

These are the words that Moshe spoke. (1:1)

These were not random words; rather, they were nuanced words, carefully selected for a purpose. Moshe *Rabbeinu's* life was coming to an end. In a short time he would enter the realm of eternity, where he would repose in the shining light of *Olam Habba*, the World to Come, the world reserved for *tzaddikim*, the righteous. Thus, Moshe's words were parting words, lessons, rebuke, messages all couched in ambiguity, veiled in allusion by implying their transgressions through names of places. He did all of this out of respect and sensitivity for the feelings of the people. Why, however, did he wait until now to rebuke them – especially for sins which had taken place decades earlier? When one errs, his friend or mentor should immediately bring it to his attention, so that he will not continue doing the wrong thing. One who can prevent a wrong from happening -- and does not -- assumes part of the responsibility. If Moshe had issues with the nation's behavior, attitude, character, then he should have commented on it long ago. Why did he wait until shortly before his death to rebuke them?

Indeed, Moshe had precedent. Our Patriarch Yaakov *Avinu* did the same thing, using his deathbed as the backdrop for his rebuke. *Klal Yisrael*, as well as the *Shivtei Kah*, said goodbye amidst rebuke. One may suggest that this, indeed, was their blessing. When one is given the opportunity to right a wrong, to delve into the origin of his misstep, it is truly a blessing. Nonetheless, did this rebuke have to take place at such a grim moment? Was there no other time for Moshe to issue his reproof?

In an insightful discourse, *Horav Noach Weinberg, zl* (Wisdom of Living), explains that there is a time and place for everything, and, while it is usually best to call immediate attention to the transgression committed by someone, a difference exists between a leader and an individual. A leader's responsibilities are different than those of an individual. If one's words will be heard, then the rebuke must be issued immediately. By dallying around we lose our window of opportunity, thus allowing the sinner time to commit his wrong again – and again. Under such circumstances, the rebuker shares in the transgression.

One who stands at the helm of a group is different, because he cannot admonish the people for every infraction. A leader who is always excoriating is labeled a negative person, a person who always finds fault. As a result, people soon stop listening to him, and he is no longer effective. A leader should not trade the immediate success for the long-term failure. He must pick his battles, always looking at the larger picture and carefully weighing all aspects and repercussions of what he is about to do. If he harps on the same infraction all of the time, people will ignore him, and his esteem in the eyes of the congregation will be diminished in a harmful way. A leader cannot just fly off the handle every time a sin is committed, or else he might be doing a lot of "flying." People are far from perfect, and those that are especially far are not always interested in hearing rebuke. They must be guided with extreme sensitivity and love. Once the subject of the rebuke is turned off, it is extremely difficult to bring him back.

The deathbed is, therefore (sadly), an opportune time for issuing critique. It is a time when people are serious; people listen. Death is final; thus, whatever one says close to his passing is not mere hyperbole. It is well thought out and of utmost importance. At such a time what a person communicates will remain forever etched in the hearts and minds of the listener.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* raises this idea up a notch by comparing parents to leaders. Parents are leaders in their homes. When children ignore what their parents have to say, it is much more than *chutzpah* – it is a tragedy, a curse! Nothing the parent says carries much weight, because their children have grown tired of their incessant criticism. In order to circumvent such a family crisis, it is important for parents to be extremely circumspect with their dose of criticism. They must also pick their battles, to know when it is best to criticize and when it is prudent to swallow it and be silent. Otherwise, the love and trust between parent and child, which obviously is the mainstay of any relationship, will be impugned. Indeed, this concept of “pick your battles” applies whenever the relationship dynamic consists of a leader/parent/boss/administrator, and those who answer to him.

Rebuke must be tendered with love, from a heart overflowing with love. Then, one certainly has the best interests of his subject in mind. It is not a manipulative critique; rather, it is love – tough love, perhaps - but love no less.