

These are the words that Moshe spoke... All of you approached me. (1:1,22)

Moshe begins his rebuke of *Klal Yisrael*. He alludes to a number of sins, most of them by "*remez*," hinting. He does not want to embarrass the people. He seeks to preserve their dignity. Why should the *Torah* list all of the details? He does this for most - except for two sins. Twice Moshe goes into detail, describing their error, how it began and what the consequences were. He agonizes about how they requested new judges. They would rather appeal their litigation to Moshe's "students" than to the "teacher" himself. Moshe relates how his acquiescence to their request brought a joyful reaction from the people. They thought these leaders would be more predisposed to responding to their needs. In truth, they thought it would be easy to sway them.

Moshe also addressed the sin of the *meraglim*, spies, who returned from *Eretz Yisrael* and slandered the land. They incited the people against Moshe and Hashem, causing irreparable damage. This damage foreshadowed the decree against this generation's entrance into *Eretz Yisrael*. That night, *Tisha B'av*, was a night when the people overreacted. They cried and cried. It was a "*bechiah shel chinam*," unwarranted weeping. They had nothing to fear but fear itself. Their punishment is our punishment, a *bechiah l'doros*, weeping for generations. On this same date, many years later, the two *Batei Mikdash* were destroyed. *Tisha B'av* became our day for commemorating national tragedy. All this was a result of their unwarranted reaction to the disparaging comments made by the spies.

Before Moshe rebuked them for the sin of the *meraglim*, he told them what had preceded the sin. "*All of you approached me.*" They all came. *Chazal* note that there was no order to the way that they came. They approached Moshe in a disorderly, disrespectful manner. The young pushed ahead of their elders, the elders pushed aside their leaders. This was in sharp contrast to the decorum that prevailed during the Giving of the *Torah*. When disrespect reigns, it is a sign that the motivation is not proper. They were not interested *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven. They sought to rebel, to undermine Moshe *Rabbeinu's* leadership, to repudiate the yoke of Heaven from controlling their lives.

Herein, says *Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, zl*, lies the root of their sin. Two sins - one goal - one origin. They sought other judges, and they pushed their way disrespectfully, demeaning their elders and leaders. They fought for their goal. They pushed for their goal. Their goal represented the antithesis of Jewish values. Their intention was to find a way to revoke their present leadership. This is why the *Torah* details and emphasizes these two sins. They are the source of so much agony and tragedy for our People. We must understand the source of our problems: a lack of respect for our spiritual leadership; a disdain for their guidance; an indifference to their rendering of *halachah* - if it does not coincide with our way of thinking.

We read *Parashas Devorim* on *Shabbos Chazon*, the *Shabbos* preceding *Tisha B'av*. We are to

study the underlying message conveyed by this *parsha*. The *churban*, destruction of the *Batei Mikdash*, began then, when our ancestors rejected Moshe *Rabbeinu's* leadership, when they rejected any form of leadership. A generation that repudiates its elders, that refuses to accept guidance from its spiritual leadership, is destined to be destroyed - by its own doing. The *Midrash* sums it up beautifully: There was once a snake in which the tail asked the head, "Why should you always lead?" Since the tail and the head of a snake really look similar to one another, it seemed like a fair suggestion. Thus, they changed positions, so that the tail was leading. We can imagine what transpired as a result of this change. The tail naturally did not know where to go. First, it went into a deep river where it nearly drowned. It then went through searing fire where it was almost roasted alive. Afterward, it dragged the head through an area that was strewn with rocks and sharp thorns. Finally, the snake came to its senses and realized that without eyes it cannot lead, without direction it will only die. Regrettably, by the time the snake learned its lesson, it was too late. Hopefully, we will take this lesson and integrate it into our lives before it is too late for us.