The Duty and Dangers of Rebuke in Rabbinic Literature

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In the Book of Leviticus we encounter a commandment that a person should rebuke his or her fellow for wrongdoing rather than harboring hatred against them: “You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kinsman but incur no guilt because of him” (Lev 19:17). The obligation to rebuke may, at first glance, appear straightforward. Yet, the concluding clause of the verse, which warns against incurring sin, alerts us to a potential danger. What is the nature of this sin and to whom does it belong? Is the sin generated through an action done by the rebuker or is it somehow related to the original transgressor? There are a number of different ways of understanding the referent of this sin, marking the word as a highly ambiguous element in the verse. If the sin refers to the original transgression committed by the offending party, then this phrase could mean that by refraining from rebuke one actually takes responsibility for the crime committed by the other party. Alternatively, the sin could point to future transgressions that the offending party will perform if you hold your tongue. On the other hand, if the sin belongs to the would-be rebuker there are another set of potential meanings. Failure to rebuke itself could constitute a sin through the neglect of a positive scriptural injunction. Or, the sin could belong to the rebuker but could actually be a byproduct of the rebuke itself rather than a result of failure to rebuke. An ineffective rebuke could encourage a rebellious individual

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4. As Menachem Bolle suggests, “putting his sin upon him” implies that through your silence and refraining from rebuke you encourage him to continue to sin (Menachem Bolle, Sefer Va-yikra, Daat Miqra (Jerusal: Mosad Harav Kuk, 1991), סיו.)
who originally transgressed accidently to intentionally continue his actions in the future. Alternatively, one may offer a rebuke that results in the humiliation of the offending party which itself would constitute the sin.\(^5\)

The ambiguity of this portion of the biblical verse marks the act of rebuke as potentially dangerous. The would-be rebuker is aware of a lurking sin but does not know whether it is determined by a failure to rebuke or the actual act of rebuke itself. What is a person to do when faced with this biblical obligation? In this paper I explore two opposing reactions to this Levitical verse, each balancing between the obligatory yet dangerous nature of rebuke. The first source appears in the Babylonian Talmud (also known as the “Bavli,” compiled c. 5-6th cen C.E.) while the second is from a late midrashic collection known as Midrash Tanḥuma (redacted in the early medieval period). Looking first at the primary sugya (discrete unit of rabbinic discussion) on this commandment which appears in the Babylonian Talmud, I will demonstrate how the rabbis simultaneously recognize the mandatory nature of this biblical injunction and problematize the performance of rebuke as a dangerous practice. In direct contrast to the discussion of rebuke in the Bavli, I argue that Midrash Tanḥuma reworks the talmudic sugya, excluding some material and adding other elements in order to invert the danger of rebuke from the consequences of reproving to the ramifications of refraining from rebuke. Reading these two sources in tandem highlights the spectrum of rabbinic reactions to Leviticus 19:17 and the clash between the duty and dangerous of rebuke.

1. Lev. 19:17 in the Bavli - A Problematic Obligation

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\(^5\) Milgrom, *Leviticus* 17-22, 1649. Also see Baruch J. Schwartz, “Selected Chapters of the Holiness Code - A Literary Study of Leviticus 17-19” (Dissertation, Hebrew University, 1987), 284 fn 84. This last reading is partially picked up by later rabbinic literature which reads the phrase as referring to embarrassment, although the sin remains on the rebuker.
The principal sugya addressing rebuke and Lev. 19:17 appears on BT Arakhin 16b-17a. As I shall argue, over the course of the talmudic discussion we continually find that the obligatory nature of rebuke is upheld, while its worth is regularly challenged. Simultaneously affirming and questioning the role of reproof, our sugya engages in a dialectic deliberation over the value of rebuke.

Our sugya on BT Arakhin 16b-17a is comprised of several semi-discrete sections. The first preserves a version of a tannaitic (early rabbinic) discussion of Lev. 19:17 found in a midrash known as Sifra. The second asks whether rebuke or humility is preferable, opting for the latter and proffering an anecdote to solidify the point. Finally, the third section asks “until what point” one should rebuke. In each of the units of our sugya we find an underlying tension: a persistent affirmation of the obligation to rebuke coupled with an opposing thrust which problematizes and devalues it. While the degree of investment in upholding the importance of rebuke varies from one section to another, its depreciation steadily resounds, climaxing at the apex of the sugya’s center. Tracing the dialectic consideration of rebuke across our sugya’s three units we shall see how the Bavli tackles the question of whether or not one should rebuke, ultimately endorsing the latter alternative.

1a. Section 1: The Tannaitic Pericope

Following a protracted treatment of evil speech (lashon hara), the Talmud switches gears to discuss rebuke by incorporating a version of a tradition found in Sifra. This material is comprised of two parts – an anonymous set of glosses on Lev. 19:17 and the reactions of several early rabbis to the commandment of rebuke. The talmudic version of this material reads as follows:

Our Rabbis taught: Do not hate your brother in your heart (Lev. 19:17a). One might think that this means one should not hit, slap, or curse him, the Torah therefore says in your heart (Lev. 19:17a) – the verse speaks only of hatred in one’s heart. From where do we know that one who sees something unseemly about his fellow is obligated to
rebuke him? As it says, *you shall surely rebuke* (Lev. 19:17b). If he rebuked him and he did not accept it, from where do we know that he must go back and rebuke him again?

The Torah says, *rebuke*, in all cases. One might think that [he should continue rebuking him] even if his countenance changes. The Torah therefore says *and do not incur sin* (Lev. 19:17c). It was taught, Rabbi Tarfon said, I doubt whether there is anyone in this generation who is able to receive rebuke. If he said to him, “remove the splinter from between your eyes,” he would say back, “remove the beam from between your eyes!”

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryiah said, “I doubt whether there is anyone in this generation who knows how to rebuke.” Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Nuri said, heaven and earth will testify about me that many times Akiva was lashed because of me because I would complain about him before Rabban Gamliel and all the more so he increased his love for me in order to fulfill that which it says, *do not rebuke a scoffer lest he hate you, reprove a wise man and he will love you* (Prov. 9:8).

Elsewhere I have argued that this *tannaitic* section purposefully advances a forceful and potentially violent responsibility to rebuke in the first, anonymous section, which is then repudiated by several rabbinic authorities. On its own, this tradition already supports my thesis by accentuating the lengths to which one should go in order to rebuke and problematizing the commandment with regard to its contemporary feasibility: One is allowed (or perhaps required?) to hit, curse, or slap another person and one is commanded to continue rebuking if one is unsuccessful at first. Yet Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryiah declare the commandment inapplicable. While the Bavli’s rendition of this material closely

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mirrors its tannaitic parallel, several significant differences catch the eye. As we shall see, two of these changes enhance the conflict between an unbending resolve to chastise and the detrimental ramifications of so doing, further bolstering my claim.

The anonymous glosses as preserved in Sifra skip over the moment when the rebuker first reproves his fellow – jumping from a delineation of approved actions (such as hitting and cursing) to the necessity of repeated attempts should an initial effort prove ineffective. The Bavli provides the missing link. Sandwiched between the gloss that hatred in one’s heart permits hitting, cursing, and slapping, and the requirement of continual attempts, all extent manuscripts of the Bavli introduce another interpretative step: “From where do we know that one who sees something distasteful in his fellow is obligated to rebuke him? As it says, ‘you shall surely rebuke’.” Literally, this gloss simply fills the gap between permissible forms of rebuke and the requirement to continue trying if at first one does not succeed. Yet, the particular idiom employed for denoting the other’s error, “something distasteful”, is rather unusual and worthy of note.

Aside from our sugya, the phrase דבר מגונה appears in four other cases in the Bavli. The first two instances, found in tractates Niddah and Kiddushin, use the phrase to refer to a physical blemish on

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7 Sokoloff translates the Aramaic root ג.נ.י in its active form as “to disgrace” and the passive form as “to look repulsive” (Michael Sokoloff, A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods (Ramat-Gan, Israel; Baltimore: Bar Ilan University Press ; Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 296 s.v. #2). Jastrow translates the term דבר מגונה as “deserving to be covered up, reprehensible, indecent; ugly” (Marcus Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature (New York: Pardes, 1950), 259 s.v. גנה.

8 The phrasing of this line varies among the manuscripts, but each preserves essentially the same material. Note, however, that MS London and MS Vatican 119 lack the subsequent interpretation of the infinitive absolute (הוכח תוכיח) as implying continual rebuke. Within the newly added gloss, MS Vat. 119 as well as the Venice and Vilna printed editions move the element of “in his fellow” (לבחבירו) to before the phrase “something distasteful” (the former also lacks the verb “sees”). Additionally, there is a discrepancy between whether the verse is cited as “as it says” (שנאמר) or “the Torah says” (כ”ל).  

9 MS Oxford preserves a fifth occurrence in BT Berakhot 31b, however all of the other manuscripts of this passage read “דבר שאינו הגון.” This example will be discussed in a note below.
a woman.\textsuperscript{10} The bodily and unalterable nature of these defects suggests that our sugya has something different in mind. The next example occurs on BT Pesahim 3a with reference to crude speech. The Torah is said to have gone out of its way to avoid a somewhat vulgar expression by adding several additional and extraneous letters: Genesis 7:8 refers to animals as “not pure” (אֵינֶנָה טְהֹרָה) rather than simply as “impure” (טְמֵאָה).\textsuperscript{11} Based upon the Pentateuch’s avoidance of “something distasteful” (דבר מגונה) in this verse (namely the word “impure”), Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi derives the premise that one should always avoid distasteful language when speaking.\textsuperscript{12} The context of this statement within a larger discussion of opting for lofty language (לישנא מעלי) suggests that the “distasteful” language in this case is only relatively unpalatable. The Torah often refers to animals as impure (טָמֵא). It is only when compared to the more “lofty language” of “an animal which is not pure” (אֵינֶנָה טְהֹרָה) that the term “impure” (טְמֵא) takes on a somewhat negative connotation. Hence, דבר מגונה in this context refers to something only slightly and relatively distasteful rather than something truly disgraceful.

The final instance of the phrase דבר מגונה appears on BT Nedarim 32a in a midrash on the biblical episode of God telling Abraham to walk before Him and “be perfect” (והיה תמים; Gen. 17:1). Abraham quivers in fear lest he possess some flaw (דבר מגונה) and therefore not be perfect in the eyes of God. Once again, דבר מגונה implies a minor imperfection rather than a glaring problem.\textsuperscript{13} Moreover, a search of the related term גנאי in the Bavli similarly reveals several examples of minor or relatively

\textsuperscript{10} On BT Niddah 17a, Rav Hisda prohibits having sexual relations during the daytime, which is explained by Abaye as a concern that a man will see דבר מגונה in his wife and she will become repulsive to him. On BT Kiddushin 41a, Rav Yehuda quotes Rav as prohibiting betrothal of a woman during the day time lest he see דבר מגונה and she becomes repulsive to him.

\textsuperscript{11} דאמרו ר’ ירuish בן לוי עלולו אל יהיו אדם דבר מגונה מפינו שיאיר עקם הכוכב שמונה אבןוית ולא יהיו דבר מגונה מפינו שיאיר עקם הכוכב שמונה א湮וית.

\textsuperscript{12} From a rabbinic perspective, the inclusion of anomalous and circumlocutious phrasing suggests a novel lesson to be learned. Similar advice is offered in Tractate Derech Erez (Pirqei Ben Azzai 1) which speaks of a praiseworthy person who happens to emit something distasteful (דבר מגונה) from his mouth.

\textsuperscript{13} As Rashi emphasizes, Abraham’s fear is sparked as a result of God’s unprecedented demand for perfection ( yal שיאיר). From a rabbinic perspective, Abraham was clearly unconcerned with major flaws as God had already selected him. It is only with the newfound standard of perfection that Abraham questions whether he possesses a minor flaw.
in insignificant offenses.\textsuperscript{14} We can now return to the use of the phrase דבר מגונה in our sugya. Given that the two other germane uses of דבר מגונה in the Talmud specifically refer to minor flaws and that the related term גנאי likewise often implies somewhat negligible offenses, it seems probable that in our sugya also connotes a moderately inconsequential offense. If so, then the Bavli’s selection of this particular idiom purposefully implies that one is obligated to rebuke another for even a minor fault.\textsuperscript{15} This extension of the obligation beyond responding to more extreme offenses (which one might infer from Sifra’s permission to hit, curse and slap the offender) builds upon our previous discussion of the force of the commandment to rebuke, augmenting the application of Lev. 19:17. If the insertion of another exegetical comment on Lev. 19:17 further extended the rebuke requirement to encompass even minor transgressions, a second major addition, which appears in the second half of the tannaitic material, advances this idea while also working in the opposite direction. Although there are some slight differences in the opinions of the tannaim who decry rebuke as they appear in the Bavli from that which we find in Sifra, the most blatant accretion is an example of an ineffective reproof and the resulting retort:\textsuperscript{16} “If one said to him ‘take the speck (קיסם) from between

\textsuperscript{14} BT B.B. 123a includes a pericope that refers back to the use of דבר מגונה in BT Pes. 3a: ‘ועיני לאה רכות מי רכות איילימ...’ רכות משמש השם בגנאי במקרא אלא דבר תקנית. דבר מנה לא דבר מגונה. נאמר מה נאמר וגם במנה נאמר ויענותו של דבר מגונה גנאי. The expression דבר מגונה refers back to the use of reference to distasteful language. A tradition preserved in BT Berakhot 33b (as well as BT Meg. 25a) states that it is גנאי to praise a king who is wealthy in gold as having much silver since this depreciates his value. Here is again only negative relative to a preferable alternative rather than something highly problematic in its own right. BT Berakhot 43b lists six things that are גנאי for a sage to do: go to the marketplace perfumed, go out alone at night, go out with patched sandals, speak with a woman in the marketplace, spend time with am ha’areẓ, and get to the house of study last. Once again, these actions are more “distasteful” than morally abhorrent (particularly since some of these expectations are then qualified by the Talmud as to when they actually apply). For other examples of גנאי referring to something only somewhat distasteful see BT Men. 35a, BT Sanh. 93b and 94a, BT Shab. 64b, and BT Pes. 56a (on this last source see Aaron Amit, “An Edition and Comprehensive Commentary on Chapter IV of Tractate Pesahim in the Babylonian Talmud” (Dissertation, Hebrew University, 1999), 358).

\textsuperscript{15} This reading is strengthened by a partial parallel in BT Berakhot 31b where we learn from the exemplum of Eli chastising Hannah for ostensibly being drunk that one should rebuke another upon seeing something which is not appropriate (לקא להא ברבי יבּּי דבר שאני בהנהו unfamiliar לחיות). The expression “something which is not appropriate” which appears in most of the manuscripts also appears to connote a less severe offense. As noted above, MS Oxford preserves the phrase דבר מגונה instead of דבר מגונה, potentially influenced by the wording of our present sugya.

\textsuperscript{16} The relevance of these others differences will be discussed below.
"your eyes," he would [reply], ‘take the beam from between your eyes.”

Building upon the idea of דבר מגונה as referring to something merely distasteful, the speck ( محمود), concerning which one chastises another person, is also indicative of something minor rather than a major problem. This is especially apparent in contrast to the “beam” (קוררה) that the other party points out. Thus, once again the Bavli’s version of the tannaitic tradition implicitly heightens the force of the command by specifically describing rebuke as oriented toward minor issues.

The parable of the speck and the beam not only augments the scope of the biblical obligation, but also subtly cuts against its desirability. This example is brought in order to concretize the case of an ineffective rebuker and an unreceptive rebuked party. However, it also adds a new dimension of concern. Without this illustration, the tannaitic assertions that no one knows how to properly give or receive rebuke potentially indicate only that the rebuker’s unconvincing rhetoric fails to prompt the offending party to yield. Rather than such a passive possibility, the particular formulation chosen to exemplify this failure portrays an escalating confrontation. By responding with a line that parallels the rebuker’s while upping the ante from a minor annoyance (a speck) to a much larger irritant (a beam), the offending party antagonistically shifts the onus onto the rebuker. Heightening the drama and raising the stakes through his combative retort, the offending party exhibits the danger of a failed rebuke inciting greater discord between the two actors. This illustration of inadequate rebuke thus further problematizes the act of rebuke beyond the dangers already noted at play in the Levitical verse.

While all of the extant manuscripts of this passage contain the word עיניך (“your eyes”), a parallel in BT B.B. 15b has some manuscript traditions and printed editions that read שניך (“your teeth”). For a discussion of different versions of this idiom see J. Duncan M. Derrett, “Christ and Reproof (Matthew 7.1–5/Luke 6.37–42),” New Testament Studies 34, no. 02 (April 1988): 271. For a discussion of the possibility that the use of this idiom in the Bavli is derived from the Jesus tradition, see William David Davies and Dale C Allison, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Clark, 1988), 671 fn. 6.

This is similarly the case for the Gospel version of this idiom where the speck (καρφός) similarly “stands for small moral defects” (Davies and Allison, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew, 1:671).
1b. Section 2: Humility or Rebuke?

The first unit of our sugya set the stage by adopting the tannaitic tradition regarding rebuke which both emphasizes and problematizes the requirement of Lev. 19:17. The two major additions to this pericope augment each of these facets by demanding reproof for even a distasteful infraction while displaying how dangerous a failed attempt can be. Moving to the second section of our text, we find a new way through which Lev. 19:17 is assessed and deemed unworthy of application. In the second major section of the Bavli’s sugya on rebuke the value of reproof is contrasted with that of humility (ענוה), with the latter clearly emerging victorious:

Rabbi Yehuda son of Rabbi Shimon asked of him,¹⁹ “Proper (לשמה) rebuke and improper (שלא לשמה) humility, which of these two is preferable?” He said to him, “Do you not admit that improper humility is preferable as the master said, ‘Humility is the greatest of all.’ Improper [humility] is also preferable as Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: ‘A person should always occupy himself with the Torah and commandments even if improperly, for from improper [motivations] one will come to [occupy himself with them for] proper [motivations].’”²⁰

Rabbi Yehuda the son of Rabbi Shimon pits rebuke against humility, a trait considered by some to be the greatest quality.²¹ Posing the question of preferability between the act of rebuke and humility tacitly acknowledges the value of the former; were rebuke clearly inferior to humility, or if it was the editor’s intention to thoroughly debase rebuke, a much lesser comparison could have been made. Yet, despite the fact that rebuke is paired with such a great partner as humility, this passage degrades

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¹⁹ Most of the manuscripts do not include Rabbi Yehuda’s interlocutor. Only MS Vatican 120 and Cambridge T-S F 2(2).29 supply the name of his father, Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi, as the addressee.

²⁰ רבי יהודה בריה דר' שמעון: "תוכחה לשמה וענוה שלא לשמה הי מינייהו עדיפא?" אמר ליה, "ולא מודית דענוה בעא מינייהו לשמה עדיפא? דאמר מר 'ענוה הגדולה_mcolute shel_shema neni_riviyot, דאמר רב יהודה אמר רב, 'лушמה עדיפן? דאמר ר' יהודה, "לא מודיא דענוה ללמד, שמעתיה נמי דריבור, דאמר רב יהודה אמר רב, 'למעתיה עדיפן אוף דריבור, "אוף שלם שלם שמעתיה אבל שלם.""

²¹ This statement is paralleled in BT Avodah Zarah 20b where it appears in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, who disagrees with an alternative position that piety (יווה) is the greatest attribute.
reproof and Lev. 19:17 on several levels. Humility is selected as clearly superior. In fact, even improper humility is favored over proper rebuke. Moreover, following upon the heels of the previous section which analyzed the biblical obligation to rebuke, the absence of any indication of humility’s scriptural status in the majority of manuscripts is glaring. Corresponsly, the inclusion of Rav’s adage concerning Torah and commandments directly calls our attention to the disparity between rebuke’s Pentateuchal pedigree and the merely rabbinic provenance proffered for the value of humility. Thus, despite the perfunctory nod to rebuke’s value as a worthy contender against humility, the overwhelming triumph of the latter undercuts the desirability of rebuke and Lev. 19:17.

The debasement of rebuke continues as the sugya presents an exemplification of proper rebuke and improper humility. In this example, the act of improper humility is barely humility at all, and in fact, the end result is closer to lashon hara (evil speech) rather than anything positive. Yet, nevertheless, following on the heels of the previous pericope, the actions taken are framed as preferable to actually rebuking.

22 In BT Avodah Zarah’s parallel to this material, Isaiah 61:1 is adduced as support for Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi’s contention that humility is the most important quality. Combatting the assertion that piety (חסידות) is the greatest virtue, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi argues that Isaiah 61:1 refers specifically to the humble (עננים) rather than the pious (חסידים). In our sugya, reference to this verse only appears in MS Munich 95 where Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi’s full point that the word עננים appears instead of חסידים is included. Rather than truncating the statement to only include a reference to the biblical verse, which would purely function as proof of humility’s scriptural status, MS Munich 95 incorporates Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi’s complete dictum, retaining the comparative reference to piety. This comparative element aligns with the question of preferability in our sugya. Humility is superior to rebuke just as it is greater than piety. Consequently the biblical verse primarily supports humility’s elevated status vis-à-vis other alternatives rather than functioning as an assertion its humility’s scriptural status in its own right. Furthermore, in contrast to the Levitical obligation to rebuke which is explicitly formulated as a commandment, the mention of the humble in Isaiah not only carries prophetic (rather than Pentateuchal) status, but is not formulated as a charge to be humble. In light of these factors, the absence of any scriptural reference in all of the other manuscripts, and even the appearance of a verse in MS Munich 95, begs the question of why the Levitical obligation to rebuke is considered less than the non-Pentateuchal value of humility. One could find a Pentateuchal source for the value of humility, namely, Num. 12:3 (“Now the man Moses was very meek (ענן ימים), above all the men that were upon the face of the earth”). Yet, this verse makes no appearance in our sugya. The lack of any such indication of humility’s scriptural (and particularly Pentateuchal) status thus stands in stark contrast to rebuke’s Levitical pedigree.
What is an example of proper rebuke and improper humility? Like the [example] of Rav Huna and Ḥiyya bar Rav who were sitting before Shmuel. Ḥiyya bar Rav said to him, “Does the master not see that he is bothering me?” [Rav Huna] took it upon himself not to bother [Ḥiyya] further. After [Ḥiyya] left, [Rav Huna] said to [Shmuel], “this and that he did to me.” [Shmuel] said to [Rav Huna], “Why did you not tell him to his face?” [Rav Huna] said to [Shmuel], “Far be it from me that the offspring of Rav would be embarrassed by my hand.”

The plethora of pronouns lacking a clear antecedent renders this passage somewhat opaque. But the most coherent understanding of the plot is as follows: Ḥiyya lodges a complaint against Rav Huna before their mutual teacher Shmuel. After Ḥiyya leaves, Rav Huna informs Shmuel of Ḥiyya’s problematic behavior. Shmuel questions why Rav Huna did not rebuke Ḥiyya directly for his bad behavior, to which Rav Huna responds that he was concerned with embarrassing him. As this example is proffered to illustrate proper rebuke and improper humility, it appears that in the eyes of the storyteller, Rav Huna’s complaints against Ḥiyya would have constituted the proper rebuke (had he actually expressed them to Ḥiyya himself) and Rav Huna’s hesitancy to rebuke lest he embarrass is the instance of improper humility. Humility is demonstrated by remaining silent rather than offering legitimate criticism.

Yet, for some reason his motivations transform his restraint into an improper action, despite being preferable to the alternative.

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23 Some interpret Ḥiyya as speaking to Shmuel at this point, a view supported by MS Oxford and Cambridge T-S F 2(2).29 which include his name explicitly. However, it is also possible that he is speaking directly to Rav Huna.

24 Once again there is a disagreement as to whether this refers simply to bringing his challenge before Ḥiyya, or if the implication is that he should have brought his challenge to Ḥiyya before Shmuel (for a discussion of the manuscripts here see Shmuel (Richie) Lewis, And before Honor – Humility: The ideal of humility in the moral language of the Sages (Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 2013), 282 fn 83.).

25 This passage is similarly elucidated by an anonymous medieval commentator labeled as “אחד מגדולי הראשונים” in the Bar-Ilan Responsa project (http://www.baraillan.ac.il/).
In his work, *And before Honor – Humility: The Ideal of Humility in the Moral Language of the Sages*, Richard Lewis surveys the nature of humility in early Jewish traditions, particularly within rabbinic literature. He argues that the rabbis transformed the biblical meaning of humility (ענוה) from a social category applicable to the politically and economically destitute into an ethical quality grounded in the negation of social hierarchy and recognition of the inherent equality of humanity. From this perspective, Rav Huna’s unwillingness to rebuke is improperly motivated insofar as he is concerned with impugning the honor of an individual with high status, Hiyya’s father Rav. In contrast to the correct form of humility, which would manifest itself as a concern for everyone’s dignity, including Hiyya himself, Rav Huna’s misplaced respect for the eminence of Rav renders his action deficient. From the perspective of Lewis’ observation that rabbinic humility is dependent on the fundamental recognition of human equality, Rav Huna misses the core component of humility. His “humble” act might not even constitute rabbinic humility (as Lewis understands it) in the first place, let alone an “improper act of humility.” Nevertheless, in light of the preface to the episode, Rav Huna’s flawed act of humility is favored over rebuke.

In addition to Rav Huna’s actions diverging from the basic idea of rabbinic humility as defined by Lewis, his “humble” act may actually be detrimental in its own right. According to the timeline of the story, Rav Huna waits for Hiyya’s egress before immediately relating to Shmuel the various offenses. For an earlier and more linguistic study of humility in rabbinic literature, see Pinchas Polonsky, “The meaning of the term ‘Anawa (Humility) in Talmudic Literature” (Thesis, Bar Ilan University, 2000). His central claim is that: “in the vast majority of sources found in Talmudic Literature, the meaning of the term anawa is ‘letting go’... Generally, the ‘letting go’ involves giving up one’s pride, wealth, social status, and deference to contrasting opinion” (Ibid., II. For his discussion of the particular section at hand, see Ibid., 64–66).


It also appears that Rav was R. Huna’s teacher, providing added impetus to avoid impugning his honor (see Chanoch Albeck, *Mavo la-Talmudim* (Tel-Aviv: Devir, 1969), 195).

The episode itself gives no indication of Shmuel’s response to Rav Huna’s explanation. Perhaps Shmuel would have criticized Rav Huna and still recommended rebuking Hiyya, as he was initially inclined to prefer. However, the framing of the story following the declaration that humility trumps rebuke inclines us to interpret Shmuel silence as affirmation.
committed against him by Ḥiyya. Purposefully delaying until the moment Ḥiyya’s back is turned, and preemptively informing Shmuel of Ḥiyya’s infractions before Shmuel has a chance to question him, Rav Huna effectively turns a possible opportunity for rebuke into its transgressive inverse: *lashon hara* (evil speech). Rav Huna conveys negative details about his peer to a third party, rather than to Ḥiyya himself (or at least even in Ḥiyya presence). Moreover, his motivation for confiding in Shmuel is primarily to excuse his own behavior and exonerate himself rather than to benefit Ḥiyya. Rav Huna thus denigrates his colleague to a superior for self-centered purposes, an action hardly distinguishable from *lashon hara*.31 By presenting this episode in the context of a preference for improper humility over rebuke, the sugya deems even this quasi act of *lashon hara* to be better than engaging in rebuke, further devaluing rebuke and its biblical commandment.

Overall, this middle section of our sugya presents a harsh blow against the value of rebuke. While the relative value of reproof is considered high enough to juxtapose it with a quality as venerable as humility, the subsequent preference for the latter undercuts its worth. As even improper humility (verging on *lashon hara*) trumps rebuke, this section of our sugya thoroughly demolishes the desire to perform this scriptural injunction. Turning now to the final section of this sugya, we will see how this material continues the trend of upholding the commandment of rebuke while simultaneously problematizing it.

1c. Section 3: Until What Point is Rebuke?

31. On the nature of *lashon hara* in rabbinic literature see Charles Bernsen, “Lashon Ha-Ra (the Evil Tongue) and the Problem of Jewish Unity” (Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 2011), chap. 1.
In the third and final section of our sugya, the Bavli asks the extent or limit of several different situations: rebuking, remaining in one’s place of lodging and suffering. For the first of these cases the sugya proffers three alternative answers attributed to different amoraim (later rabbis): one should reprove until hit by, cursed by, or arousing anger (ניזפה) in, the object of one’s rebuke. These three options are linked to the views of tannaim who derive their positions from the biblical episode of King Saul expressing his indignation at his son Jonathan for rebuking him.

Until what point is rebuke (כחה עד היכן תו)? Rav said, “until a blow (הכאה),” Shmuel said “until a curse (קללה),” and Rabbi Yohanán said, “until indignation (נדיפה).” [These views are] like a tannaitic debate: Rabbi Eliezer says “until a blow,” Rabbi Yehoshua said, “until a curse,” Ben Azzai says, “until indignation.” Rav Naḥman bar Yīzhak said, “And the three of them derive their positions from a single scriptural source: “Saul flew into a rage against Jonathan. ‘You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! (1Sam. 20:30),’ and it is written, ‘Saul threw his spear at him to strike him down (1Sam. 20:33).’” According to the one who said “until a blow,” it is written, “to strike him down.” And according to the one who said, “until a curse,” it is written, “to your shame, and to the shame of your mother’s nakedness (1Sam. 20:30).” And according to the one who said “indignation,” it is written, “Saul flew into a rage.” And according to the one who said “indignation,” is it not written “a blow” and “a curse,” [therefore why is indignation also

32 In addition to place of lodging, the sugya inserts a similar comment about leaving one’s previous profession. However, this is not introduced as a separate question but is merely an additional meimra that accompanies the previous discussion.
33 Although Jonathan’s response to Saul’s question about David’s absence (1 Sam. 20:28-29) is not exactly the type of statement which one would normally construe as rebuke, this seems to be the way that the sugya understands the function of his words. See Rashi’s comments (ד.ה. עד קלל) as well as הגהות הב”ח on this gloss.
34 MS Vatican 119 reads רפא instead of רב. Given the dating of the other two amoraim in this dialogue however, Rav is the preferred reading.
35 The correlation with the views of three tannaim is missing in MS Munich 95.
36 Munich provides the previous portion of 1 Sam. 20:30 (ויאמר לו בן נעות המרדות) rather than the later phrase (לבשתך ולבושת ערות אמך) found in the other manuscripts.
necessary]?! That case [is different] because of the great love which Jonathan had for David, he exerted himself more [than was necessary].

Hitting, cursing, and indignation, the three alternatives for the end point of rebuke, hark back to the midrash with which the sugya opened. Lev. 19:17’s prohibition on holding anger in one’s heart was interpreted to permit hitting (יכנו), cursing (יקלקלנו) and slapping (יִסְטוּרנוּ). Two of the three terms directly correspond (לא תשה) (כללו) and the word זיפה both reminds us of the anger (לא תשתא) in the beginning of Lev. 19:17 and itself is a term employed by the Bavli as a word connoting rebuke. These three endpoints for rebuke thus parallel the three permitted forms of rebuke suggested by the opening of the sugya.

At the outset of our sugya, the three actions describe the extreme measures permitted to a rebuker in order to reform an offender. In this third portion of the sugya, the three actions now portray the response of the rebuked party. This inverted reflection of the beginning of the sugya both heightens the obligation of rebuke and amplifies its danger. As noted above, when attributed to the rebuker the three actions demand that he or she adopt even such extreme measures for correcting the offender. When the sugya applies these extreme actions to the rebuked party in the context of asking the point until one must continue rebuking, it extends the obligation by forcing the rebuker to not simply give up when the offender passively refuses to accept reproof. The rebuker is obligated to continually rebuke and to do so until the rebuked party becomes so offended or provoked that he or she


[38] Jastrow, Dictionary, 891. Hitting and slapping are very similar actions so we can understand why only the most common of them would be reiterated while the other is dropped. Furthermore, the sugya is guided and restricted by the biblical evidence and therefore adopts an example (1 Samuel) which comes as close as possible to the forms of expression in the exegetical material above. It is important to note that the word זיפה does not appear in the scriptural example and thus the choice of this particular term, which itself implies rebuke, is significant.

[39] See Rashi’s commentary ad loc.
responds in kind. In this way, the extreme actions attributed to the rebuked party increase the intensity of the biblical injunction, forcing the rebuker to persist. Yet, in so doing, the sugya simultaneously elevates the level of danger in store for the rebuker. He or she must persevere, knowing the impending peril.

By adopting parallel language for the acts of the rebuker and the offender, the sugya subtly blurs the line between the one who is in the right and the one in the wrong. When both commit similar actions in the context of their confrontation, the casual observer cannot simply determine who is the one rebuking and who is the one being rebuked. Furthermore, just as the insertion above of “take the beam from between your eyes” in response to the parallel language of “take the speck from between your eyes” deflects our gaze onto the rebuker and his flaws, so too the analogous terminology here centers our attention on the ineffectiveness of the rebuker and his similarity to the offender. The slight difference between their actions is also instructive. While the offender may become angry (نزיפה), the rebuker may slap him (יסטרנו), potentially a more egregious and insulting act.40 Additionally, by specifically ending the responses of the originally rebuked party with another type of rebuke (نزل), the Bavli establishes the possibility for a continual cycle of unending reproof.41

Beyond the implications of the parallel language, a blatant absence in this section indirectly problematizes rebuke. The sugya never explicitly offers the possibility that a successful rebuke, where the offender admits his sin and repents, could or should be the end point of rebuke. Perhaps this is simply too obvious, but the fact that such an auspicious possibility is deemed improbable for the rabbis

40 In fact, three of the extent manuscripts (MSS London, Munich, and Vatican 119) read “scratch him” (וסטרנו) instead of “strike him” (וסטרנו). While this is likely the result of metathesis from the more unusual root ר.ר.ר. to the more familiar ר.ר, the imagery is equally if not more violent.

41 The Bavli rhetorically places גָּזִיר at the conclusion of the listing, despite having to invert the order of the biblical verses. According to 1 Sam. 20, Saul first becomes angry at Jonathan (ו יִירָה אֲבֵד אָבַר; 1 Sam. 20:30), then curses him (לְכֹת אֲבֵד אָבַר; 1 Sam. 20:30) and finally prepares to strike him (וֹלַכָת; 1 Sam. 20:33). Choosing to reverse the order of events allows the sugya to build to a crescendo and conclude by coming full circle back to rebuke.
is reinforced by the statement of Rabbi Eliezer which appears toward the end of this unit: “If (∈למה) the Holy One Blessed Be He came to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with strict justice (∩יר), they would not have been able to stand before his rebuke (תוכחה), as it says, ‘Come, stand before the LORD while Icite against you all the kindnesses that the LORD has done to you and your fathers’ (1Sam 12:7).” Even the patriarchs could not have successfully withstood divine rebuke if it was too strict. Just as Rav Huna in the previous section assumed that his rebuke would result in embarrassment, so too this final section of the *sugya* assumes that it is highly unlikely that rebuke will end favorably.

Across the three major units of our *sugya* we have witnessed a consistent trend. Each section upholds and at times augments the obligation to rebuke while simultaneously devaluing, problematizing and questioning the appropriateness of performing Lev. 19:17’s injunction. Building upon *Sifra*’s comments on the verse, the Bavli inserted an additional exegetical gloss that requires responding to even a “distasteful matter” (∩דבר מגונה). Yet, it also exemplifies an unsuccessful rebuke attempt with an illustration that intensifies the confrontation and projects the onus back onto the rebuker. Likewise, in the second unit of the *sugya*, rebuke is thought worthy of comparison with the highly esteemed quality of humility. But it quickly falls short and is disparaged as inferior to even improper humility, invoking the concern of humiliation in the exemplification of proper rebuke. Finally, in the last component of our passage, the rebuker is urged to persist until provoking even a combative retaliation on the part of the offender. Nevertheless, this response is carefully constructed so as to blur the boundary between meritorious and deplorable actions, reiterating the danger of an escalating conflict and spiral of rebuke. The coexistence of these incongruent trajectories suggests that the *sugya* actively grapples with the act of rebuke and its biblical basis. Overall, the Bavli simultaneously acknowledges the obligatory nature of rebuke and problematizes the commandment, highlighting the dangers of actually rebuking.

42 תניא רבי אליעזר hồiי אומר אלמלא בא הקב”ה矣 אברחמו זוחק וייעקב בדין עיני ולא צדקה לעם מполнить חכמה שיאמר וענתה.
We turn now to a later work known as *Midrash Tanḥuma* which offers a different approach to dealing with the biblical commandment to rebuke. I will begin by discussing the nature of this *midrash* and arguing that the relevant section of this source was aware of the talmudic *suga* addressed above. Having established this relationship between *Midrash Tanḥuma* and our *suga*, I then systematically examine material that was excluded by the *midrash* from the original talmudic source as well as new sources that were introduced by the *midrash*. Overall, I argue that the exclusion of previous material and the inclusion of new material present a competing conception of rebuke and Lev. 19:17. In contrast to the Bavli which balanced between the importance of the commandment and a discussion of the dangers involved in rebuking, I argue that *Midrash Tanḥuma* thoroughly embraces the practice of rebuke, finding the element of danger in refraining from performing this commandment.

*Midrash Tanḥuma* appears in two major versions, the so-called “printed edition” and the “Buber edition.” The former was likely redacted in geonic Babylonia while the Buber edition was redacted in Italy-Ashkenaz (or perhaps Palestine). Thanks to the efforts of Marc Bregman, we now can identify

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three major redactional strata within the printed and Buber Tanhuma collections. First there is an early layer from around the 5th century which regularly uses Galilean Aramaic as well as Greek and Latin terms. This is followed by the middle stratum (c. 6-7th cen.) which often replaces Aramaic with Hebrew and which is the most prominent layer. Finally, the late stratum dates from after the Islamic conquest and is roughly contemporaneous with the emergence of the two editions of Tanhuma.

The relevant passage for our discussion of rebuke appears only in the printed edition of Tanhuma in Parshat Mishpatim (section 7). As I shall demonstrate, this homily likely derives from the latest redactional layer of this Tanhuma collection and was aware of some form of the Bavli as well as our sugya in particular. After establishing that the Tanhuma passage was directly interacting with the BT Arakhin sugya discussed above, I will argue that Tanhuma purposefully reworks this earlier talmudic material in order to downplay its problematization of rebuke. Systematically purging the sugya of elements which challenge rebuke and Lev. 19:17, Tanhuma introduces several alternative sources culled from across the Bavli which strongly endorse the practice of reproof. Furthermore, Tanhuma actually inverts the nature of the danger involved by applying it to the case where one refrains from rebuking.

1. Midrash Tanhuma and the Bavli Sugya

It is well-known that Tanhuma adopts and reworks earlier rabbinic material. Particularly when it comes to earlier Palestinian midrashim, there are numerous examples to show how Tanhuma draws from its forerunners. When it comes to the Bavli however, there are fewer obvious parallels to make as strong a case. Jacob Elbaum, in describing the nature of Tanhuma, and late midrashim more generally,

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44 Bregman originally presented these findings at the 10th World Congress of Jewish Studies (Bregman, “Stratigraphic Analysis of a Selected Pericope from the Tanhuma-Yelammedenu Midrashim”). His full analysis and description of these layers later appeared in Marc Bregman, Sifrut Tanhuma-Yelamdenu : te’ur nusheha ye-‘iyunim be-darkhe hithayutam (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2003), chap. 4. For a brief English summary of his conclusions see Dov Weiss, “Confrontations with God in Late Rabbinic Literature” (Diss., University of Chicago, 2011), 63–64.
thus suggests that while it is clear that these works used earlier midrashim, it is less certain as to whether or not they used the Bavli.\textsuperscript{45} Nevertheless, several scholars have undertaken to demonstrate that Babylonian traditions influenced Midrash Tanhuma.\textsuperscript{46} Allen Kensky, for example, in his dissertation on Midrash Tanhuma Shemot, indicates that there are several places where it is clear that the Bavli is the source of the Tanhuma text.\textsuperscript{47} More recently, Ronit Nikolsky has treated two examples where she believes Tanhuma reworks earlier Palestinian midrashim and is influenced by the Bavli.\textsuperscript{48} The most recent work to treat this issue, Dov Weiss’ Pious Irreverence: Confronting God in Rabbinic Judaism, presents several examples to show how Tanhuma employs material from the Bavli. There is thus significant precedent for positing that Tanhuma directly reworks material from the Talmud.

One of the challenges in describing the relationship between Tanhuma and the Bavli is that these works were compiled over an extended period of time with significant debates as to the dates of their final editing. Some sections of Tanhuma clearly predate later traditions in the Bavli and vice versa. Assuming that a particular passage in Tanhuma is later than one in the Bavli simply because Tanhuma as a whole was likely compiled at a later date ignores the nature of these works. In order to demonstrate that our rebuke passage in Tanhuma reworked the talmudic sugya, we must start by assessing the relative dating of the Tanhuma passage in relation to the talmudic material. For various reasons it is almost impossible to accurately date the redaction of our talmudic sugya. However, if we can establish the material from Tanhuma to be of late provenance, then this is a first step toward claiming that it had

\textsuperscript{46} In addition to Midrash Tanhuma, the Bavli also seems to have influenced other Yelammedenu traditions. A. Neubauer points to the work of M. Joel Müller who Neubauer believes that the Tanhuma-Yelamden tradition used the Babylonian Talmud (A. Neubauer, “Le Midrasch Tanhuma et Extraits du Yelamdenu et des petits Midrashim,” \textit{Revue des études juives} 13 (1886): 226).
\textsuperscript{47} Kensky, “Midrash Tanhuma Shmot,” 69–71.
access to some version of the Bavli sugya as the Bavli was likely redacted in the 5th or 6th centuries while the latest layers in Midrash Tanhuma stem from much later.

As previously mentioned, the passage from Tanhuma that treats rebuke appears in only one of the two Tanhuma works, the printed edition. This is not entirely surprising as Marc Bregman notes that while the two versions of Midrash Tanhuma generally correspond in their homilies on Leviticus through Deuteronomy, the printed and Buber editions “to Genesis and Exodus are clearly two distinct works,” and our material appears in the Exodus section. Yet, for our purposes, the fact that this text is lacking in the Buber edition is of particular importance. According to Bregman, despite the divergence between the two editions in Genesis and Exodus, they “share a large amount of closely parallel material” which suggests that “the two recensions of the Tanhuma are both descended from one hypothetical, common ancestor.” The absence of this material in the Buber edition indicates that it was not part of the “common ancestor” but is rather a later addition from the period when the two versions were redacted. Accordingly, our passage belongs to the later stratum of Tanhuma which Bregman locates after the Islamic conquest. Moreover, if indeed the printed edition was redacted in “geonic Babylonia,” as Bregman writes, then it emerged from the same academies that studied the Babylonian Talmud. The absence of our passage from all manuscripts of the Buber edition is thus strong evidence that it was introduced into the printed edition of Tanhuma at a late date in Sassanian Persia where some form of the Bavli was already redacted.

Aside from its late provenance, another factor suggests that our passage from Tanhuma post-dates the Bavli and was working with some version of the Talmud. Our section of Tanhuma augments

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49 Bregman, Sifrut Tanhuma-Yelamdeenu : te’ur nusheha ye-’iyunim be-darkhe hithayutam, 3*
50 Ibid. Also see Kensky’s comparison specifically with regard to these two versions on the beginning of the Book of Exodus (Kensky, “Midrash Tanhuma Shmot,” 60–65).
51 As Bregman notes, similarities between the printed and Buber editions are typically indicative of the middle layer while substantive differences reflect the later stratum (Bregman, “Stratigraphic Analysis of a Selected Pericope from the Tanhuma-Yelammedenu Midrashim,” 121).
the BT *Arakhin* passage by incorporating material from three other Talmudic *sugyot* spread across the corpus. It employs passages from an extended discussion in BT *Shabbat* 54b-55a, a shorter selection from BT *Tamid* 28a, and a pericope that is likely from BT *B.M.* 31a.\(^{52}\) Beyond these three cases, *Tanḥuma* also appears to draw on an interpretation preserved in BT *A.Z.* 4a. The use of these many different sources from across the Babylonian Talmud bolsters the case for this *midrashic* section having had access to a version of the Talmud.

Having established that our *Tanḥuma* section is of late provenance and utilized some version of the Bavli, we can ask whether it also had a version of our *sugya*. Comparing the Bavli’s *sugya* with the *Tanḥuma* passage we find several components of the former that are missing in the latter. However, as I shall argue, the particular elements that are missing are specifically those which problematize rebuke and therefore should be understood as systematically removed by the editor of *Tanḥuma*. For the material which our *sugya* and *Tanḥuma* have in common, there are two sections not found in prior *tannaitic* versions or in other direct parallels suggesting that they were taken directly from our *sugya*.

The first is a gloss which the Bavli adds to the earlier *tannaitic* tradition: “From where do we know that one who sees something distasteful in his fellow is obligated to rebuke him? As it says, ‘you shall surely rebuke’.”\(^{53}\) The second is the first half of the section “until what point is rebuke.” As this material is not

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\(^{52}\) Selections from these *sugyot* are integrated directly into the *Tanḥuma*’s discussion of rebuke. There is also another passage that comes immediately after *Tanḥuma*’s discussion of rebuke (introduced by הנון רבן) that also derives from an earlier rabbinic tradition (*Sifra* *Aḥarei Mot* 8:13; BT *Yoma* 67b).

\(^{53}\) There is an oblique parallel to this material in BT *Berakhot* 31a-b: “Eli said to [Hannah], ‘How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself?’ [1Sam 1:14] Rabbi Elazar said, ‘From here [we learn that] one who sees something improper in his fellow needs to rebuke him (להוכיחו).’” In contrast to the version that appears in both our *sugya* and *Tanḥuma* however, here the idea that one should rebuke someone for an improper action is derived from the Book of Samuel and not Leviticus. Additionally, as opposed to the phrase דִּבְרָךְ מִגְנָה which appears in all of the manuscripts of the printed edition of *Tanḥuma*, most manuscripts of BT *Berakhot* 31a-b (except for MS Oxford Opp. Add. Fol. 23) read דִּבְרָךְ שֵׁנֵי הגון and one manuscript (Columbia X 893.16) reads לְמִדָּה instead of לְמִדָּהוּ. The identical language used by our *sugya* and *Tanḥuma* and the differences between both and the partial parallel in BT *Berakhot* suggests that the *Tanḥuma* version was derived from our *sugya* rather than the BT *Berakhot* *sugya*. 

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in any tannaitic text and only appears in this form within our sugya, Tanhuma likely derived it directly from our sugya.

In addition to the two sections that appear only in our sugya and in Tanhuma, further evidence that Tanhuma used our sugya can be found with regard to the three glosses paralleled in Sifra. In each of these cases the version is consistently phrased differently in the Bavli manuscripts from the version found in Sifra and in all three instances Tanhuma directly parallels the language in the Bavli. Glossing Leviticus’ prohibition on hatred in one’s heart, Sifra states: “I only said hatred which is in the heart” (לא אמרתי אלא שנאה שבלב). By contrast, both the Bavli and Tanhuma read “Scripture says ‘hatred which is in the heart’” (שם שבלב הכתוב מדבר). In the second comment, Sifra states: “from where [do we learn] that if he rebuked him even four or five times [without it being effective that] he should repeat and rebuke [again]?” (ומנו שאמו חנחו [א转型发展 הרבעה והמשה פסמי חゾר והוויכח). The Bavli and Tanhuma leave out any indication of a number of attempts and simply state that “[if he] rebuked [him] and he did not accept [it], from where [do we learn] that he should repeat and rebuke him again” (הוכיחו ולא קבל מנין שאפילו וראו). Finally, in the third gloss Sifra reads, “One might think that even if you rebuke him and his countenance changes” (יכול אף פניו משתנות). The Bavli and Tanhuma consistently leave out the phrase “you rebuke him.” The fact that the Tanhuma passage is of late provenance, used versions of several sugyot from across the Bavli, includes two sections that only appear in our sugya, and follows our sugya when it differs from Sifra indicates that the Tanhuma passage is based directly upon our sugya.

2. Excluding Material

54 The printed editions read אלא שמא rather than אל שמא (as is found in all of the manuscripts).
55 MS Munich 95 lacks the words הכתוב מדבר but does not include the phrase לא אמרתי.
56 MS Oxford Bodleian 187 actually preserves this line twice, but still does not have the language we find in Sifra.
57 Some of the Bavli manuscripts invert the words פניו משתנות but the Tanhuma manuscripts all read פניו משתנות.
Having established that our source in Midrash Tanhumah was directly working with the earlier Bavli sugya, we can now examine how this midrash fashions an extended discussion of rebuke with the rhetorical agenda of advocating for its supreme importance. One of the ways this is accomplished is through the introduction of several other talmudic passages (mentioned above), which I shall describe in detail below. However, before introducing new material, Tanhumah must first deal with the fact that the BT Arakhin sugya contains both tangential materials not directly relevant to rebuke as well as a number of elements which problematize rebuke. As I shall demonstrate in this section, Tanhumah actively reworks our BT Arakhin sugya by excluding material extraneous to the topic of rebuke and systematically removes those parts of the sugya which problematize Lev. 19:17 and the practice of reproof.\textsuperscript{58}

The first two sections of the BT Arakhin sugya both focus exclusively on issues directly related to rebuke. In the third section however, there is a significant amount of material that does not advance our understanding of this topic. The first unit of this third section derived a disagreement over the endpoint of rebuke from 1 Sam. 20, aligning the suggested possibilities with different parts of the verses. Tanhumah retains the list of three alternative endpoints to rebuke attributed to amoraïm along with the basic statement that these positions were derived from 1 Sam. 20. However, Tanhumah excises three things: 1) the fact that this amoraïc disagreement corresponds to a tannaitic disagreement, 2) the explicit connection between each position and its scriptural source and 3) the question as to why one of

\textsuperscript{58} As Norman Cohen argues regarding a particular example from the Tanhumah Yelammedenu tradition, “The integrated nature of this homily is reflected as well in the presence of only a limited amount of superfluous material and of submotifs not associated in some way with the major themes” (Norman J. Cohen, “Structure and Editing in the Homiletic Midrashim,” AJS Review 6 (April 1981): 18). Similarly in our example, I am positing that the editor actively excluded material deemed superfluous to a discussion of rebuke.
these positions is not redundant. Although all of this material treats the issue of rebuke tangentially, it does not significantly further our understanding of the nature or obligation of reproof.59

Beyond passages which do not directly advance our understanding of rebuke, Tanhuma also systematically excises those sections and lines which present rebuke in a negative light or especially as being dangerous. As noted, Tanhuma preserves the Bavli's version of the three glosses on Lev. 19:17. However, Tanhuma does not include the voices of the tannaim who eschew rebuke. This half of the tannaitic tradition portrayed rebuke as an impossible task which the rabbis declared themselves incapable of fulfilling. In making a strong case for the desirability of rebuke, this material had to go. But, what about the first part of the tannaitic source which I argued also established rebuke as a dangerous practice? My earlier analysis of this section demonstrated how it simultaneously heightens the obligation and portrays it as hazardous. In its current context however, there are significant differences which enhance the level of obligation but obscure the danger. Within Sifra, the anonymous section of glosses concluded with the warning against incurring sin by embarrassing the other party. This was immediately followed by the tannaim rejecting rebuke, placing the problematization of rebuke at the apex of the juncture between these two halves of the commentary. In its new context, Tanhuma introduces an additional gloss on Lev. 19:17 proving that a student must rebuke his teacher. This comment brackets the possibility of going too far, returning us to another extension of the obligation. Promptly after these comments on Lev. 19:17, Tanhuma goes on to claim that one who does not rebuke is caught up in the sin of that other person. Rather than the questioning of rebuke which follows in Sifra, thereby amplifying the fear of sin by over-rebuking, in Tanhuma a new section is introduced which

59 Tanhuma retains the basic citation of the relevant material from 1 Sam. 20 while ignoring the extraneous step of explicitly linking each of the three rabbinic positions to their corresponding verse. In this way, Tanhuma preserves the scriptural source for each position without engaging in the tangential question of whose view depends on which verse.
highlights the sin involved in refraining from rebuke. In this way, Tanhuma obscures the idea of rebuke as dangerous in the *tannaitic* text by introducing a new sin that overshadows the previous concern.\(^{60}\)

Section two of the Bavli sugya, which compares proper rebuke to improper humility, is the most damaging to the value of reproof. For this reason it is entirely absent from Tanhuma’s version. This is not to say that humility lacks value in the eyes of Tanhuma’s editor(s). The printed edition of Tanhuma elsewhere includes the statement that “no quality is greater than awe and humility” (אין בכל המודות גדול ומיראה וענה), citing Deut. 10:12 as proof.\(^{61}\) When humility challenges the value of rebuke however, it goes too far. Besides this entire section of our sugya, Tanhuma also refrains from extracting the one line directly relevant to rebuke from the third section of the Bavli where Rabbi Eliezer states that, “If the Holy One Blessed Be He came to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with strict justice (דין), they would not have been able to stand before his rebuke.” Such a description paints rebuke, at least when spurred by strict justice, as unbearable. As this tradition speaks of ineffective rebuke, casting it in a negative light, Rabbi Eliezer’s words have no place in Tanhuma’s project of lauding rebuke. By removing this tradition, along with the entire second section of the sugya and the latter half of the *tannaitic* material preserved in the Bavli’s first section, Tanhuma actively reworks the Talmud’s primary discussion on rebuke, leaving only those elements which advance a positive understanding of rebuke and Lev. 19:17.

3. Introducing New Material

In an analysis of another pericope from Tanhuma, Ira Chernus demonstrates how this late *midrash* combines earlier sources to create a new message, drawing authority from its predecessors.

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\(^{60}\) One might suggest that the introduction of this new sin actually further problematizes rebuke by juxtaposing the sin of going too far with the sin of not rebuking at all. However, in Tanhuma these two pericope are separated by an additional gloss on Lev. 19:17 that a student must rebuke a teacher. According to my reading, this space downplays the direct clash between the two avenues toward sin while allowing the second, strengthened by the larger context, to overshadow the first.

\(^{61}\) *Tanhuma Parshat Qorah* 12.
Summarizing the work of Tanḥuma’s editor he writes, “[the editor] has taken a group of disparate traditions... and molded them into an apparently simple and straightforward unity. His ability is seen both in his choice of traditions and the way he combines them and gives them new contexts in order to communicate his own message with the apparent support of earlier authorities.” The same can be said of our homily. Tanḥuma both deletes irrelevant and problematizing passages from our BT Arakhin sugya and incorporates other material from elsewhere in the Bavli in order to construct a thoroughly pro-rebuke passage. While not all of the appropriated talmudic pericopae explicitly treat rebuke, our homily frames and organizes all of this material into a sustained argument for the extreme importance of rebuke and Lev. 19:17.

Previously we highlighted the three major sugyot from which Tanḥuma draws as a means to demonstrating that Tanḥuma was working with some version of the Talmud. We can now turn to a more detailed exploration of these three sections to illustrate how each of them augments the importance of rebuke and the Levitical obligation. The first and shortest Bavli pericope Tanḥuma adopts is based upon a statement of Rava from BT Bava Meẓia 31a:

One of the rabbinic figures said to Rava, “Shall I say that [the word] rebuke [in Lev. 19:17 implies] one time, [but the addition of the word] you will rebuke [teaches] two times?”

[Rava] said to him, “[The word] rebuke [on its own] implies even a hundred times; [what does the word] you will rebuke [teach then]? [Based on the word rebuke] I know only that the master [should rebuke] a student. From where [do we learn that] a student [should rebuke] the teacher? The Torah says rebuke, you will rebuke – in all cases.”

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63 א"ל ההוא מדרבנן לרבא ואימא הוכח חדא זימנא תוכיח תרי זמני א"ל הוכח אפי' ק' פעמים משמע תוכיח אין לי אלא הרב. תוכיח מ"מ (בבלי ב''מ לא.).
The first half of the BT Bava Mezίa version, which derives the number of times one should rebuke, is somewhat repetitive of Sifra’s requirement for continual attempts. Tanḥuma already included a version of Sifra’s gloss in the form of repeating a rebuke when the other party does not heed it (לא קבל). Consequently, this opening interpretation is unnecessary and only the second half of this tradition from BT Bava Mezίa is imported into Tanḥuma: “It was taught [in a baraita] (ותניא): “You will rebuke,” [from this] I know only that the master [should rebuke] a student. From where [do we learn that] a student [should rebuke] the teacher? The Torah says rebuke, you will rebuke – in all cases.64 Although the content of this gloss is taken verbatim from BT Bava Mezίa 31a it is no longer attributed to Rava. Instead the passage is now marked as a tannaitic source (תניא). Altering the introductory marker not only upgrades the authority of this tradition from an amoraic to a tannaitic dictum, but also locates it as an organic continuation of the preceding tannaitic glosses on Lev. 19:17. On a substantive level, this tradition also augments the force of rebuke by expanding the scope of the obligation. The biblical law used the language of “brother” (אחיך) and the BT Arakhin added another gloss with the word “fellow” (חבירו). Both of these terms denote someone of similar social status. By expanding the obligation to include rebuking a teacher, this additional gloss now mandates confronting a superior, a more demanding requirement.

BT Shabbat 54b-55a is the next major source Tanḥuma employs. The first part of this material is basically copied verbatim:

Whoever is able to protest (למחות) against the people of his household and does not protest is caught [in the sin] of the people of his household. [Whoever is able to protest against] the people of his city [and does not protest] is caught [in the sin] of the people

64 תכנית הוחל תuncate אתי לאך הובד למלמד תלמיד לרב מינו תלי הובד תuncate מ"מ
of his city. [Whoever is able to protest against] the entire world [and does not protest] is caught [in the sin] of the entire world.65

Protesting (ד.ח.מ), rather than rebuking (יו.כ.ח), is the primary topic of this section. However, Tanhuma introduces this material with a line that connects it to the previous glosses on Lev. 19:17 and frames it as a discussion of rebuke: “And one who does not rebuke (תומך) is caught in that very sin (באהוא עון), as the master said…”66 By adding this simple connector Tanhuma is able to maintain the original language of the BT Shabbat 54b-55a passage, simultaneously transforming it into a directly relevant comment on rebuke that links to the biblical obligation. While the Levitical injunction provided a positive impetus to practice rebuke, this new amoraic passage highlights the detriments of failing to perform. Not only does a bystander who refrains from rebuking fail to perform a commandment, but he or she also incurs sin as a result. Moreover, one is liable not only for one’s fellow or one’s teacher, but for everyone in the entire world as well. Tanhuma thus crescendos from the localized confrontations of friend and teacher in the glosses on Lev. 19:17, to responsibility for one’s entire city and world. More importantly, Tanhuma understands that the danger associated with reproof is about refraining from rebuking others, rather than an ineffective attempt.

Using Ezekiel 9 as a springboard, the continuation of the passage declares that even the most righteous individuals often fail at rebuke. Introducing a parable in which Strict Justice (דין) asks God why the righteous are different from the wicked, Justice suggests that even the completely righteous are flawed insofar as they have failed to rebuke the wicked.67 God retorts that it is known that protesting against the wicked would have been ineffective and therefore the righteous cannot be held

65 פס על אנשי עירו, בכל העולם כלו וכל מי שאפשר לו למחות באנשי ביתו ואינו מוחה נתפס על אנשי ביתו, באנשי עיריו, בתוספת על всем עיר, בכל השולח כלו.
66 ואמן דלא ממכח מציפיס בראשו עון דאמר מר
67 In contrast to the appearance of ‘דין’ in BT Arakhin where R. Eliezer declares that even the patriarchs could not have withstood such Divine rebuke, here ‘דין’ serves as an advocate for rebuke, prompting God to punish the righteous for not rebuking. The relationship between these two uses requires further study.
accountable. Justice counters that just because God has access to this information does not mean that the righteous do – and therefore they cannot be exempt from the necessity of trying to protest. God concedes the point and allows everyone including the righteous to be punished. While BT Shabbat moves on to discuss other verses in Ezekiel 9, Tanhuma summarizes the main point that “you learn that even the completely righteous are caught [in the sins] of the generation” (הא למדת שאפילו צדיקים אוכלים על הדור). Citing Ezekiel 21:8 (discussed above) Tanhuma specifies that the righteous sin because they refrain from protesting against the wicked. The overall message of this excerpt from BT Shabbat is that everyone (including the righteous) is responsible for everyone else (including the wicked) and that everyone is liable for failure to rebuke.

The final sugya which our Tanhuma passage takes from the Bavli appears in BT Tamid 28a. According to the Talmud (BT Tamid 27b-28a), a certain man appointed for overseeing the temple mount would make rounds of the different watches to ensure that everyone was awake. If he found someone asleep, he was permitted to hit them or burn their clothing. After describing this situation, the Talmud quotes a baraita in the name of Rabbi [Yehuda haNasi]:

What is the proper path that a person should choose? Love rebukes (התוכחות) for as long as rebukes are in the world comfort (נחת רוח) comes to the world, goodness and blessing come to the world and evil departs from the world; as it says “But it shall go well with the rebukers (מוכיחים); Blessings of good things will light upon them” (Prov. 24:25). And there are those who say He will strengthen [them] with extra faith as it says, “My eyes are on the trusty men of the land, to have them at my side” (Psa. 101:6). Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said that Rabbi Yonatan said, “Whoever rebukes his fellow for the sake of heaven (לשם שמים) merits a portion of the Holy One Blessed Be He, as it says, ‘He who reproves a man will in the end [Find more favor than he who flatters
“him” (Prov. 28:23); and not only this, but they draw out for him a thread of lovingkindness, as it says, ‘Find more favor than he who flatters him.’”

Appearing toward the end of Tanhuma’s extended discussion of rebuke, this passage drives home the point that rebuke is a highly positive and desirable practice. Loving rebuke is the “proper path” (דרך ישרה) that a person should choose in life as rebuke brings all sorts of benefits to the world and removes evil from the world. Following the citation of Prov. 24:25, Tanhuma introduces an additional gloss on this verse not found in the BT Tamid parallel: “for the rebuker and for the one rebuked” (על המוכיח ועל המתוכח). Attentively noting the plural form of the word rebukers (מוכיחים) used in Proverbs, this added point identifies both parties in the rebuke act as benefiting.

While there do not appear to be parallels to this gloss in the Bavli, we do find a more extended version of this tradition in Devarim Rabbah, another work in the Tanhuma Yelammedenu family. The Vilna printed edition and Lieberman’s edition of Devarim Rabbah differ in the first couple of sections where this material appears (see Hermann Leberecht Strack and Günter Stemberger, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash, trans. Markus Bockmuehl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 307–308). In the Vilna edition (Parsha 1 Siman 1) the question is asked, “From where do we learn that everyone who accepts rebuke merits blessing” (ומין שלכל המקבל תנחמה זכה?) An answer is supplied from Pro. 24:25, suggesting that the plural form of the verb rebukes is read expansively as also implying the rebuked party. A clearer instance of the dual reading of rebukes appears in the Lieberman edition (Parshat Devarim 15): “Rabbi Shimon ben Laqish said, “and to the rebuker” (מוכיח) is not stated here, but rather “and to the ones rebuked” (וכם שבעם על المدينة) Rabbi Yohanan said, “upon them will come a blessing of goodness,” – upon the rebuker and upon the rebukers – (על המהメกะ והמבודד) On Rabbi Shimon ben Laqish’s reading of rebukes as referring to those rebuked (rather than the rebukers) see Lieberman’s notes (Saul Lieberman, Midrash Debarim Rabbah: Edited for the first time from the Oxford ms. No. 147 with an Introduction and Notes, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Shalem Books, 1992), 12–13).
In this detail examination of the passage from *Midrash Tanhuma* we have witnessed how this late rabbinic work reworked our sugya from the Babylonian Talmud, excluding some material and introducing new sections in order to change the underlying message. Unlike the Bavli which problematized the act of reproof and highlighted the dangers involved, *Tanhuma* emphasizes the critical importance of rebuking others by extending the scope of the commandment to encompass even those in a relative position of power (such as one’s teachers) and by reflecting upon the divine reward in store for practitioners. Additionally, in contrast to the Bavli, *Tanhuma* identifies the failure to rebuke as the real danger involved.

**The Duty and Dangers of Rebuke**

Leviticus 19:17 instructs a person to rebuke his fellow but warns against incurring sin. From the outset this commandment constitutes a core tension between positive obligation and detrimental sin. But what exactly is the nature of this sin and how is it related to rebuke? In the course of our discussion we encountered two diametrically opposed approaches to answering this question and consequently two divergent trajectories of guidance. According to the Bavli, the sin and danger resides in the actual act of rebuke when performed incorrectly and therefore the practice of reproof should be greatly restricted. By contrast, *Midrash Tanhuma* adopts the opposite perspective, locating sin and danger in the absence of rebuke. Failure to rebuke another person not only deprives someone of great reward but actually renders them liable for the other person’s transgressions. Endorsing the practice of reproof, *Midrash Tanhuma* is able to fully embrace the Levitical commandment. This sharply diverges from the Bavli where concern over the danger of rebuke forces this text to call into question the biblical requirement and ultimately recommend against this commandment.

The Bavli and *Tanhuma* reflect alternative approaches to the biblical verse, the former reading the phrase “but do not incur sin” as referring to the results of an unsuccessful rebuke and the latter
overriding the tannaitic gloss on this clause by shifting the sin onto the one who refrains from rebuke. However, the importance of this disagreement extends beyond their approaches to Leviticus. The Talmud offers humility as the desirable alternative to rebuke indicating that one should focus primarily upon perfecting oneself rather than looking to the faults of others. This orientation toward the self is affirmed by the first section of the sugya which imagines the rebuked party responding that the rebuker should regard the “beam” in his or her own eye before looking to others. In contrast to this more inward focus, Midrash Tanhuma emphasizes the importance of an outward gaze, putting aside one’s own possible imperfections in order to help others improve. The first pericope which we saw added to Midrash Tanhuma’s discussion was the obligation of a student to rebuke his teacher. A disciple, particularly vis-à-vis his mentor, is the epitome of a non-perfected individual. Yet, he is obliged to point out failings even in his role model. The core addition of Midrash Tanhuma, personal accountability for a sin one has failed to denounce, speaks to the heart of this text’s vision: Another’s faults are equally as important as my own. Even the most righteous individuals have failed in this regard and recognition of this shortcoming prompts God to punish them. Lastly, the passage from BT Tamid 28a, with which Midrash Tanhuma draws this section to a close, not only promises the rebuker goodness and a portion of the Divine, but also notes that rebuke brings goodness and blessing to the world as a whole. Introduced as the “proper path that a person should choose” (דרכ ישרו שיברו לו האדם), the externally-oriented act of rebuke stands as the ideal orientation for not only benefiting oneself, but for benefiting

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70 Interestingly, Midrash Tanhuma omits a line that appears in the major manuscripts of the parallel in BT Shab. אמר רב פפא: והני דבי ריש גלותא נתפסו על כולי עלמא. Perhaps this was intentional as the meimra locates the obligation specifically with the Exilarch and Midrash Tanhuma may have worried that such a line could be interpreted as displacing the obligation from the ordinary individual. While the subsequent statement of R. Hanina, which refers to elders and ministers, is retained, this is perhaps because it is used to derive the biblical source of the obligation.
the world as well. The outward-orientation thus spills over from defining the ideal type of behavior to defining the ideal reward which applies to everyone.\footnote{Contrast this with BT Arakhin’s discussion of improper humility where the statement of Rav Yehuda in the name of Rav declares that the commandments in general should even be undertaken “improperly” as this will ultimately lead a person to do so properly. The focus here is internally focused on the individual’s motivation for practice of commandments, rather than on broader manifested benefits of humility for others.}

In conclusion, Bavli Arakhin 16b-17a and Midrash Tanhuma Mishpatim 7 each reflect a different attitude toward the duty of rebuke and its dangers. The choice of which material to include and exclude results in a problematization of rebuke in the Bavli and an extolment of rebuke in the Midrash. However, this disagreement is not restricted to alternative readings of the biblical verse. I would suggest that in addition to sensitivity to its dangers, the Bavli chooses to reject rebuke because of an underlying preference for working on one’s own faults and moving toward self-perfection prior to looking to others.\footnote{I develop this point more thoroughly elsewhere in comparison to a similar phenomenon in the early Christian monastic world.} Contrastingly, Midrash Tanhuma reiterates the necessity of responding to the sins of others despite one’s own lack of perfection. These two diametrically opposed approaches point us toward competing notions of an ideal person’s religious orientation. Should a person primarily work on perfecting him or herself, or should a person first and foremost be directed outward as one responsible for others? Understanding and comparing these two different rabbinic takes on Lev. 19:17 and rebuke thus teaches us far more than the simple duty and dangers of rebuke. I hope that this brief examination of these two major rabbinic works gives us better insight not only into broader questions about one’s interpersonal obligations but also pushes us to think more deeply about the proper orientation of the religious self.