

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 which Moshe spoke to all Israel on that side of the Jordan in the desert, in the plain opposite the Red Sea, between Paran and Tofel and Lavan and Chatzeros and Di Zahav” (1:1)

In the opening posuk of Sefer Devarim, Moshe lists a number of locations where Bnei Yisrael encamped in the desert as a veiled rebuke for their sins in those places. Rashi explains that Di Zahav is a reference to the sin of making the golden calf. The Gemara in Berachos 32a says that at the same time, Moshe complained to Hashem that they only made the golden calf because Hashem had given them so much gold in the first place. Even while he was giving them rebuke, he looked for a reason to excuse them for their wrongdoing, even going so far as to say that it happened because Hashem gave them the means to do it. He was trying to minimize Hashem’s anger over their sin. This contains a lesson for us as well. Even when one criticizes someone, he should still defend that person to others and help them appear in a better light to everyone else.

איכה אשא לבדי טרחכם ומשאכם וריבכם

“How can I bear your trouble, your burden, and your strife all by myself?” (1:12)

The Midrash Eicha says that if Bnei Yisrael would have merit, we would only read the word “Eicha” in the Torah, but now we must also read it in Megillas Eicha. Why would it be a merit to read it in the Torah if even the word “Eicha” there is part of a rebuke? The Yalkut Maamarim answers that Moshe’s rebuke was meant to prevent future calamities. If they would read “Eicha” in the Torah and take the lessons to heart, they would not have any problems in the future. They would merit to only read this “Eicha” and they would not need any other. Since they did not heed Moshe’s rebuke, another, more tragic “Eicha” is necessary to help get the message across.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin 104a says that the punishment is described with the word “Eicha,” whose numerical value is 36, because they violated all 36 sins which are punishable by *kareis*. If this is its true meaning, why was Moshe’s use of this harsh word appropriate? R’ Dovid Feinstein explains that in fact the posuk in this week’s haftora says that Yerushalayim was destroyed because of theft and dishonesty in justice and financial matters. This is because descent to immorality does not happen overnight. It begins with small things such as petty theft. Moshe’s “Eicha,” which is in the context of judges and the courts, is a warning to the people that one must be wary of injustice and understand what it can lead to. It is not “just” a small crime because it can easily lead to much worse.

ונעבר מאת אחינו בני עשו הישבים בשעיר מדרך הערבה מאילת ומעצין גבר ונפן
ונעבר דרך מדבר מואב

“And we departed from our brothers, the children of Eisav, who dwelt in Seir, by way of the plain from Eilas and from Etzion Gever, and we turned and passed through the way of the desert of Moav.” (2:8)

Why are Eisav’s descendants continually referred to as our brothers in Torah, despite the fact that absolutely no familial closeness remained between the two nations? R’ Shimon Schwab answers that we do not find any idolatry mentioned in connection with Edom until much later on in history, when idolatry was already pervasive among the Jews as well. They continued to recognize the existence of the One G-d. Even though they rebelled against Him, they admitted his existence and worshipped no other. In this aspect, Bnei Yisrael and Edom were brothers because they were united in their rejection of foreign deities, a belief that distinguished them from all other nations of the world at that time.

ויאמר ה' אלי אל תצר את מואב ואל תתגר בם מלחמה כי לא אתן לך מארצו ירשה
כי לבני לוט נתתי את ער ירשה

“And Hashem said to me: Do not distress Moav, and do not provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land as an inheritance, because I have given Ar to the children of Lot as an inheritance.” (2:9)

When the Jews neared Moav, they were commanded not to “provoke them to war.” Later, when they approached Ammon, they were commanded not to “provoke them,” regardless of war. It seems that they were permitted to frighten Moav as long as they did not actually attack, but they were forbidden to cause any scare to Ammon. What is the reason for this difference?

Rashi, citing a Gemara in Bava Kama, says that this was a reward for Ammon whose matriarch had been more modest than her sister. One of Lot’s daughters named her child Moav, which means “from my father,” whereas the other chose Ammon, meaning “son of my people.” Because Ammon’s mother was less explicit about his origins and more modest than her sister, she was rewarded that her descendants would not even be provoked by Bnei Yisrael.

This story happened hundreds of years earlier, but we see how long the reward lasted. It is important for us to develop sensitivity in the way we speak and to speak modestly about certain things rather than openly. Doing so will bring us a great reward which will last for many generations.

*Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
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