

Tochecha and Teshuvah:

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Almost every Shabbat morning at Temple Beth Israel, we sing the intention from Leviticus 19:18: *V'ahavta l'reyacha kamocha*: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. It is powerful to take a moment to focus on love for ourselves, radiating to those around us. But *what* does it mean to love our neighbor? There is a clue in the context of this mitzvah in the Torah.

Leviticus 19:17-18 states in full: "You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kin and incur no guilt on their account. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against members of your people. Love your neighbor as yourself: I am *Hashem*."

In this context, at first, we notice what love *isn't*: it isn't hate; it isn't bearing a grudge; it isn't trying to get revenge. But there is one positive command in these verses: that of *tochecha*, reproof. הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ, the verse states, with a doubling of the root: "Reproving, you shall reprove," or "Surely, you shall reprove." "In fact," teaches the commentator Chizkuni on this verse, "your failure to make an attempt at reconciliation will be held against you by the heavenly tribunal."

Consider whom are we most likely to reprove: usually the students, friends or close family members who have in some way failed our expectations. We reprove people when we expect better of them, and when we have faith that they can do better.

Tochecha is a gift. I have received reproof from several of you this past month, about ways in which you expected me to show up for you better than I did. Every time I receive such reproof, I am sorry, of course. I am also grateful that you brought it to me instead of complaining about me or disappearing. And I am grateful for opportunity to reconnect and do better. To those who have felt hurt by me but not shared reproof, I invite you to do so, and I welcome the opportunity to strengthen our relationship.

As we enter the month of Elul, it is not only a time for *cheshbon hanefesh* – accounting of the soul – by accounting our own failures of others, but also for asking: "Are there angers or hurts that I am holding that I could deal with more constructively? Do I owe anyone loving reproof?" It's possible that it is the greatest gift of love you could offer.