

that surrounded them --were left speechless. No one would have dared render such inane excuses in the presence of Moshe. It would only be the big talkers who did not bother showing up, who would talk. Is this not usual fare? The complainers who dispute, who deride, never do it to your face. It is always behind your back. It takes courage-- or *chutzpah* -- to confront someone. These people are, for the most part, the spineless and weak-minded who tremble at the "first roar of the cannon." They were all acutely aware of the truth: they had sinned because their *emunah*, faith, in Hashem was not yet concretized. So they sinned. Confronting one's errors requires fortitude, which sinners do not possess. After all, if they were morally strong, they would not have sinned. Indeed, those sinners did not even have the courage to attend the rebuke.

**אכל תשברו מאתם בכסף ואכלתם... כי ד אלקים
ברוך בכל מעשה ידיך**

You shall purchase food from them for money so that you may eat... For Hashem, your G-d, has blessed you in all your hard work. (2: 6,7)

Rashi explains that Hashem has provided you with ample funds, so that you can pay for the food that you receive from Eisav's descendants. If Hashem provides, it would be ingratitude on your part to ask for food without paying for it. *Horav Moshe Chevroni, zl*, derives from here a powerful lesson concerning the meaning of gratitude. When a Jew has the means, yet he presents himself as destitute and in need of assistance, he defames Hashem. He makes it appear that the Almighty does not provide for His subjects. This applies (I assume) not only before gentiles, but even before our fellow Jews. When we have, but make it appear as if we are in need (for whatever reason), we are acting with ingratitude to Hashem. It goes without saying that, when we act without gratitude, we risk losing our Heavenly benefits.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* employs this idea to explain the *Mishnah* at the end of *Meseches Peah*: "Whoever is not a cripple or blind, but presents himself as such, he will not leave this world until he becomes like one of them" (free translation). If a person is blessed with good health, but nonetheless presents himself as sickly (probably for pity or to raise money), he denies Hashem's beneficence. One must appreciate Hashem's gifts; to demonstrate ingratitude by concealing his gift of health is to deny Hashem's favor. Such a person will one day answer for his insolence.

How many of us are guilty of such ingratitude? How many of us cover up our blessings for ulterior motives, because it is more "profitable" to appear poor, as a *nebech*, someone in need? Some do it for attention. Others do it

because they are afraid that people will constantly be at their door asking for favors. Others are just simply unhappy people who would rather than share their good fortune with others, live miserably and be considered to be *rachmanus* cases.

Horav Zaidel Epstein, zl, was blessed with amazing longevity, reaching almost one century of life on this world. While so many who live a long time conceal their gift, he did exactly the opposite. He never hid his age, because he felt that one does not conceal a gift from Hashem. It shows ingratitude. He did not go around shouting his age, but he did not hide it either. He was thankful to Hashem, so why not show it?

Va'ani Tefillah

רפאנו ד' ונרפא

Refaeinu Hashem v'neirafei

Heal us Hashem and we will be healed.

The *Chafetz Chaim* distinguishes between the imprisonment ordered by a mortal king and that which is decreed by Hashem. When a king wishes to imprison one who has rebelled against him, he dispatches his royal guards to arrest him. The prisoner's hands are cuffed and his legs chained. He is then locked in a prison situated in a fortress, where there is no way out. In addition, he is watched 24/7 by armed guards. Escape is not an option. Hashem, however, does not have to resort to such extreme methods in order to remove one's freedom. When Hashem wants to restrict a person's movements, He simply confines him to bed. The house remains unlocked; there are no armed guards, no barred doors, neither anyone nor anything to prevent him from leaving. Nonetheless, one can be certain that this prisoner is not going anywhere. Illness is Hashem's way of imprisoning us.

לע"נ

רוזה רחל בת ר' משה אריה-ע"ה

נפ' ח' אב תשנ"ו

ע"ה Shelley Horwitz

Peninim is published weekly by *Peninim Publications* in conjunction with the *Hebrew Academy of Cleveland*, 1860 S. Taylor Rd. Cleveland, Ohio 44118

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**פנינים
התורה**

Parashas Devarim

תשע"ז

פרשת דברים

אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה

These are the words that Moshe spoke. (1:1)

These were not random words; rather, they were nuanced words, carefully selected for a purpose. Moshe *Rabbeinu's* life was coming to an end. In a short time he would enter the realm of eternity, where he would repose in the shining light of *Olam Habba*, the World to Come, the world reserved for *tzaddikim*, the righteous. Thus, Moshe's words were parting words, lessons, rebuke, messages all couched in ambiguity, veiled in allusion by implying their transgressions through names of places. He did all of this out of respect and sensitivity for the feelings of the people. Why, however, did he wait until now to rebuke them – especially for sins which had taken place decades earlier? When one errs, his friend or mentor should immediately bring it to his attention, so that he will not continue doing the wrong thing. One who can prevent a wrong from happening -- and does not -- assumes part of the responsibility. If Moshe had issues with the nation's behavior, attitude, character, then he should have commented on it long ago. Why did he wait until shortly before his death to rebuke them?

Indeed, Moshe had precedent. Our Patriarch Yaakov *Avinu* did the same thing, using his deathbed as the backdrop for his rebuke. *Klal Yisrael*, as well as the *Shivtei Kah*, said goodbye amidst rebuke. One may suggest that this, indeed, was their blessing. When one is given the opportunity to right a wrong, to delve into the origin of his misstep, it is truly a blessing. Nonetheless, did this rebuke have to take place at such a grim moment? Was there no other time for Moshe to issue his reproof?

In an insightful discourse, *Horav Noach Weinberg, zl* (Wisdom of Living), explains that there is a time and place for everything, and, while it is usually best to call immediate attention to the transgression committed by someone, a difference exists between a leader and an individual. A leader's responsibilities are different than those of an individual. If one's words will be heard, then the rebuke must be issued immediately. By dallying around we lose our window of opportunity, thus allowing the sinner time to commit his wrong again – and again. Under such circumstances, the rebuker shares in the transgression.

One who stands at the helm of a group is different, because he cannot admonish the people for every infraction.

A leader who is always excoriating is labeled a negative person, a person who always finds fault. As a result, people soon stop listening to him, and he is no longer effective. A leader should not trade the immediate success for the long-term failure. He must pick his battles, always looking at the larger picture and carefully weighing all aspects and repercussions of what he is about to do. If he harps on the same infraction all of the time, people will ignore him, and his esteem in the eyes of the congregation will be diminished in a harmful way. A leader cannot just fly off the handle every time a sin is committed, or else he might be doing a lot of "flying." People are far from perfect, and those that are especially far are not always interested in hearing rebuke. They must be guided with extreme sensitivity and love. Once the subject of the rebuke is turned off, it is extremely difficult to bring him back.

The deathbed is, therefore (sadly), an opportune time for issuing critique. It is a time when people are serious; people listen. Death is final; thus, whatever one says close to his passing is not mere hyperbole. It is well thought out and of utmost importance. At such a time what a person communicates will remain forever etched in the hearts and minds of the listener.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* raises this idea up a notch by comparing parents to leaders. Parents are leaders in their homes. When children ignore what their parents have to say, it is much more than *chutzpah* – it is a tragedy, a curse! Nothing the parent says carries much weight, because their children have grown tired of their incessant criticism. In order to circumvent such a family crisis, it is important for parents to be extremely circumspect with their dose of criticism. They must also pick their battles, to know when it is best to criticize and when it is prudent to swallow it and be silent. Otherwise, the love and trust between parent and child, which obviously is the mainstay of any relationship, will be impugned. Indeed, this concept of "pick your battles" applies whenever the relationship dynamic consists of a leader/parent/boss/administrator, and those who answer to him.

Rebuke must be tendered with love, from a heart over flowing with love. Then, one certainly has the best interests of his subject in mind. It is not a manipulative critique; rather, it is love – tough love, perhaps - but love no less.

HEBREW ACADEMY OF CLEVELAND

אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל כל ישראל בעבר הירדן

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael on the other side of the Yarden. (1:1)

Rashi explains that, in the last days of his life, Moshe Rabbeinu was giving Klal Yisrael mussar, words of rebuke. Perhaps rebuke is too strong a term. Moshe was guiding them on their future journey, calling to mind their errors of the past. As long as Bnei Yisrael would learn from their earlier mistakes, they would be on a positive road toward spiritual ascendancy. Moshe did not spell out in clear terms their mistakes; rather, he alluded to their faults by employing names for non-existent places, but the message was nonetheless clear: the place called Di Zahav refers to an abundance of gold, which led to the *chet ha'eigel*, sin of the Golden Calf.

The *Shlah HaKadosh* derives from here the proper approach concerning how one is to rebuke. First and foremost, the purpose of rebuke is not to put someone down, but rather, to raise him up, to make him aware of his potential and how to achieve it. Moshe never outright mentioned their shame, the actual sin which they had committed. He attempted to allude to their greatness, and then, once they were identified as “great,” the taint of sin was obvious against such a backdrop. Shlomo HaMelech writes: *Al tocheach leitz pen yisna'echa, hocheach l'chacham v'yehavecha*, “Do not rebuke a scoffer, perhaps he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you.” When rebuking someone, don't present him as a *leitz*: do not put him down; do not make him feel that he is a nothing. For this will only cause him to close up, to turn away from you, to hate you. Instead, treat him as a *chacham*, who should know better, who should act on a higher plane. Then he will respect and love you. The *Kli Yakar* adds: “Anyone who rebukes and wants to be assured that his words will be accepted and achieve efficacy should (not come outright and describe the sin in all of its gory details, as some take perverse enjoyment in doing) make an effort simply to allude, to hint (in a round-about manner, if possible) to the infraction. Thus, he maintains the sinner's dignity and self-esteem.

The attitude one must retain, especially upon rendering *mussar*, is best encapsulated by *Horav Meir Chadash, zl*, in describing his revered *Rebbe*, the *Alter m'Slabodka*. The *Mashgiach* (as *Rav Meir Chadash* was reverently called) was once asked to summarize his *Rebbe's* teachings. He thought for a long time, then answered with a single word: *V'ahavta!* “And you shall love!” *V'ahavta es Hashem Elokecha...V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho*. “And you shall love Hashem, your G-d...And you shall love your fellowman as yourself.”

It is all about sensitivity towards another Jew, a sensitivity which is based upon love. If one does not love his fellow Jew, he has no business rendering *mussar*. I might add that one who refrains from pointing out his friend's failings in a respectful and sensitive manner is really not much of a friend.

The *Alter* was unique in his outlook and educational approach – a perspective which not only guided the establishment of Torah throughout Lithuania, but also directed how he dealt with his students. Constantly emphasizing the idea of *gadlus ha'adam*, man's greatness and his power in the world, he strongly believed that the development of man's stature was the key to his elevation and success. Thus, he strove to imbue each student with a sense of his own personal significance and value and (thus) his responsibility. All this was derived from the notion that man is the crown of Creation.

“It is through a sense of man's greatness,” claims the *Alter*, “that a student (this actually applies to anyone) comes to sense the tremendous responsibility that rests upon his shoulders.” This realization will eventually motivate him to exert himself, to apply effort in seeking to realize his potential and to elevate himself in Torah.”

As the accentuation upon *gadlus ha'adam* played an especially crucial role in the early to mid-twentieth century (when yeshiva students were considered on the low-end of the totem pole) so, too, it is vital in dealing with anyone who has issues related to esteem (which often is the greatest catalyst for self-destruction). The Jewish youth who spent his time learning Torah was considered a pathetic loser, a societal parasite, an embarrassment to society. Such negative appellations were hurled at the Torah world by none other than our own co-religionists who had fallen prey to the scourge of the *Haskalah*, Enlightenment movement. The *Alter* battled strenuously on behalf of the *yeshivah* man's stature by first inculcating in him, in his own eyes, a sense of self-importance, and only later in the eyes of those around him.

One who rebukes must feel a sense of love for -- and be sensitive to -- his subject's needs. How he presents his rebuke makes a powerful difference in its acceptance, because it often is an indication of the rebuke's true intentions. A *maggid* who would travel from town to town exhorting the people to develop a closer relationship with Hashem, and to elevate their level of observance, once stopped in Radin, home to the venerable *Chafetz Chaim*. The elder statesman of the Torah-world listened to the *maggid* deliver a *shmuess*, ethical discourse, on the topic of rebuke and how it should be administered, and he was reasonably impressed. He observed that the *maggid* was a gifted orator who knew exactly “how” and “when” to say “what.” He felt strongly that an individual with such a gift had a moral obligation to implement his gift in the service of *Klal Yisrael*, to help Jews navigate the difficult challenges to their spiritual wellbeing.

The *maggid* replied to the *Chafetz Chaim* that he also thought that he had the ability to inspire, but a recent trip was weighing heavily on his mind, to the point that he had begun to consider taking up another means of sustaining himself. Apparently, he spoke in a community that had a group of individuals living there who had little to no respect for anyone who would preach against the way of life they had adopted. This *maggid* prepared what he felt was an excellent discourse. Unfortunately, his words were

short lived, as the entire group walked out in the middle of his speech. They created such a commotion that he was forced to prematurely end his speech and leave.

The *Chafetz Chaim* asked him, “How did you present your *shmuess*? What tone did you use?”

The *maggid* replied, “What is the question? I gave it my all. I lashed into them, raising and lowering my voice for maximum effect. I excoriated them in such a manner that they had to see the folly of their ways.”

The *Chafetz Chaim* calmly asked, “When you put on your *Tefillin* this morning, did you raise your voice? Did you scream out the *brachah*, blessing? Obviously not! Why? Because one need not scream when performing a *mitzvah*. *Hocheach tocheach es amisecha*, “You shall reprove your fellow” (*Vayikra* 19:17) is likewise a *mitzvah*. There is no reason to raise one's voice.”

At times, however, despite the incredible spiritual benefits which may be reaped, if it might hurt or even make someone feel ill at ease, it is better that one leave well-enough alone. *Horav Shmuel Aharon Yudelevitz, zl*, author of the *Meil Shmuel* was a *gaon*, brilliant Torah scholar, and *tzadik* in a generation when the Jewish community of Yerushalayim was replete with *gaonim* and *tzadikim*. He was an individual who possessed a singular *dveikus*, clinging relationship with the Almighty, was a paragon of humility and sensitivity, taking great pains never to do anything that might in any way impinge on another Jew.

The story is told that following the passing of the *Rav* of Batei Horodna the lay leadership turned to *Rav Shmuel Aharon* to deliver a *drashah*, soul-stirring, inspirational speech, prior to *Kol Nidrei*. *Rav Shmuel Aharon* was well-known as an inspirational speaker. This was an unparalleled opportunity designated for *teshuvah*, repentance/return. *Rav Shmuel Aharon* demurred. Despite the many times he was asked to speak -- and regardless of who did the asking -- *Rav Shmuel Aharon* adamantly refused to speak.

“This was an incredible opportunity to bring the entire *shul* to tears,” the *baalei batim* said. “True,” he continued, “I might be able to inspire them to such a point, but there is one person whose tears which I do not want.” They looked at him incredulously. He continued, “Every year, prior to *Kol Nidrei*, the late, revered *Rav* of the *shul* would ascend to the lectern and give a fiery, emotional discourse on the importance of *teshuvah* on *Yom Kippur*. Every year, his *rebbeztin* would sit up front and listen raptly with pride to her husband's passionate words. This year, I am certain, the *rebbeztin* will be sitting in her regular seat listening. Only this year it will not be her husband that is speaking. She will once again cry, but this time the tears will be tears of grief and sadness over her loss. If she will hear someone else speaking, it will intensify her suffering, as her loss becomes more palpable. I, for one, do not want to be the cause of such tears to be shed.”

אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל כל ישראל

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael.

(1:1)

Moshe Rabbeinu gathered the entire nation (all *Yisrael*) together to speak to them. The primary purpose of this gathering was to deliver words of rebuke to them for the way they had acted these past forty years. *Rashi* explains the necessity for having all of *Klal Yisrael* present, for had he spoken to only part of the people, those who were absent would have said, “Had we been there, we would have rejected him.” Therefore, Moshe called them all together, implying to those who had excuses that they should let them raise their voices and dispute him.

We wonder what would those “no shows” have said. Could they dispute the sin of the Golden Calf? Was the murder of Chur for standing in their way a figment of imagination? Did they not complain about a lack of water, meat, food? Did they not express their disdain for the *manna*? Is there a question concerning the *meraglim's*, spies, slanderous report of *Eretz Yisrael*? Did they not cry and mutiny that night? Perhaps Korach and his rebellion is a myth. Clearly, these people could not deny this verity. They had sinned.

Rashi's commentary is based on the *Sifri* which has a slightly different tone. There, the complainers declared that had they attended Moshe's rebuke they would have responded with four or five excuses to justify their behavior! Not only would they deny the sin, but they would also find up to five reasons to justify it!

Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl, explains this phenomenon first by quoting Shlomo HaMelech, *Kol darchei ish zach b'ainav*, “All ways of a man are pure in his (own) eyes” (*Mishlei* 16:2). No man finds fault in himself. He always has a way of qualifying his errant behavior. Not only does he have an excuse for his sin – he even believes that his excuse holds water; that it is true! With this in mind, let us analyze one sin (possibly the worst infraction): the *cheit ha'eigel*, the sin of the Golden Calf. What would they have said?

First, Moshe did not descend the mountain in a “timely” fashion – as he said he would. Second, *Satan* projected an image of Moshe's bier being carried in the sky by angels. Third, they did not make the *eigel* – Aharon HaKohen did! Fourth, they were still under the Egyptian pagan influence. Idol worship was a way of life in Egypt. It was something they had lived with for 210 years. They should be allowed a little latitude. Fifth, *Klal Yisrael* did not initiate the *eigel*. It was the *eirev rav*, mixed multitude. Who asked them to come? Why should they have been permitted to join the Jewish nation in their freedom journey? Similar excuses to justify their sin can be “crafted” with regard to the *meraglim*. This is what those who did not appear for Moshe's rebuke would have said. If so, why did all those who came just listen and not attempt to dispute Moshe?

Simply, those who stood before Moshe and saw the Heavenly aura-- the undisputed, unabashed holiness