



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

## Devarim 5782

### Bringing It Back

Rabbi Joshua (*The Hoffer*) Hoffman z"l

In the beginning of parshas Devorim, Moshe tells the people of the preparations that had been made, in the second year after the redemption from Egypt, to end their encampment at Mt. Sinai and enter the Holy Land. He then recounts that those efforts were frustrated as a result of the sin of the spies. Between his account of the preparations and his account of their frustration, Moshe interrupts his remarks with a seemingly unrelated matter. He tells the people, "I said to you at that time saying; "I cannot carry you alone.." (Devorim 1:9). He then proceeds to recount the command to appoint judges to assist him in dealing with their litigations.

There is a dispute in the midrash regarding what the words 'at that time' refer to, precisely. But, as Rabbi Shmuel Bornstein, in his *Shem MiShmuel*, points out, whether it refers to the time when Yisro advised Moshe to appoint these judges, or the later incident of the 'misonenim,' or complainers, (Bamidbar 10:1), the account is out of chronological place at this point in Parshas Devorim. Why, then, was it placed here? Rabbi Bornstein, in his commentary, suggests several explanations, all of which are on a mystical plane. Rabbi Yehudah Shaviv, in his *MiSinai Ba*, offers a more basic explanation, which I would like to present and expand on.

In Parshas Shoftim, we are told, "Judges and officers you shall appoint in all your cities which the Lord, your G-d, gives you. Righteousness, righteousness you shall pursue, so that you will live and take possession of the land that the Lord, your G-d, gives you" (Devorim 16:18,20). Rashi there, to verse 20, sites the Sifrei, which comments that the merit of appointing decent judges is worthy of keeping Israel alive and of settling them on their land. Rabbi Ephraim of Lunshitz, in his commentary *Keli Yakar* to Parshas Devorim, already cited this Sifrei to explain the reason for Moshe's mentioning of the appointment

of judges in the middle of his account of the preparations to enter Eretz Yisroel. Rabbi Shaviv explains that the conquest of the land needed to be done by a united people, and there was therefore a need for judges to settle disputes that may arise and thereby maintain the nation as a cohesive whole.

Although Rabbi Shaviv does not elaborate on this point, there is, in fact, a halachic need for the nation to form a cohesive whole in order for the land they conquer to be considered as part of Eretz Yisroel proper. As Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zt"l, has explained, this is the function of the Sanhedrin and the king in the process of *milchemes mitzvoh*; the obligatory wars that are to be fought in conquering the land. However, I believe that there is another dimension, as well. That the unity of the people serves in the process of entering Eretz Yisroel, for which a system of judges is necessary.

Ramban, in his introduction to the book of Shemos, writes that the redemption from Egypt was not completed until the mishkan was built, and the divine presence again rested among the people, as it had rested above the tents of the patriarchs. In his commentary to parshas Terumah, Ramban adds that this dwelling of the divine presence in the mishkan was really a continuation of the experience of Mt. Sinai, when G-d's presence rested upon Mt. Sinai. Thus, when the people were readying themselves to journey to Eretz Yisroel, part of their preparation was to maintain the dwelling of the divine presence among them. What typified the experience at Mt. Sinai, the midrash tells us, was the unity of the people at the time, in contrast to the quarrelsome way in which they had been conducting themselves until then. In order to maintain that sense of unity as they embarked on their journey to Eretz Yisroel and to carry that unity into the land itself, there was a need to set up a system of judges and courts. That is why,

I believe, Moshe mentioned the establishment of that system in the midst of recounting the preparations that the nation made for entering the land.

This coming Shabbos, which is the Shabbos before Tisha B'Av, is known as Shabbos Chazon, or the Shabbos on which the haftarah beginning with the words “Chazon Yeshayahu,” or “The vision of Yeshayahu (Isaiah)” is read. In that haftarah, the prophet discusses the perversion of justice that existed in Yerushalayim before the destruction of the Temple, for which G-d said he will bring punishment. The Haftarah ends with the words, “Tzion shall be redeemed with justice, and her captives with righteousness” (Yeshayahu 1:27).

The famed Rav Gavriel Zev Margolis, affectionately known as Rav Velvele, who served as a rabbi of the Baldwin Place Shul in Boston, from 1907-1911, and later as rabbi of the Adas Yisroel shul in New York, 1911-1935, writes, in his *Toras Gavriel* to parshas Devorim, that one of the reasons we read parshas Devorim on Shabbos

Chazon is because of its reference to the appointment of worthy judges. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, who came to Boston many years after Rav Velvele left, made a similar connection between the section in parshas Devorim relating to the appointment of judges, and the destruction of the Temple. As recorded by Rabbi Tzvi Shachter in his *Nefesh Horav*, he used to instruct the Torah reader in the Maimonides shul in Boston to read parshas Devorim at mincha of the Shabbos preceding Shabbos Chazon, until shelishi, instead of until sheni, as marked in the regular prayer books, in order to incorporate the entire section regarding the appointment of judges in that reading. Rav Soloveitchik noted that this had been the practice in Brisk, as well. This practice, and the connection between the need for justice as a means of uniting the Jewish people and the advent of the final redemption, should serve as a motivation for us to engage in self-introspection and repentance as we approach the coming fast day of Tisha B'Av.

## Blame is Lame

*Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given on July 14, 2021)*

In Parshas Devarim, Moshe Rabeinu reviews some of the events of their history together, of the 40 years from Yetzias Mitzrayim, up to the time of Moshe's speech. And one of the points that he alludes to—quite relevant for this time of the year (Shabbos Chazon is mamash Erev Tisha be-Av this year)—is the Chet ha-Meraglim. This was the seminal event that started the sad chapter of our history that witnessed all the unfortunate events that happened on this fateful date. And what is striking about this are the stark differences between how Moshe describes the events of the Chet ha-Meraglim in Devarim and the way the story really happened—as Hashem tells us directly—in Parshas Shlach. What are the obvious differences? In Devarim the pasuk relates: *Va-tikrevu eilai kulchem va-tomru nishlecha anashim le-faneinu va-yachperu lanu es ha-aretz va-yashivu osanu davar es ha-derech asher na'aleh ba ve-eis he-orim asher navo aleihen.* Yet, we know how the story started in Parshas Shlach. *Ve-yidaber Hashem el Moshe ley-mor. Shlach lecha anashim...* etc. Hashem said: Send Meraglim. It was Hashem's idea. Yet, suddenly, Moshe says in Parshas Devarim: *Va-tikrevu eilai kulchem.* It was Am Yisroel's idea. And Rashi says they

came *be-irvuviya*—in a jumble. The mob came and started making demands of him. So which was it? Did Hashem suggest sending Meraglim, and they got messed up or did the people were already messed up from the beginning and demanded it? However, I don't think that was the biggest difference. The biggest difference is what happened to the actual Meraglim. We know from Parshas Shlach—the story as it happened—the Meraglim came back and said: It's a nice big fruit...but...there are giants and they are going to kill us, etc. They came back, destroyed everyone's morale, and scared them. They committed the worst Lashon Hara ever and got the people to the wrong place. All of a sudden in Parshas Devarim: *Va-yikchu be-yadam mi-pri ha-aretz va-yoridu eileinu va-yashivu osanu davar va-yomru tovah ha-aretz asher Hashem Elokeinu nosein lanu.* The Meraglim came back and said: It's such a great land—let's go! They gave a purely positive report. Suddenly, we find *ve-lo avisem la-alos*—and you (the people) did not listen to them. It's a totally different story. In Shlach, Hashem told them to send the Meraglim, and they came back with a bad report and got everyone to sin. Here, in Devarim, it's the people's idea, Meraglim gave a good report, and the people didn't want to

go anyway.

There are lots of ways to meyashev the stira. One answer is that there, the bad report came from the ten bad Meraglim, and here the good report came from the two good Meraglim. That's not what mainly bothers us. Even if there is a way to answer them, why are there stiras in the first place? It could be Hashem, Moshe, and the people demanded this independently. Or that Hashem responded after the people asked. But why would Moshe tell it over in a totally different fashion?

I think the answer is pashut. Parshas Shlach is History. The Torah is not merely a history book. But at least on the simple, pshat level, the Torah gives us the historical facts of what happened. Parshas Devarim cannot be construed as history. It's Moshe's Mussar Shmuess. There is a difference between them. Both have to be true. But which perspective you take can be very different. Parshas Shlach is history. It was a very complex situation. And if you want to learn a lesson from history, you can analyze what went wrong. And you can see how all the pieces came together. Hashem started it, and the Meraglim exacerbated the situation. And then the people messed up. Here in Devarim, Moshe is giving the people Mussar. He is not telling them a story and analyzing historical trends. He is telling them: You are now going into Eretz Yisroel, and you will be in exactly the same position your fathers were in thirty-eight years ago. Are you going to enter the land—are you going to be afraid? He tells them: You could look at the story and say: Ve-yidaber Hashem el Moshe ley-mor. Shlach lecha anashim. So it's Hashem's fault. Hashem is the one who had this unsmart idea in the first place. It was His fault. And nebach, what are we supposed to do when it's Hashem's fault? Or you can look at this story and say: It's Meraglim's fault! They were our leaders—chosen by Hashem and Moshe Rabeinu—who were supposed to be smarter, wiser, and more authoritative than us. And they gave us the wrong advice. They told us not to go, and we listened to our leaders!

What else were we supposed to do? You can always blame it on someone else. And you know what? That's very true. Life is complicated. Everything has many causes. You could always blame it on someone else. So when Moshe is talking to Klal Yisroel, he says: You know what? You can always blame everything on everyone else. But that's not the point! That's not how you become a better person. That's not how you learn to do better the next time—by figuring out how you can blame everyone else. Le-ma'ase,

I don't care whether it was Hashem's initiative or the Meraglim fault. It doesn't matter whether they brought back a good report or a bad one. Lema'ase, you could have decided to listen to Kalev and Yehoshua and to get up your faith to go into Eretz Yisroel. Or you could have made a wrong decision. And you made the wrong decision. That's why in Parshas Devarim Moshe leaves out any possible factor that could be used to blame anyone else. Because our nature always tells us to just to figure out a reason why everything was everyone else's fault and not ours. This doesn't make you a bad person. That's human. But that doesn't help us learn how to make better decisions next time. To do that, you need to learn to take responsibility for yourself. You could have done 'x' or 'y,' in the moment of decision, and you chose the wrong thing. Don't just say: Next time if I don't have such bad midos as Meraglim, I will do better. In the future, if Hashem doesn't put me in such a nissayon, I will be better. No. Say: Next time, I will take achrayus to decide to be better. And that's exactly what Moshe is saying right now. I know that right now I am only telling you half the real story. I am telling you half of the story involving your decision, and I am leaving out half the story of everyone else's decisions because their decisions are not relevant when you are learning Mussar. One generation ago, you made a wrong decision. And now you must take achrayus, and it's only up to you to make that right decision. You have the power to do right or wrong. Choose to do what's right. That's the essence of Moshe's Mussar Shmuess to all of us. On the one hand, he is speaking to particular people in a particular place and matzav. And on the other hand, it's relevant to everyone in all times, places, and situations. We should be cognizant of this message when we are tempted to blame everyone but ourselves. It was our leaders' fault, our parents' fault, and our Rabbis' fault, the world's fault—and ultimately, of course, everything is Hashem's fault. And in some ways, all of this might be true. But it's not relevant. The point is: We should now take the achrayus that it's our fault that we messed up. It's the power of believing in ourselves that we can do it right the next time, no matter what everyone else does. Ultimately, that's what the Three Weeks is all about. Rambam writes, very famously: Why do we fast on the 17th of Tamuz and Tzom Gedaliya and Asara be-Teives? It's not because we are sad about what happened a long time ago when our ancestors' sins caused the Churban. We fast nowadays because we are doing something wrong if we still live in the state of Churban. It's because we haven't

lived up to our responsibilities. Because Avodas Hashem is be-yadeynu. Says the Rambam: The whole point of these Three Weeks—the period leading up to Tisha be-Av—is exactly what Moshe is telling us here. Don't just look at what people did wrong 2,000 and 3,000 years ago, what everyone did wrong—the Rabbis and the Sanhedrin, etc., and even Hashem. It's all true, and we can find this all over Shas. But that's not the point. Rather, look at all these stories and drashas and ask yourself: What do I take from this? What decisions that my ancestors faced—where they had two choices, and they picked the wrong one—and how, when facing these same two choices, I can pick the

right one? And if we take Moshe's lesson to heart—by focusing on what's personally relevant and separating that from just historical tidbits—and taking achrayus for ourselves. Then, when we have to make decisions similar to those faced by our ancestors in the days of Churban Bayis Rishon and Sheini, and in the days of the Meraglim, etc., we will make the right decision, no matter what anyone else tells us—no matter the Matzav. And im yirtze Hashem, if we all make the right decision, we will be zoche to see the Beis ha-Mikdash return, be-m'heira be-yameinu. Shabbat Shalom.

## “Abracadabra” – We are All Magicians!

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

**S**efar Devarim begins, אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל כל ישראל – “These are the things which Moshe spoke to all Israel...”

In this pasuk, the word דבר is used in two different ways. The word דברים means “things,” whereas the verb דבר means “speak.” In the Hebrew language, the word for “thing” is also the word for “speech.”

This is not coincidental. When we speak, we create things. Sometimes those things are fruitful and beneficial, and other times, they are harmful and destructive. Words are especially powerful; they are the tools we use to build and to destroy. High-ranking officials can cause markets to crash or to soar by making statements. Even ordinary citizens can get a person fired, or ruin his marriage, by spreading unflattering information. But we can also lift a person's spirits and repair a broken soul by speaking words of encouragement and motivation. We can ruin a person's day with words of criticism or an insult; and we can give him a beautiful day with a kind word or a compliment.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the term “abracadabra” as a magical declaration was first introduced in the 2nd century. I sense, however, that it is actually older than that. The words אברא כדברא mean, “creating through speaking” – and this concept is taught to us already in the Torah.

We are all magicians. We all create or destroy by the words we speak.

Later in Parshas Devarim, we read Moshe's account of חטא המרגלים, the sin of the spies. The ten spies wrought such devastation – the effects of which we still suffer even today – without doing anything other than speaking. By

the way they spoke of Eretz Yisrael and its inhabitants, they destroyed everything. The people heard what they said, panicked, and decided they would not proceed into the land. Hashem punished them, and Chazal teach that it was at that point when the decree of the churban was issued (אתם בכיתם בכיה של חינום ואני קובע לכם בכיה לדורות). All this because of speech.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe zt”l was especially sensitive to the effects of one's choice of words. For example, he refused to use the word “deadline,” which warns of “death,” and spoke instead of a “due date,” which has an association of birth and the creation of new life. When he was asked to give an endorsement to a hospital in Israel, he insisted that the hospital call itself בית רפואה (“place of healing”) as opposed to the accepted Hebrew term for hospital, בית חולים (literally, “place of ill”). He felt it was imperative that patients feel that they are there not because there is something wrong with them, but because they are convalescing. The Rebbe understood the notion of אברא כדברא, the subtle but significant power of our choice of words.

During this time of year, when we focus our attention on curing the ill of שנאה חינום (baseless hatred) on account of which the Beis Ha'mikdash was destroyed, we must recognize the importance of discretion when speaking. It is through the words we use when speaking or posting that we create either שנאה או אהבה, that we create conflict and hostility, or create love and respect among Am Yisrael.

# The Art of Rebuke

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Devarim, the fifth book of Torah opens with the following words:

אָלֶה הַדְּבָרִים, אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּעֵבֶר, הַיַּרְדֵּן: -  
בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּעֵרְבָה מִזֶּה סוּף בֵּין-פָּאָרָן וּבֵין-הַפֶּל וְלִבְּנוֹ וְחִצְרֹת--וְדֵי זָהָב -  
*these are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Israel on the other side of the Jordan, in the wilderness, in the plain, opposite the Reed Sea, between Paran and Tofel and Lavan and Chatzeros and Di Zahav (Devarim 1:1).*

Though it sounds like these are all places in the desert where the nation traveled, Rashi teaches us that each name alludes to a different sin of the Israelites in the desert. Because Hashem had mercy on their dignity, Moshe here rebukes the nation by alluding to their sins, and not saying them outright.

To what sins does the verse allude? Arava refers to the sin of Ba'al Peor (see Bamidbar 25); Mol Suf alludes to their rebelling at the Sea of Reeds, when they complained "are there not enough graves in Egypt that you took us out to die in the desert?"; Tofel and Lavan allude to their sins of slandering the manna; Paran alludes to the sin of the spies; and Chatzeros alludes to the rebellion of Korach.

What about זָהָב וְדֵי זָהָב, literally 'more than enough gold'? Rashi teaches: וְדֵי זָהָב. הוֹכִיחוֹן עַל הָעֵגֶל שֶׁעָשׂוּ בְּשִׁבִיל רֵב זָהָב שֶׁהָיָה לָהֶם - *he rebuked them over the calf that they made, because of the abundance of gold that they had (Rashi to Devarim 1:1).* As the nation had an excess of gold that they collected, which washed ashore after the Egyptians, their horses, chariots and riders sunk in the Reed Sea (see Rashi to Shemos 15:22), it was this gold that they used to construct the golden calf, which led to the tragic sin of national idol worship.

Rabbi Shalom Rosner teaches, "The Gemara (Brachos 32a) interprets the allusion of Di Zahav a bit differently: 'Moshe said to Hashem: The riches you gave to Bnei Yisrael until they said 'enough' (די, dai) is what caused them to erect the golden (זָהָב) calf.'"

It seems from the Gemara that Moshe blames Hashem for the sin of the golden calf. And yet, Rashi teaches us that this verse is tochacha, a rebuke by Moshe of the people, where he blames the nation for the sins! Was it the nation's fault, or was it G-d's fault (keviyachol)? How are we to understand this seeming contradiction?

Rabbi Rosner explains, "After hundreds of years of slavery, He took them out of Egypt with great miracles and

gave them vast riches. What can be expected of someone who becomes a millionaire overnight? It is hard to deal with so much good fortune so quickly. It is Your fault, Hashem, for having spoiled them!

"Rav Asher Weiss asks what was transpiring here. Was Moshe Rabbeinu rebuking Am Yisrael, or was he directing the rebuke vis-a-vis the RS"O (keviyachol)? Actually, it was both. On the one hand, Moshe was giving the Bnei Yisrael mussar (chastisement), but at the same time, he was defending us."

It's as if he was saying - Hashem, what did You expect of them? Having been deprived of riches for hundreds of years, they simply could not properly handle the great wealth you gave them with the Exodus.

Rabbi Rosner points out that there is a very important lesson to be learned from this. "Whenever we are trying to improve someone else, as a parent, as a teacher, as a friend, at the same time that we are putting them down, we have to be raising them up. At the same time that we are accusing them of wrongdoing, we have to be excusing them for their sinful behavior. As the Gemara (Sotah 47a) states: לְעוֹלָם לְעוֹלָם אֲמַרְתָּ מִמְּיַד הַיְמִינִי וּמִמְּיַד הַשְּׂמֹאל דּוֹחָה דּוֹחָה - *always (a person shall) push away with the left hand (be harsh in rebuke when necessary), and with the right hand, draw close and embrace.*"

We must always display love for the child and/or talmid, and attempt in some way to defend their behavior, or see another angle of the transgression, even when rebuke is in order. Moshe Rabbeinu is the messenger of Hashem and our messenger as well. He is the go-between in both directions. From Hashem's point of view, Moshe was giving us mussar. But from our point of view, he was defending us before Hashem.

"May we take this lesson with us and carefully balance rebuking and defending our children and our students" (Shalom Rav, v.II, p.348-349).

"On one occasion, Rav Pam zt'l offered a homiletic interpretation of the saying: כְּבַדְהוּ וְחִשְׁדְהוּ, "*Honor him but suspect him*". Said Rav Pam: If you must suspect him, do it in an honorable manner. He illustrated this with a personal recollection: 'One year, when I taught at the mesivta level, I was asked to proctor a test. I sat at my desk with a sefer but at the same time, I kept an eye on the talmidim. At one point, I noticed one student copying from his neighbor's paper. Now I could have told him, 'I will tear up your

paper for cheating!’ or ‘I’m going to give you a zero!’ Instead, I walked over to him and whispered, ‘If you don’t understand the question, please come up to my desk and I will explain it to you.’

“Many years later, the talmid came over to me somewhere and said ‘What I learned by the Rebbi I have long forgotten, but this [what happened that day when I cheated on the test] I will never forget” (Rav Pam,

## The Gentle Reproof

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

**T**his week, congregations the world over finally align their Torah readings with Israel, and all begin reading the fifth book of the Torah, known as Deuteronomy, or Devarim in Hebrew.

The book of Devarim is also called Mishneh Torah, which is commonly translated as “repetition” or “review” of the Torah. This name underscores that many of the legal and historic details that were recorded in the previous four books of the Torah are repeated in this fifth book. Much of the book of Deuteronomy is a record of the exhortations, warnings, and reproofs that Moses delivers to the people, pleading with them to observe the Torah and the mitzvot, and informs them of the specific rewards and punishments that await them for the observance and non-observance of the mitzvot.

The book of Devarim often elaborates and expands on many of the mitzvot that were already mentioned in the previous books. So, for instance, the Ten Commandments are repeated once again in parashat Va’etchanan. However, of the more than 100 laws which are contained in Deuteronomy, over 70 are entirely new.

The book of Devarim begins with the words that were spoken by Moses in the last five weeks of his life and were enunciated as a last will and testament to his beloved people to teach and to reprove them. Deuteronomy 1:1 reads: *אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל*, *These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel.* According to tradition, Moses calls all the people, so that they would all be present and have the opportunity to respond to the words of reproof.

Before mentioning the actual words, however, the Torah (Deuteronomy 1:1-2), uncharacteristically, lists a relatively long list of locations where Moses spoke to the people. Moses proceeds to remind the people that he spoke with them: “... on the other side of the Jordan, by the wilderness, the

Artsroll, p.145-146).

What an incredible and beautiful lesson as we open Sefer Devarim, the final words that Moshe spoke to the nation he loved, and led, for forty years. A parent/teacher has many roles. Even when rebuke must be given to the child/student, we must look for ways to simultaneously defend them, thereby building up the person, even while criticizing the behavior.

*Arava, opposite the sea of Reeds, between Paran and Tophel, and Lavan and Chatzerot, and Dee’zahav. It is eleven days journey from Horeb, by way of Mt. Se’ir to Kadesh-Barnea.”*

Why this long list of locations? Our commentators suggest that Moses was concerned that when they entered the new land, the people would be influenced by the local idolatry of Canaan, and sin. Consequently, Moses began his words by reminding the people of the long string of sins and rebellions that marked their 40 years of travel in the wilderness. After all, if they and their parents could sin in the wilderness when they were constantly surrounded by miracles, surely, great dangers await them in the new land, where there are no constant reminders of G-d’s presence. Nevertheless, Moses does not actually mention the sins. Instead, he alludes to them indirectly by naming the places where the sins were committed.

Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad offers a lovely parable to elucidate this method of reproof. Based on the Midrash Tanchumah, he tells of a King who had a magnificent orchard, with beautiful ripe fruit. The King placed a guard dog in the orchard to protect the fruit from thieves. Once, while looking out the window, the king saw one of his trusted officers entering the orchard to eat the fruits without permission. The guard dog attacked the officer and ripped his garments. The King said in his heart, “If I say to my beloved officer that I saw him, he’ll be embarrassed, and I don’t want to embarrass him. But if I remain silent, then he will think that I did not see him, and he’ll repeat this dastardly act.” When the officer entered the King’s palace, the King casually remarked how terrible it was that the wild dog ripped the officer’s clothes. The officer clearly understood that the King saw him steal the fruits.

Similarly, not wanting to openly embarrass the people of Israel, Moses did not explicitly mention their sins, but rather mentioned the places and locations of their sins. The

people took the hint and understood.

Rabbi Yisrael of Rhizin stated that a great leader, when he wants to give words of Torah and מוסר —mussar (reproof) to his people, has to “dress” the message in stories, parables, and legends—things that speak to the heart, so that they can penetrate the heart and enter the soul.

It’s hard to believe that more than 20 years have passed since the horrendous school shooting tragedy occurred in Littleton, Colorado. Since then, many more mass shootings have occurred that have caused many to regularly expect more such tragedies, resulting in significant indifference to these heartbreaking calamities.

After Littleton, a friend sent me a copy of a piece that he had written reflecting on the broader issues of education, as seen from the Torah’s perspective and concerning the issue of giving proper reproof. It was entitled “In the Aftermath of Littleton,” and is a reflection on the shooting by two Columbine High School students that resulted in the tragic deaths of 12 students and one teacher in that Denver area High School on April 20, 1999.

In the aftermath of Littleton, we have tried a little of this and a little of that. Most of the noise was about gun control, and it failed. Then Congress passed a law allowing (not requiring but allowing) schools to post the Ten Commandments.

I’m a big fan of the Ten Commandments, but ignoring the constitutional issues, does anyone really think that putting a poster on a wall is going to create moral children? It can’t hurt. But putting the Ten Commandments on the wall is typical of our “quick-fix” approach to the emptiness of our popular culture. It is akin to thinking that a few seminars on tolerance will eliminate hate or anger.

Being good takes work!

At the heart of morality is the sacrifice of self-interest to a higher code. It means returning the wallet you find on the street. It means listening to someone else’s problems when you want to talk about your own. And it means subduing your anger even when you are in the right.

None of the above is easy. Walking by a poster ten times a day isn’t going to create a child with values. If you want to see why, think about the minimum level of morality, that of civility—saying “Please” and “Thank you.” Saying “Please” and “Thank you” is the minimum level, because you only have to say it, not feel it. But even that minimum level takes an immense amount of work. You have to tell a child over and over to say “Please” and “Thank you” before it becomes

second nature. Think of how much work it takes to get a child to share or think of others.

Being good takes work. And Judaism may have something to tell us about how to create moral children.

Moral fitness is akin to physical fitness. No one would argue that if our kids are overweight or out of shape that we can solve the problem by putting up a poster that tells them that “Fit is better than fat.” We understand that if you want to be good at sports or music you must practice dull, repetitive tasks such as free-throw shooting for hour after hour.

If we want our children to be good, we must work at it. To make goodness a habit, to make children or adults think of others along with themselves, takes hours of training.

Here are some ways to make it happen.

Set aside a container for charity and make a habit out of giving something every day, even if it is only spare change. Do it in a set way, say every morning before breakfast, so that it becomes a habit.

Express gratitude. Thank God for the food you eat. Thank the person at the table who cooked and served the meal. And recognize your children’s good behavior, not just the bad.

Spend time with your children. This is the hardest part. We want virtuous children, who learn virtue—without our help. It’s impossible. Quantity time is quality time. Jews have the Sabbath. On the Sabbath, the telephone “drops dead,” the television ceases, parents hug their children and bless them, eat three mandated meals together, and sing, and talk of the Bible. If you don’t have the Sabbath, take a taste of it into your life. Turn off the TV and telephone at least one night a week. Dedicate a night to the family and make it a rule that everyone stays home that night. Talk to one another. It works wonders.

Finally, be a role model. One kind deed, one act of tolerance or of consideration does more to teach children about morality than 100 lectures, or 200 trips past a poster of the Ten Commandments.

There is an old Jewish story about two fathers in synagogue. One talks during the service but lectures his child about the importance of prayer. The other father says nothing to the child but devotes his being to prayer every week. The second child grows up dedicated to prayer. The first grows up talking during services but lectures his child about the importance of prayer.

Be a role model. Do. It is your best bet if you want your children to follow.

The Torah has much to teach about so many areas of our lives. We don't always need to come in roaring, to "sock it to 'em," and "bowl 'em over." Often, the indirect,

gentler method of reproof (which means teaching) is most efficacious. It worked for Moses. It can work for us as well.

## Lessons from Moshe's Rebuke

Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

**T**he opening chapters of Chumash Devarim are devoted to Moshe's rebuke to the Jewish people for the various sins they committed over the forty years in the Wilderness. It is worthwhile contemplating whether there are any lessons we can glean from Moshe's rebuke to other situations, determining what will enable words of rebuke, where required, to be effective and well-received.

### Lesson One: Timing

The first element of Moshe's rebuke that is worth considering is actually unique to his setting and specifically not relevant to most situations that require rebuke, but may nevertheless yield a lesson regarding rebuke generally. Rashi in verse 3, s.v. *vayehi*, states that Moshe delayed his words of rebuke until shortly before his passing, so that he would not need to rebuke the people repeatedly. In this matter, he derived his practice from our forefather Yaakov, who likewise saved his words of rebuke toward his sons until shortly before his death.

R' Yaakov of Lissa, in his commentary *Nachalas Yaakov* on Parshas Devarim, asks: Should this practice regarding timing be adopted by us when we need to give rebuke? Surely, the longer one delays, the more wrong the person will commit! Additionally, is it indeed the case that rebuke be timed so as to only having to be given once? The halachah states that one is required to rebuke as often as necessary!

Rather, the difference between us and Moshe lies in the fact that, in our experience, rebuke is typically required when we see someone doing something wrong, with the goal of getting them to desist. As such, one certainly will not wish to delay his rebuke, nor will one have it as a priority to rebuke only once. In Moshe's case, however, the sins he was discussing were ones that had already been committed. Indeed, in many cases, the sin in question was not even committed by them, but by the generation that preceded them! Rather, the goal of his rebuke was to address those sins in retrospect, as well as their underlying causes, with the goal of ensuring that they not be repeated.

This was something which only needed to be said once, and moreover, Moshe judged that it would be better to delay the message until shortly before his passing.

However, even after having noted the difference between Moshe's case and ours, we can still learn the importance of timing when delivering rebuke, giving some thought to the time and setting where the rebuke will be most effective, namely when the person will be most receptive, and not necessarily when we are feeling our most righteous or morally indignant.

### Lesson Two: Respect

The opening verse in our Parsha is effectively a list of places. According to Rashi, these do not represent the places where Moshe administered his words of rebuke, but are rather the subject of the rebuke itself:

לפי שהן דברי תוכחות ומנה כאן כל המקומות שהכעיסו לפני המקום בהן, לפיכך סתם את הדברים והזכירן ברמז מפני כבודם של ישראל.  
*Since these are words of rebuke, and [Moshe] listed all the places where they angered the Almighty, therefore, he phrased matters vaguely and mentioned them [only] in hinted form, out of respect for the People of Israel.*

Let us consider: How effective was this verse in chastising the people? It is a universal rule that those who are most in need of rebuke are also the ones most adept in deflecting it. This would be infinitely more likely to happen if the words of rebuke themselves are not even explicit! Nevertheless, as far as Moshe is concerned, it is more important to convey a message of respect. This is not only for the general value of respecting others, but is also the only way that any rebuke can have a positive outcome. Rebuke is a confrontation; specifically, confronting the person with something they are doing wrong. This is not something that is easy to hear and if they feel they are the object of derision, they will not hear it at all. Additionally, addressing the person with respect means that not only are you telling them where they are going wrong, but no less importantly, that you firmly believe that they can get it right, and it is to this end that you are bringing the matter up.

Indeed, the commentators point out that in the ensuing verses and chapters, Moshe is very explicit in recounting the episodes over which he is rebuking the people, sparing no detail or comment! Has he changed approach from the circumspect one reflected in the opening verse? The Maharal, in his *Gur Aryeh* on that Rashi, explains that clearly, at a certain point, Moshe will need to get down to details, otherwise the people are in danger of actually not knowing what he is talking about or what he means to say. The point of Rashi is that you cannot start rebuke that way. The way you begin is what sets the tone for what follows, and beginning with respect will hopefully ensure that whatever you say subsequently – however explicit – will be received positively.

### Lesson Three: Loss

Verse two informs us that Moshe's words to the people were said, "Eleven days' [journey] from Chorev." What is significance of the verse telling us the time it could have taken from Chorev to reach the Plains of Moav, especially given that, in actuality, it had taken them a good deal longer? Presumably, it is for this reason that Rashi explains that these words are not merely words of description on the part of the Torah, but are actually also included in Moshe's rebuke to the people:

אמר להם משה ראו מה שגרמתם... ובשביל שקלקלתם הסב אתכם  
סביבות הר שעיר ארבעים שנה.

*Said Moshe to them, "See what you caused [for yourselves]... Since you corrupted your path, Hashem took you around Mount Se'ir over a period of forty years."*

From these words we can learn that a person might not be moved to improve his ways based solely on being shown that he has done the wrong thing. He needs also to be shown how sin has caused him loss so that it might enlist his motivation in bettering his situation. The same is true for a person's own introspection. An important part of teshuvah is recognizing not only that we did the wrong thing, but that it did not bring us the happiness and fulfillment that it promised. Thus, we conclude the vidui, during which we list our sins, by saying "ולא שוה לנו" *and it wasn't worth it for us.* We need to recognize that the yetzer hara did not deliver the picture of success and happiness that he had painted for us, even though that did not stop him from charging for delivery.

### Lesson Four: Care

Verse four informs us that Moshe's words were said, "After he had smitten Sichon, king of the Ammorites... and Og, king

*of Bashan.*" Here too, Rashi explains that Moshe waited to time his rebuke after having performed a kindness for the Jewish people so that they would realize that his rebuke was intended for their benefit, and not merely to criticize them. Having recently led them in battle to initiate their entry into the land of Israel, the people had to know that Moshe had their best interests at heart and would be able to accept his words of rebuke accordingly.

### Roots – From Devarim to Bereishis

As we have mentioned, Rashi traces Moshe's decision to delay his rebuke back to Yaakov Avinu. With regards to the other aspects we have mentioned, I believe they can be traced back to the very first rebuke ever administered, namely, that of Hashem to Adam after the sin of the Etz Hada'as. We tend to synopsise the aftermath of the sin by simply saying that Adam was punished and sent away from the garden. However, when we consider the relevant verses, we see that Hashem's response to Adam contained numerous elements of which it is most worthwhile to take note:

**Respect:** Immediately following their eating from the Etz Hada'as, the verse relates *בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יָדְעוּ כִּי עֲרֻמִּים הָיוּ*, *they realized that they were naked*, *וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגָרֹת*, *and they sewed for themselves fig leaves* and *וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגָרֹת*, *and they made for themselves bindings.* Only after that did Hashem appear to rebuke them. We see that Hashem first gave them time to cover up their nakedness and preserve their dignity and only then confronted them. Had He confronted them in their state of full disgrace, there would be no trace of self-respect left for them to rebuild from, they simply would have been shattered and bewildered, without any wherewithal to recover from their sin.

**Care:** After rebuking Adam and Chava and informing them of their punishments, the verse states *וַיַּעַשׂ ה' אֱלֹהִים לְאָדָם וּלְחַוָּה חֲמֵשׁ עוֹר וַיַּלְבִּשֵׁם*, *Hashem God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them.* There is much discussion among the commentators as to the nature of these "garments of skin." However, it is fair to say that no less important is the concluding word *וַיַּלְבִּשֵׁם*, *and He clothed them.* We might have expected that, with things having cooled considerably between them and Hashem, that He could simply have said, "Here are your new clothes, get dressed." The additional element of Hashem Himself clothing them was nothing other than an act of love, indicating thereby that although He was punishing them, He had not given up on them nor lost His affection

for them. That parting message surely gave them strength and resolve to do their best to rectify what they had done wrong.

**Loss:** After recording the banishment of Adam and Chava from Gan Eden, the verse relates *וַיִּשְׂכֵן מִקְדָּם לְגַן עֵדֶן אֶת הַכְּרֻבִים וְאֶת לַהֵט הַחֶרֶב הַמְתְּהַפֶּכֶת לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת דְּרֹךְ עֵץ הַחַיִּים* [Hashem] stationed at the east of the Garden of Eden the Cherubim, and the flame of the constantly revolving sword, to guard the way to the Tree of Life.

We must ask: Surely there are easier and equally effective ways to prevent Adam's return to the garden, such as simply sealing up the entrance! Why did Hashem choose such an elaborate arrangement involving Cherubim and flames of revolving swords? The Radak, in his commentary to that verse, provides a stunning explanation of this matter. It is apparent from the verses that Adam's initial response to being confronted over his sin was not to do teshuvah, but instead to defend himself. This attitude

persisted even as he was banished from the garden. (See Bereishis Rabbah 21:6.) Clearly, he was not sufficiently aware of the impact of his sin and the loss it had caused him. What could bring about this awareness? The answer is, the sight of Cherubim with deadly flaming swords ready to cut him down if he should even attempt to return to where had lived just a few hours ago served to bring home the message of just how much he had forfeited from what he had once enjoyed. Indeed, says the Radak, it was at this point that Adam did teshuvah!

It is profoundly moving to see how the elements which Mosh employed in his words of rebuke and reproach are rooted in those of Hashem literally from the beginning. All of this should serve to provide a deeper appreciation of the opening section of Chumash Devarim, whereby Moshe Rabbeinu is our teacher not only in terms of the lessons he imparts, but also in terms of the way he imparts them.