

## **“These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael.” (1:1)**

At the end of the fortieth year of their sojourn in the wilderness, Moshe *Rabbeinu* is about to take leave of the flock that he had nurtured. He commenced his rebuke on *Rosh Chodesh Shevat* and culminated his words on the day that he died – the seventh of Adar. The *Sifri* comments that Moshe purposely decided to admonish the people close to the time when he was leaving this world. He learned this practice from Yaakov *Avinu*, who also chided his sons prior to his death. *Chazal* suggest four reasons why one might leave rebuke until the end – close to one's death: First, so that one rebukes only once and not many times; second, so that the one who is reproved will not continue to be embarrassed in the presence of the one who rebuked him; third, so that the recipient not have the opportunity to deliver any complaints or display hatred toward the individual who had rebuked him; last, when one lectures someone close to his departure from this world, the chances are good that the object of his rebuke will remain to listen to what he is being told. People manifest respect and affinity towards those who are on their deathbeds. It seems implied that people are more likely to listen and accept criticism from someone who is about to die. Why? What prevents the individual from turning his back on the person who is rebuking him? What is restraining him?

*Horav Mordechai Miller, z.l.*, explains that human nature dictates that one does not concede or recognize that he is the beneficiary of many blessings until that moment in which they are almost taken away from him. One appreciates what he has when he almost loses it. We take our lives for granted, paying lip-service to Hashem for this special gift, but only really showing our true appreciation when we are about to lose it. The *Bnei Yissachar* explains that people demonstrate material/physical love particularly when a separation is about to occur. Two friends can go through years of friendship without exhibiting any external signs of love for one another. Only when they are about to separate for an extended period of time do they display that dormant love.

To rebuke someone is to care; to reproach is to love. One who does not care about his friend does not bother to criticize his deficiencies – simply because he does not care. One who is a true friend seeks every opportunity to raise the level of his friend's spiritual, moral and ethical standing. The capstone of a relationship comes to the fore at the moment when a separation is about to take place. This is especially true if the separation is to be permanent. What better and more appropriate time for Moshe, the quintessential leader, teacher, surrogate father and friend of the Jewish People, to bring their shortcomings to the attention of *Klal Yisrael*.

While it is essential for he who reprimands to do so lovingly, it is equally important that the individual he is reproaching be mature and realize that everything is being said for his own good. Regrettably, while we may have wonderful intentions when we offer rebuke, those constructive intentions must be conveyed to the one being rebuked when he is most receptive or the rebuke will fall on deaf ears.

*Horav Eliezer M. Shach, z.l.*, derives a compelling lesson from *Rashi*. In his commentary,

*Rashi* explains that Moshe's decision to rebuke *Klal Yisrael* shortly before his death is supported by the practice of Yaakov *Avinu*, who did the same. *Rav Shach* says that from here we learn that one must have a strong reason to delay rebuke, for he will need to explain why he waited.

The *Chafetz Chaim, z.l.*, would demand of rabbinic leadership that they not tarry in critiquing their congregants. If something was amiss, it should be pointed out immediately. He would explain that when these congregants would one day stand in judgment before the Heavenly Tribunal, they would be asked, "Did you study Torah? Did you deal ethically with your neighbors?" No excuse would be accepted. Hashem does not tolerate empty reasons for one's failure to keep his end of the bargain. The congregants will then say, "We thought that we were acting appropriately, since the *rav* in our community never complained about our religious activities or lack thereof. We then figured that all was well." This excuse is a powerful one – one that will regrettably bring the onus of guilt upon the *rav* for his failure to carry out his responsibility as a Torah leader.