> This response is similar to keeping quiet, and prevents the offender from launching further attacks against you. The

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311. If you do, it is a violation of this *d’Oraisa*. This is the case according to the Chinuch and others who permit responding because a person is not a stone, and cannot be expected to remain indifferent to physical assault and embarrassment.

312. This would be permitted according to the Poskim who say that the offender is no longer included in *עמיתו* — “his fellow,” and therefore you may embarrass him.

However, the term “his fellow” is written with regard to the commandment of *לא תונו* — not to aggrieve or embarrass, but it is not written with regard to the sin of hitting. Therefore, if you are able to control yourself from hitting him, you are forbidden to hit him.

313. Chinuch 338. See footnote no. 26.

314. *Bava Kama* 92b. Rashi explains that you should admit to the claim.

Gemara says that ignoring such attacks avoids a hundred more attacks.<sup>315</sup>

☞ 28.167 ☞

It is most virtuous to remain silent, even if the offender is a non-Jew.<sup>316</sup> If you were not naturally blessed with such a righteous character, it is worthwhile to acquire it.<sup>317</sup>

☞ 28.168 ☞

If the one who initiated the insult is a *talmid chacham* and the other responded with an insult, they must both ask each other forgiveness.<sup>318</sup>

## Chazon Ish

☞ 28.169 ☞

Chazon Ish writes:<sup>319</sup>

A person whose soul is polished and clean will always be careful never to hurt anyone's feelings, but will make great

315. *Sanhedrin* 7a. See Rashi.

316. *Sefer Chareidim* (*Lavin* 1:17).

317. This righteousness is connected to love for Hashem, as the verse (*Shoftim* 5:31) refers to him as *אהביו כצאת השמש בגבורתו* — “Those who love Him, are like the sun that goes forth in its might.”

318. See *Ra'anach*, vol. 1 ch. 4 in his understanding of the Rivash ch. 216 where the *chacham* called someone a *rasha* in the wake of a business deal, and the other responded by calling the *chacham* a *shoteh* (idiot). The person had to appease the *chacham* (to save himself from excommunication), but the *chacham* was also wrong and he, too, had to ask forgiveness to save himself from excommunication for causing the other to respond this way (as the one who hits his adult son, thereby placing a stumbling block in front of him). (See *Mo'ed Katan* 17a.)

319. *Emunah U'Bitachon* 1:11.

allowances for other people's shortcomings, and will forgive their ill speech... such people find it easy not to respond to insults and the like.

He also writes:

Just as it is not worth getting angry and taking revenge from somebody who assaults you due to his pathological insanity, so, too, it is not worth taking revenge or hating someone who offended you as a result of his spiritual disorders. There is absolutely no difference between a person who has cast away his (spiritual) yoke and one who is mentally imbalanced.

A wise man once prepared a feast and invited his friends. When they arrived, his wife purposely turned over the beautifully set tables and everything landed on the floor. One of the guests was so angry at her that he wanted to leave. The wise man asked him why he was so upset, when the same thing happened to him only a few days before. The guest was puzzled, and had no idea what his host was talking about. The wise man reminded him of when his chicken ran wild and tipped over his table. There is no difference between a person when he is not in touch with his holy spirit and a wild chicken.<sup>320</sup>

### Dubner Maggid's Seven Reasons

∞ 28.170 ∞

The Maggid of Dubnow<sup>321</sup> lists seven reasons why someone might choose to remain quiet in the face of verbal abuse and disgrace:

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320. Compare this with the words of Rabbi Yitzchak of Akko (cited in section 160) about taking imaginary revenge by thinking of the offender as an animal or a mentally deranged person.

321. *Sefer HaMiddos* (hatred, ch. 6–10).

1. The first reason is *pride*. Sometimes a person is just too proud to address an insult. He feels it is beneath his dignity to pay attention to the offender. This level is not a high level of character, but is a lot better than the level of one who responds. This level is not to be confused with the very high level that is described in *Sefer HaYashar*.<sup>322</sup> In *Sefer HaYashar* there is a level which is called “the way of the very righteous and wise, that their hearts are big enough to absorb what any human being does to them, be it good or bad. If a lowly person assaults them, they consider their soul too dear to disgrace by responding. If an honorable person hurt them, they will also bear it.”

This very high level might appear to stem from pride but it does not. This level is not mentioned in *Chovos HaLevavos*, and refers not to a trait rooted in ego, but to a trait root rooted in spirituality. The integrity of the soul is greatest at the level when it does not feel any insult from another person.<sup>323</sup>

2. The second reason is *wisdom*. He wishes to disgrace the offender and to elevate himself in the eyes of others, but feels he will best accomplish these goals by remaining silent.

The Dubnow Maggid adds that, while reason number two is superior to reason number one, his intentions are unfavorable in the eyes of Hashem. He is not among

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322. Ch. 6. Mistakenly credited to Rabbeinu Tam, it was probably written by the Ba'al HaMa'or. A similar reason is written in an *Igeress* of the Rambam to Rav Yosef ibn Vaknin, that “the honor of my soul and the integrity of my character are more precious to me than my victory over the fool with my speech.”

323. Rambam (*Igeress to Rav Chisdai HaLevi*).



those who “hear their shame and do not respond,” because his silence is merely an eloquent response. He is better than the one who responds verbally, but they share similar goals.

3. The third reason for remaining silent is out of *love for Hashem*. He knows that Hashem wants him to remain silent, so he remains silent, but his heart is full of rage against the offender. He knows that the Gemara says<sup>324</sup> that the world stands on the merit of those who remain silent at the time of quarrel, and he knows that<sup>325</sup> those who do not return an insult, and who hear their shame and do not respond, are compared to the mighty rising sun. The Dubnow Maggid says that this reason is better than the first two but is still lacking, because he does not truly accept his shame.
4. The fourth reason is *fear of Hashem*. He fears Hashem to such a degree that he cannot answer back when someone insults or shames him because he is so acutely aware of the fact that he is standing before Hashem. If he were standing before a king of flesh and blood he would not dare respond with insults and shouting, all the more so when he realizes that he is standing before Hashem.

Although this level of fear of Hashem is truly great, the Maggid says that it is not the proper response. This person still feels that it is befitting to respond to the offense, but his fear of Hashem prevents him from doing so. His feeling that it is befitting to respond is less than perfect.

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324. *Chulin* 89a.

325. *Shabbos* 88b.

5. The fifth reason for silence is *humility*. He feels that he is truly without virtue, that the one offending him is better than he is, that everything bad he said about him is true, and that the whole truth is even worse than what was said. This reason is a truly righteous one, and he is compared to the sun that goes forth in its might.

When a person truly accepts upon himself to correct his character traits and to be completely humble, to be shamed and not to shame in response, to hear his disgrace and not to respond, the Divine Presence will immediately rest upon him and he will not need to learn (Torah) from people, because the spirit of Hashem will teach him.<sup>326</sup>

6. The sixth reason for silence is *faith*. He realizes that nothing happens to someone unless it was decreed in Heaven.<sup>327</sup> This is what King David meant when he said in response to the curses of Shimmy ben Geirah:<sup>328</sup> “*For Hashem told him to curse.*” With this attitude, you will not hold it against the person, but will accept the shame and disgrace happily, as this is the will of Hashem. Even if the offender had ill intentions, Hashem saw it as good for you to undergo disgrace and humiliation, and the offender is merely a tool.<sup>329</sup> Few people attain this level.

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326. *Reishis Chochmah (Sha'ar HaAnavah ch. 3)* — Rabbi Yitzchak of Akko — Rabbi Meir — Rabbi Yosef Giktalia.

327. See *Chulin* 7b.

328. *Shmuel* II 16:10.

329. This is also what Yosef told his brothers in *Bereishis* 50:20 that they had bad intentions, but Hashem intended it for good.

Closely related to this reason, is the reason mentioned in *Reishis Chochmah*,<sup>330</sup> that one should realize that it is atonement for his sins. This adds a more practical dimension, because everyone needs some measure of pain or suffering as atonement. When a person lives in perfect tranquility and total well-being, his sins are not atoned.<sup>331</sup> Therefore, although the offender's intentions were sinister, you have gained from it all, and should be thankful to Hashem. Your offender served as Hashem's tool to bring you an opportunity to further refine your soul and to receive atonement for your sins. *Sheloh* writes that if you would know how much embarrassment atones for your sins, you would seek it out.

These are the people who *Chazal* refer to as "Hearing themselves disgraced and do not reply, who act out of love and rejoice in their suffering." About them Scripture says:<sup>332</sup> "Those who love Him will be like the mighty rising sun."<sup>333</sup>

They rejoice in their suffering because they realize that it is from Hashem and for their own good. The offender is nothing more than a tool in His hands.

7. The seventh reason for silence is the fact that one is only in this world for a short time and there is so much for one to do here, that he does not have the time to bother with things that are unimportant, such as what someone said about him or did to him. Also, he realizes

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330. *Sha'ar HaAnavah* (humility) ch. 3.

331. Rabbeinu Yonah, *Sha'arei Teshuvah* 2:4 — *Sifrei* (*Devarim*, *Parashas Va'Eschanan*).

332. *Shoftim* 5:31.

333. *Yoma* 23a; Rambam, *Hilchos De'os* 2:3.

that this world is transient and that the truly important thing is to try to ensure that while he is here he acts in such a way that he will not be embarrassed in the next world — The World of Truth. In this temporary world, everyone passes through so briefly, and then departs like in a dream. With this attitude, you will neither bear a grudge against anyone, nor will you hate anyone for personal reasons.

This is quite similar to the words of the *Reishis Chochmah*,<sup>334</sup> that when a person is connected to the higher world, he is oblivious to scorn and shame from people.

If you live your life at the level of numbers five, six, or seven, you are without doubt, one of the most perfectly righteous. If you do not, you should start from a practical level, and strive to attain these very righteous levels. Even if you are truly angry at what somebody said to you or about you, try to contain yourself and talk to him quietly. Keep in mind the fact that “A soft answer turns away wrath.”<sup>335</sup> It not only turns away another person’s anger, but it turns away your own anger as well. Eventually, if you get used to speaking gently, you may be able to reach the level of true humility.

### Rav Moshe Cordovero

#### ∞ 28.171 ∞

Rav Moshe Cordovero *z”l* writes<sup>336</sup> that you should accept and not respond to insults because you should try to emulate

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334. *Sha’ar HaAnavah* (humility) ch. 3.

335. *Mishlei* 15:1.

336. *Tomer Devorah* ch. 1–2.

the ways of Hashem, Who tolerates the shameful behavior of people, and continues bestowing upon them goodness and kindness.

This contains the element of being *מעביר על מדותיו*, (*ma'avir al middosav*) which means not to be exacting about what others do to you. As a result of such behavior, in Heaven, you will not be dealt with in an exacting way, and your faults and sins will be wiped away.<sup>337</sup>

This is a true attribute only when you act this way because of the correct motives. If it is just a passive behavior mode related to low self-esteem, it is not an attribute but yet another flaw in character. For their part, the potential aggressors should not use these righteous modes of response as a license to abuse others.

∞ 28.172 ∞

Others say that one should not get angry over what someone says, and even if they cursed him, because if he gets angry he will darken the light of wisdom of his soul (*Neshama*).<sup>338</sup> Therefore, it is better to ignore them and not respond.<sup>339</sup>

### Sheloh HaKadosh; Ba'al Shem Tov

∞ 28.173 ∞

The *Sheloh* writes that if people would realize just how much disgrace and embarrassment atone for, they would seek out

337. *Rosh Hashanah* 17a.

338. *Sefer Chareidim* (*Mitzvos Assai* that are dependant on the heart) ch. 1. Anger causes the removal and switching of the holy *Neshama* with an impure spirit See *Zohar*, *Parashas Te'tzaveh*; *Ari z"l* etc.

339. See *Chinuch* 338.

opportunities to be disgraced and embarrassed. He is referring to a celestial level far beyond what most of us are working on, but that nonetheless is attainable.

It is brought in *sefarim* that the Ba'al Shem Tov did his best to do favors for his enemies and tried to uplift them because a person's enemies do him the greatest favor by saving him from thoughts of arrogance which are likened to idolatry and which can pull him down into the darkest levels.<sup>340</sup> Also, the Satan is jealous of the very righteous people and tries to pull them down from their high level and destroy them spiritually. When the Satan hears that people are speaking badly of the great *tzaddik*, he is satisfied and leaves the *tzaddik* alone.<sup>341</sup> These ideas are concepts of *chassidus* that pertain to people already on a high level. Nonetheless, they provide yet another reason why a person should remain quiet when embarrassed, and his heart should rejoice that he was given this protection from arrogance. [Also see chapter 20 regarding one's attitude toward his enemies and about praying for their repentance.]

### Rav Shmuel Rosenberg

#### ∞ 28.174 ∞

The Dubnow Maggid did not mention it, but there is yet another reason not to answer the offender, namely, so as not to embarrass him.

*In the year 1901, many Rabbanim convened in the town of Uhall, where they discussed important religious issues. It was decided, that the rules and measures they had adopted, should*

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340. *Nesiv Mitzvosecha (Nesiv HaTorah, Shevil 1:13)*

341. *Dudaim BaSaddeh, Parashas Noach* in the name of the Ba'al Shem Tov.

be written up by Rav Shmuel Rosenberg when he returned to Unsdorf.

Another talmid chacham who was present, disagreed with the decisions of the gathering, and wrote down a list of extreme and fanatical measures that he wanted enforced, and signed Rav Shmuel's name on the bottom. When the forged letter reached the Rabbanim, they were furious. Rav Shmuel received scores of letters protesting his single-handed attempt to institute fanatic measures in defiance of the measures they had agreed upon.

His talmidim prepared a written statement for the newspapers, clarifying that the letter was a forgery. Upon hearing of their plan, Rav Shmuel restrained them. He said, 'If it is publicized, people will eventually find out the source of the forgery, and the one who did it will suffer terrible embarrassment. It is better that the arrows are shot at me, and it will be atonement for my sins.'

#### ☞ 28.175 ☞

Rav Shmuel was not in the middle of an emotional storm from immediate embarrassment from the offender, which would perhaps allow him to respond in kind, but was in a situation where his reaction could be calculated. Even if he were, he was obviously able to control himself and thus obliged to under normal circumstances. In this particular case, his extremely pious response was not a Halachic obligation. Halachically, one is permitted to deny having done something even though his denial will likely lead to the discovery of who really did it, and the person will be embarrassed.<sup>342</sup> This was especially true in his case when the one who did it implicated and maligned him.

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342. See Chafetz Chaim (*Shemiras HaLashon*, Klal 10, *Be'er Mayim Chaim* no. 43)

∞ 28.176 ∞

In certain instances, not only is one allowed to defend and protect himself, but he must do so in order to bolster the forces of truth and destroy the forces of falsehood. If one is a *talmid chacham* and the guilty one is not, it is sometimes a *chilul Hashem* (desecration of Hashem's Name) to accept the burden of guilt for an act of impropriety that he is not guilty of. These things must be weighed carefully before deciding how to act.

### Rav Aryeh Levine

∞ 28.177 ∞

*Rav Aryeh Levine was summoned to court and notified of his liability to repay a loan on which he had allegedly signed as a guarantor. He knew that he had not signed as a guarantor and that his signature had been forged. In order not to publicly embarrass the borrower, Rav Aryeh "admitted" that it was his signature.*<sup>343</sup>

This very pious response is also clearly above and beyond the call of Halachah. A source for such pious responses may be found in the Gemara,<sup>344</sup> which relates that:

*The decision to make a leap year is taken only by those who were specifically invited by the head of the Sanhedrin to partake in the deliberations. Once, Rabban Gamliel sent his messenger to invite a group of seven. Rabban Gamliel meant that he should invite the six most prominent members of the Sanhedrin, and together with Rabban Gamliel himself they would be seven. The*

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343. *Isb Tzaddik Haya* p. 78.

344. *Sanhedrin* 11a.



*messenger made a mistake and thought that he was to invite seven to come, which would make eight together with Rabban Gamliel himself.*

*When he arrived in the morning, Rabban Gamliel found that together they were eight instead of seven, so he asked that whoever was not invited should leave. Shmuel HaKatan volunteered to leave in order not to cause anyone embarrassment. He said that he did not come to join in the deliberations but only to see how they did it. Rabban Gamliel responded by telling him to stay, and that he is really befitting to engage in the deliberations, but Chazal said that it should only be done by those who were invited.*

*The Gemara says that really Shmuel HaKatan was among those who were designated to be invited, but in order not to cause embarrassment to the extra one who was not to have been invited, he volunteered to leave.*

### ∞ 28.178 ∞

The Gemara cites another example, involving Rabbi Meir, who, learning from the righteous behavior of Shmuel HaKatan, admitted to doing something which was very embarrassing, in order that everyone else should follow suit so that nobody would know who really did it. Rabbi Meir did this in order to save that person from embarrassment.

The Gemara then relates a story when:

*Rabbi Yehudah, the Nasi, was saying shiur, and there was a powerful and unpleasant odor of garlic in the room. He asked that whoever is responsible for the odor, please leave the room. Rabbi Chiya got up and left the room. After him, everyone else got up and left the room. The following morning, Rabbi Shimon, the son of the Nasi, asked Rabbi Chiya, "You are the one who caused discomfort to my father (by bringing in the unpleasant odor):" Rabbi Chiya answered that he was not.*

Rabbi Chiya had only made it seem like he was to blame for something he did not do, in order to save from embarrassment the one who really did it. The Gemara says that he learned this righteous behavior from the righteous behavior of Rabbi Meir.

∞ 28.179 ∞

In order to place things in proper perspective, it is important to note that if there is room for concern that the improper behavior will lead to future problems, or if the one responsible needs to be corrected, you must find out who is guilty. For example:

*If a student in the dormitory is stealing from the others, it is important to find out even if it will cause him embarrassment.*

∞ 28.180 ∞

When an absolute sin is involved, you might be forbidden to accept the blame when you are not guilty. Doing so, would be considered a measure of *chutzpah*. It is considered *chutzpah* to publicize one's sins<sup>345</sup> — all the more so if one really did not commit them. Worse still, it could even constitute a *chilul Hashem*.

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345. See *Tosafos, Yevamos* 88a, that even if witnesses testify that someone ate non-kosher animal fat and must bring an offering, it is possible that if he denies it and says that he did not eat it he is believed and does not bring a sin-offering. This is because we then assume that he ate it intentionally, and it is a good thing that he denies having eaten it on purpose because one should not publicize his sins. Although *Tosafos* is unsure about the Halachah with regard to his not having to bring a sin-offering in that case, and the *Rambam, Hilchos Shegagos* 3:2, and *Ri Kurkos* etc. hold that he does have to bring one, the point that he did well by denying that he sinned is not in question.

∞ 28.181 ∞

When giving *mussar* to others, it is proper and humble to include oneself in the *mussar*, even if one is not guilty of the sin. This is especially important when speaking to a group of people.<sup>346</sup> Also, since Jews are responsible for each other (*arvus*), one may include himself even if he actually did not commit the sin.<sup>347</sup> In this form, it is not considered *chutzpah*.

### Grudges and Forgiveness

∞ 28.182 ∞

If a person physically injured his fellow, even though he paid all of the damages he is obliged to ask his forgiveness.<sup>348</sup> The victim should forgive him for the physical offense or embarrassment in order not to be cruel.<sup>349</sup> This is the way of the Jewish people.<sup>350</sup>

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346. See *Sanhedrin* 11a, as Shechania ben Yechiel said in *Ezra* 10:2.

347. *Sefer Chassidim* 22.

348. *Bava Kama* 92a; Rambam, *Hilchos De'os* 6:5.

349. *Ibid.* Since harboring a grudge and taking revenge are permitted for non-monetary matters according to most Poskim, refusal to forgive him is not a sin of harboring a grudge, but he should forgive him so as not to be cruel.

350. See *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, *Choshen Mishpat*, *Hilchos Ovrei Derachim* no. 10. This might coincide with the *Rishonim* who permit you to bear a grudge in your heart and to revenge shame and degradation. Even so, if he asks your forgiveness you should not be cruel and you should forgive him. However, it is possible that these Poskim are talking about a case when you are not bearing a grudge for the shame and embarrassment, but even so, you did not forgive him. It is possible not to bear a grudge, but still not forgive him. Even when you are forbidden to bear a grudge, you are not necessarily obliged to forgive. Therefore, the Poskim had to tell us that if he asks forgiveness you should not be cruel and you should forgive him. See wording of *Maharshal* on *Smag* (*Lavin* 11). This will be

It is a measure of great piety to forgive him even if he does not ask your forgiveness.<sup>351</sup>

It is even greater piety to relate to it as a Heavenly decree for you to suffer the pain or embarrassment, and to be happy that you received atonement for your sins.<sup>352</sup>

∞ 28.183 ∞

Some Poskim equate bearing a grudge with not forgiving the offender. Therefore they say that if he offended him with a purely monetary issue (such as not letting him borrow something), he must forgive him even without his asking since he is forbidden to bear a grudge.<sup>353</sup>

∞ 28.184 ∞

Others say that even if he does not forgive him, it does not

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discussed further.

351. This is in the *Tefillah Zakka* that most people say before *Kol Nidrei*, and in a prayer that is said every night by some people before קריאת שמע על המטה, *Kerias Shema* before going to sleep. Also see *Yerushalmi, Shevuos* 4:2, that R' Tarfon had forgiven the watchmen who mistakenly hit him, even before they had hit him.

352. See footnote on *Shem Olam (Chafetz Chaim)* ch. 3.

353. This is the opinion of *Shibolei HaLeket* vol. 2 *Hilchos Nedarim* — *Teshuvos* Rashi ch. 245, who writes that if one swears never to forgive somebody for having hit and disgraced him, the oath is binding. It is not considered an oath to refrain from fulfilling a mitzvah (which is not binding), because the Gemara in *Bava Kama* 92a, says that one should forgive in order not to be cruel. It does not say that he is guilty of bearing a grudge if he does not forgive. This is because he is allowed to bear a grudge for physical pain and embarrassment.

Were it not for the fact that he is allowed to bear a grudge for physical pain and embarrassment, he would be guilty of bearing a grudge if he did not forgive him.

This is also the opinion of *Talmidei Maharik* (on *Smag, Lavin* 12); *Chezkuni*, and *Mitzvos HaLevavos*.

mean that he is bearing a grudge. It is possible not to bear a grudge but also not to forgive him, and it is only a measure of piety to forgive him, but it is not considered bearing a grudge if he does not.<sup>354</sup> This means that he must forgive him to

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354. See Ritva, *Rosh Hashanah* 17a, that Rav Papa, who said in *Megillah* 28a that when he retires every evening he forgives all those who hurt him, did not mean that this is an obligation, but rather a measure of piety. If you do not forgive him with regard to Heavenly retribution, you are not in violation of bearing a grudge. This also seems correct in the opinion of the Rambam.

One can refute this and say that not bearing a grudge requires one to forgive the offender, but Rav Papa might have been referring to offenses of a physical nature for which according to most Poskim one is permitted to bear a grudge and to take revenge. Although permitted to bear a grudge and to take revenge, Rab Papa did not do so, and he even forgave the offenders. There is no proof from there as to whether or not the mitzvah of not bearing a grudge requires one to forgive.

As cited earlier, the Poskim disagree as to whether there is a sin to bear a grudge or take revenge over offenses that are physical or personal. Those who say that there is (Chinuch, Rambam in *Sefer HaMitzvos* etc.) will have to rule that not bearing a grudge does not require you to forgive. Rambam, *Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:10, writes that you should not be cruel... and when the sinner asks your forgiveness you should forgive him wholeheartedly, even if he had sinned greatly against you, you should not take revenge and harbor a grudge, and this is the way of the Children of Israel etc... It seems that the Rambam equates not forgiving with bearing a grudge. If the Rambam holds as he does in *Sefer HaMitzvos*, that you are forbidden to bear a grudge in the case of physical pain and embarrassment, it would be difficult to understand why in *Bava Kama* 92a, which is talking about physical pain and embarrassment, we say that he should forgive him and not be cruel — when he must anyway forgive him in order not to be in violation of bearing a grudge?

This would seem to prove that the Rambam changed his mind from what he wrote in *Sefer HaMitzvos*, and he holds that you are permitted to bear a grudge and take revenge for physical pain and embarrassment. If so, the question returns — why the Rambam, *Hilchos Teshuvah*, mentions revenge and grudges?

The true meaning of the Rambam appears to be that not forgiving is

the extent that his personal relationship with him will not be affected, but he does not have to forgive him with regard to Heavenly retribution.<sup>355</sup>

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not considered bearing a grudge. In *Hilchos Teshuvah*, his reference to not taking revenge and not bearing a grudge is from an ethical standpoint, and not from an Halachic standpoint. Therefore, he continues that this is the way of the Children of Israel etc. Even to those who maintain that not forgiving is a form of bearing a grudge, it does not seem like it is a form of revenge. He only mentions these as a means of stressing the qualities of the Jewish people who are above the pettiness that preoccupies the lives of other peoples.

[*Teshuvos* Rashi (ibid.) and Ritva (ibid.) also mention both revenge and bearing a grudge with regard to not forgiving someone. Perhaps, just like refusal to do him a favor is revenge, refusal to forgive him could also be a form of revenge.]

It is also possible that the Rambam means that you should forgive him personally, but not forgive with regard to the punishment due him from Heaven. Failure to grant him your personal forgiveness is a violation of taking revenge and bearing a grudge even according to the Ritva. The Ritva only says that you are not in violation if you do not forgive him “a forgiveness of Heaven” (pertaining to his punishment from Heaven). See following footnote.

355. The wording of the Ritva is מחילת שמים — “Forgiveness in Heaven.” Obviously, this is what he means. In truth, it is not up to the person to decide if Heaven should forgive the offender or not. Once the person forgives the offender, Hashem does whatever He sees fit. We learn from Avraham Avinu to pray that Hashem should forgive him, which can be compared to intervening on his behalf. If so, it is a little difficult to understand why he would not have to intervene and pray for his forgiveness from Heaven, just as he would have to intervene with a government, if he got into trouble.

It seems that with regard to other sorts of troubles he would have to intervene on his behalf, but with regard to the trouble that he made for him, it is a measure of piety to do so, but not an obligation.

But this is difficult from the Halachah of a *talmid chacham* who must take revenge, and Rashi, *Yoma* 23a, explains that this means that he should not intervene if somebody is taking his revenge for him. According to the Ritva, even after you wholeheartedly forgive somebody, your refusal to intervene on his behalf is not considered bearing a grudge (or revenge),

Nonetheless, it is a measure of piety to do so, and this piety was displayed by Avraham Avinu ע"ה when he prayed for the healing of Avimelech.<sup>356</sup>

∞ 28.185 ∞

If you ever embarrassed somebody, you should readily accept embarrassment from others as atonement. This is the way of the penitent — to be insulted and not return the insult.<sup>357</sup>

∞ 28.186 ∞

The Torah warns in particular, to be careful not to hurt the feelings of widows and orphans, because their tears are easy in coming and Hashem punishes quickly for this.

*Widows and orphans are only examples, but this applies to anyone who is feeling sad, depressed or forlorn.*

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as long as you are not committing the act of revenge. Perhaps that is the difference between a *talmid chacham* and other people. While for other people forgiving him even from Heavenly retribution is a measure of piety, it is forbidden for the *talmid chacham* to forgive that much unless the offender asked his forgiveness. If he did not ask forgiveness, the *talmid chacham* should forgive him personally and not personally bear a grudge or take revenge, but he should not intervene on his behalf when he is punished from Heaven.

356. See *Bava Kama* 92a, that you should not be cruel, but should be forgiving. Even though it is not a good character trait to be unforgiving, it is not a violation of bearing a grudge or of taking revenge. If he does not ask your forgiveness, it is not even considered cruelty not to forgive.

The concept of being *מעביר על מדותיו* also proves that being unforgiving is not an actual sin. See *Yoma* 87b, when R' Hanina refused to forgive Rav for thirteen years, the Gemara says that it is proper to be forgiving (*מעביר על מדותיו*). It does not say that you are in violation of bearing a grudge or of taking revenge if you are not.

357. *Sefer Chassidim* ch. 54. The Halachic issues of embarrassing him in return were discussed earlier.

This was discussed in some detail in chapter 10. If one of these people aggrieves you, you should be extra careful not to overreact, and you should make an extra effort to restrain yourself and not to react at all.