

## These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael... After he had smitten Sichon... On the other side of the Yarden in the land of Moav. (1:1,4,5)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* begins the fifth book of the *Torah* with an admonition to *Klal Yisrael*, reminding them of the myriad of sins which they had committed throughout the past forty years. Moshe spoke to all the people, not giving any individual the opportunity to say, "Had we been there, we would have refuted him." We can learn from Moshe's rebuke concerning the correct manner in which to reprove someone who has erred. Moshe waited until the last five weeks of his life to rebuke *Klal Yisrael*. He wanted to be sure that they would listen. The commentators offer a number of reasons for this approach. We simply suggest that at an emotional time, such as the end of one's days -- when life is coming to a close -- the speaker and listener are more attuned to another. Each one is particularly careful not to offend, not to embarrass. One does not want to make a mistake at a time like this.

The manner in which one presents his rebuke is critical. *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*, writes in the name of the *Gaon m'Vilna* that one should never rebuke using strong words. He should speak softly, in a mild, soothing tone to assure the listener that he is there to help him. He concludes that one who is not capable of speaking softly is absolved from the responsibility of rebuke.

The *Torah* adds that Moshe chose to rebuke *Klal Yisrael* "after he had smitten Sichon." Their triumph over the feared Emorite kings heartened *Klal Yisrael* to enable them to listen to Moshe. They could no longer say, "What right has he to rebuke us? Did he bring us into the Land as he had promised?" Timing - Moshe sought the appropriate time to maximize the effect of his rebuke. He wanted to make sure the people would listen to him. We are talking about the leader who sacrificed himself for *Klal Yisrael*. For forty years he endured their criticism, their rebellious nature, their ingratitude. He provided leadership for them through the splitting of the Red Sea, the Giving of the *Torah*, and every significant occurrence in the wilderness. Yet, he was still concerned that they might think he did not keep his promise! As *Horav Moshe Reis, Shlita*, points out, this is the way one rebukes. The evil inclination has the "habit" of covering up the wonderful things people do for us. It makes sure that we see only ourselves - not others who have done so much for us.

Moshe commences his rebuke by emphasizing his *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*. When he concludes his words, he blesses the people. The *mochiach*, one who rebukes, should show his love and caring to the one whom he rebukes. The purpose of giving *mussar*, ethical reproach, is not to simply hear one's own voice; it is to effect a response, a change in the individual. This will occur only if the person knows that the rebuke is the result of someone's love.

It is important that the subject of the rebuke be in a proper frame of mind, tranquil and at ease, so that he will be able to listen, concentrate and integrate the lessons into his life. *Sforno* writes that the significance of "after he had smitten Sichon," is that the people would be predisposed to listen.

Nothing was hanging over their heads, that which that they had most feared was now behind them. They were now able to listen to *mussar*. Rebuke does not simply place blame; it is an opportunity for bringing someone back, to correct their prior mistakes, to adjust their lifestyle to give it more meaning. The listener must be attentive and willing in order for the rebuke to meet with success.