

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת דברים

**אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל כל ישראל בעבר הירדן במדבר בערבה
מול סוף בין פארן ובין תפל ולבן וחצרת ודי זהב**

“These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel, on the other side of the Jordan, concerning the wilderness, concerning the Arava, opposite the swampland, between Paran and Tofel, and Lavan, and Chatzeros, and Di Zahav” (1:1)

Moshe spoke to all the Jews together, united as one. The Vilna Gaon points out that this is how we merit to have Hashem among us. When the Jewish nation is united and every Jew sees his fellow as his brother, we begin to treat each other differently. Then Hashem will be with us and we can begin the road to repentance. This is why Moshe delivered his rebuke to the people when they were gathered as one.

The Gemara in Yevamos quotes two seemingly contradictory pesukim. One posuk (Yeshaya 55:6) says, "Seek Hashem when He is found." Another posuk (Devarim 4:7) says, "Like Hashem, our God, who is there whenever we call out to Him." Is Hashem always there or only sometimes? The answer is that Hashem is always there for the community but not always for the individual. When there is a group of people together, their prayer has a much greater power. This is why it is extremely important to daven every tefilla with a minyan. When one davens alone, his prayers are not always as readily accepted as when one davens with a group. The exception is the Aseres Yemei Teshuva, the ten days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, when even the individual is heard at all times.

**ויהי בארבעים שנה בעשתי עשר חדש באחד לחדש דבר משה אל בני
ישראל ככל אשר צוה ה' אתו אלהם**

“It was in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first of the month, when Moshe spoke to the Children of Israel, according to everything that Hashem commanded him to them” (1:3)

Why did Moshe wait to give rebuke until shortly before his death? He learned from Yaakov Avinu, who waited until the end of his life to give rebuke. Yaakov said that he was afraid that if he rebuked his sons at the time of their misdeeds, they would have left him and gone over to assist Eisav.

Rebuke is important, but it has to be done in a manner in which it will have the desired effect and not be counterproductive. Parents have a responsibility to educate their children but they should be careful that their rebukes and punishments should accomplish the intended goal.

ואמר אלכם בעת ההוא לא אוכל לבדי שאת אתכם
“I said to you at that time, saying: I cannot carry you alone” (1:9)

Rashi asks: How could it be that Moshe, who brought down the Torah from Hashem and brought about the plagues in Egypt, could not judge the Jewish people by himself? The answer is that Moshe did not want to bear the sole responsibility for errors in judgment. The judges in secular society have no personal responsibility for their mistakes, but Jewish judges are responsible to pay out of pocket if they err. Moshe did not want to have this burden, but wished to divide it among many judges so that it should be a much lighter responsibility.

R' Moshe Feinstein points out that even Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest prophet who ever lived, was worried that he would make a mistake. This is a lesson that even the smartest person can make mistakes. Every single person has to be very careful about his actions and decisions to avoid mistakes. No person can have so much self-confidence that he does not have to inspect his actions.

הבו לכם אנשים חכמים ונבנים וידעים לשבטיכם ואשימם בראשיכם
“Provide for yourselves distinguished men who are wise, understanding and well known to your tribes, and I shall appoint them as your heads” (1:13)

The Baal HaTurim comments that the word "va'asimem" can also be read as "va'ashamam, "and their guilt." The guilt of the people often lies with the leadership, who are in position to rebuke the people and correct their mistakes. If they do not do so, they are held responsible for the guilt of the nation.

A leader has the potential to do both good and bad. He can lead by example for good or people can learn to do bad things from his behavior. A person in a leadership position has to be very careful to lead well and set the right example for those who look up to him.

וישמע ה' את קול דבריכם ויקצף וישבע לאמר
“Hashem heard the sound of your words, and He was incensed and He

swore, saying” (1:34)

This posuk uses a strange language when it says that Hashem "heard the sound of your words." Rabbi Friedman suggests that the sound of their words refers to their crying. If they had just complained and voiced their concerns, perhaps Hashem would not have punished them. Instead, they let their emotions get a hold of them and they cried. Hashem heard the sound of their words, their crying, and became angry at their reaction. To be upset is one thing, but to be so distressed about going to Eretz Yisrael to the point where the people were all crying was too much. This is why they were punished.

The punishment by the Golden Calf has its roots in a similar idea. When Moshe descended with the luchos, he commented that he heard loud noises. He heard the singing and dancing and the sounds of the celebration that was being held around the Golden Calf. Making the calf was one thing but singing, dancing and celebrating with such fervor was quite another. Sinning is one thing, but to sin with all one's emotion is quite another.

As a result of this unnecessary crying, Hashem decreed that Tisha B'Av would always be a night of crying. Our mourning is a direct result of the inability of the Jewish people to recognize the kindnesses that Hashem did for them. Today, when we at least have a State of Israel in which Jews can live, we should be grateful for Hashem for allowing us to be able to have access to our holy land. This appreciation is vital in order to undo the mistake that we still suffer for today.

In Pirkei Avos (2:13-14), Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai asked his students to find the proper path and the improper path for a person to follow. One said to have a good heart and to avoid having a bad heart. Another said to have a good eye and not to have a bad eye. Another said to have a good neighbor and to avoid bad neighbors. A fourth said to have a good heart and to avoid having a bad heart. But a fifth student said to have foresight and to avoid borrowing and not paying back. R' Chaim Shmuelevitz points out that all the other good and bad paths are obviously complete opposites. What is the connection between having foresight and not paying back? He writes that when a person borrows but does not repay, it shows that he has no foresight. It betrays a lack of appreciation for what the lender did for them. Some people just do not work hard enough to repay their loans because they are not appreciative of what was done for them. If a borrower is considerate of his lender, he will make sure to work hard enough to be able to pay off his loan on time. Foresight is the proper path to lead one's life, to anticipate what will

happen out of appreciation for others.

**ויצא האמרי הישב בהר ההוא לקראתכם וירדפו אתכם כאשר תעשינה
הדברים ויכתו אתכם בשעיר עד חרמה**

**“The Emorite who dwell on that mountain went out against you and pursued you as the bees would do; they struck you in Seir until Chorma”
(1:44)**

Why does the posuk say that Emorites pursued the Jewish soldiers like bees? Rashi explains that just like a bee dies when it stings a person, the Emorites died every time they killed a Jew. The lesson of this is that even when Hashem punishes us, he still shows his mercy at the same time. Despite the fact that the Jews had sinned by going to war and were soundly defeated as a punishment, it was still not entirely a punishment because the Emorites fell at the same time.

Hashem never completely abandons us. Even when our nation undergoes tragic times, there are still stories when Divine Providence still shines through. Hashem is with us especially when we suffer. Chazal tell us that the Divine presence is with a person who is ill. Whatever situations we may go through, whether on a personal or communal level, we should remember that Hashem never completely abandons us.

In a similar vein, the Ramban comments in the beginning of the parsha that Moshe mentioned miracles that Hashem performed for the Jews while rebuking them. This served two purposes. Moshe wanted the Jews to repent for their wrongdoing through understanding what Hashem had done for them. He also wanted to strengthen them so that they should not feel unworthy of entering Eretz Yisrael. He wanted to show them that Hashem had always been with them despite their sins and that they would be able to conquer their enemies easily if they repented because Hashem was on their side.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
Written by Michael Gutmann