

Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; And may the earth hear the words of my mouth. May my teaching drop like the rain, may my utterance flow like the dew; like storm winds upon vegetation and like raindrops upon blades of grass. (32:1,2)

Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlop, zl, observes the reality of two students of the same ability and similar qualities entering a *yeshivah* program; they remain in the *yeshivah* the same length of time, both studying diligently. Yet, one emerges as a *gadol b'Yisrael*, Torah giant, while the other one leaves as a learned Jew, fully proficient in Torah erudition, but does not achieve *gadlus*, greatness, in Torah. What is the difference between them? The *rav* explains that it is all dependent upon one's ability to attend. The more attention one pays to a subject, the more he throws himself into a project, the greater is the likelihood that he will succeed at what he does and the greater his ultimate personal success quotient will be. The fellow who punches in punctually at 8:00 a.m. and punches out punctually at 5:00 p.m. is a conscientious worker, but, chances are, that is all he will be. The individual who is likely to grow in the business world is the one who does not wait till 8:00 a.m. to punch in, and who does not stand by the clock waiting for the time at which he can punch out. Two people may be endowed with similar gifts, but the individual who applies himself more will be the one who actually makes it to the top.

Parashas Ha'azinu begins with this idea: the importance of listening, taking note, applying what one hears to practical use. The first two *pesukim* teach us the various forms of application. The **Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh** explains the contrasts which are noted in these *pesukim*. We find *haazanah* opposite *shemia*, both of which are forms of paying attention. We find *dibur* opposite *amirah*, both of which are forms of communication: *dibur* is a form of communication which contrasts with *amirah*, flowing speech, in which a lesson is taught by itself, by example, by derivation.

The *Ohr HaChaim* focuses upon three distinctions. *Shomayim* and *aretz*, heaven and earth, represent two entities that are geographically distant from one another. When one communicates with the earth it is much simpler, since the earth is in the speaker's close proximity. The earth can easily hear words which heaven must strain to listen to. One does not have to exert himself, expend much effort, in reaching out to someone who is close. With regard to someone who is distant, a greater demand is placed on his communication skills, on his ability to reach out to someone who is not close by. I must add that distance is not necessarily measured only in physical terms, but in spiritual terms as well. We could be sitting right next to someone but, spiritually, we may be light years away from him.

When one must reach someone who is far, it is necessary to seek every effective method of communicating over distance. Furthermore, distance does not only apply to two people. An individual may even be distant from himself! For example, if there is something which I am not

willing to do, then I am distant from this project. If I am to convince someone who has no relationship to the importance of a certain *mitzvah*, he could be well-versed, quite observant, and deeply committed, but if he is clueless concerning the critical importance of, for example, *kollel*, or the crucial significance of *shemittah* – he is distant. With him, we do not communicate on the same level as we would with someone who is close to us – with whom we have an intimate relationship.

Second, the *Ohr HaChaim* observes that heaven and earth are two disparate entities: one is physical, the other is spiritual. Concerning heaven, the mode of communication is *dibur*, which is stronger and more compelling than *amirah*. The soul is able to tolerate a stronger form of Heavenly communication than the body can endure. Thus, when speaking with a person, it is important that the message be conveyed in a pleasant, soft-spoken manner. Otherwise, the desired effect will probably not be attained. When one speaks regarding *ruchniyus*, spirituality, to men of elevated spiritual ascendancy, one may make demands; one may give ultimatums, because the spiritual world and those whose lives are regulated by it are made of different mettle. They can handle it.

When one embarks on the journey toward achievement in Torah, at first it is difficult. *Yaaruf kamatar likchi*; Hashem's words descend with the force of a pelting rain. The student feels overwhelmed. It is just too hard. When one feels deluged by the weight of such compelling lessons, he gravitates to the more simple lessons, the stories which are easy to listen to and do not challenge his mind. When one strives to make it in *ruchniyus*, he must first be aware that the climb will be difficult – but, if he perseveres, he will reach the zenith and experience a source of satisfaction unlike anything else he has previously experienced. At this point, Hashem's words flow with ease like the dew. It is no longer difficult. He has risen to the challenge. It is not coming "down." He has gone "up."

Everyone has his personal challenge, his own journey. Much like *k'se'irim alei eisav*, the rain drops upon the blades of grass. No blade of grass is the same; none touches the other; each has its own individual drop of rain to nurture it.

When we chastise a person concerning spiritual matters, we may be demanding and forceful. Spirituality is on a different plane. Thus, we speak differently. In contrast, when we address a person's personal issues, it requires warmth, compassion and love. We are talking to a person about his personal life. We must go easy on him – or we will lose him completely.

Third, the heavens represent the leadership, the great ones, who stood at the forefront of our people. The *aretz*, earth, is a metaphor for the *amcha*, ordinary Jews, the multitudes of our nation who are the soldiers. Moshe *Rabbeinu* speaks strongly to the leadership, "As the *Shomayim* aspect of *Klal Yisrael*, your behavior must be pristine; your ethics, exemplary, your moral demeanor, immaculate. This way, the *aretz*, the *hamon am*, Jews all over, will look up to you and follow your example."

Our third lesson is consequential and quite possibly the most portentous. It is not always about

what we say, or how we express ourselves. It is not necessarily about the depth of our message, or the compelling nature with which we express it. The most profound manner of communicating the importance of our message is by exemplifying it. We can talk ourselves blue in the face – if we do not have the respect of our student, child, friend, we are wasting our time. We must set an example, a standard by which we live, so that it will be transmitted into the hearts and minds of our students/children. The rest is determined by method. If there is, however, no teacher to speak of, method is of limited value.