

And this is the blessing with which Moshe blessed... Bnei Yisrael before his death. (33:1)

Rashi notes the apparently unnecessary phrase, *lifnei moshe*, before his death; obviously, this took place prior to our leader's passing from the world. After all, could Moshe *Rabbeinu* bless the people after his death? We understand this phrase to mean "immediately before he died." The *Maharal m'Prague* comments that Moshe blessed the people at the last possible moment, to teach us that the primary role of a leader is to rebuke and guide his people. He should wait until his task is complete before blessing them.

Rashi alludes to the urgency of Moshe's blessing. Moshe knew that his death was imminent and that this was his last opportunity to impart his message to the people that he had shepherded for the last forty years. What was that message? Rebuke and guidance. A leader does not care about himself. Moshe could have said nice things to everyone and bask in the people's adoration, but then he would not have been a true leader. A leader who does not speak the truth is not much of a leader. A leader who is afraid to say what is unpleasant, to speak the unvarnished truth even if it might impugn his popularity, has no right to lead.

Rashi adds the citation of Hillel's well-known maxim, *Im lo achshav eimasai*, "If not now, when?" (*Pirkei Avos* 1:14). The (not so) simple explanation of this dictum is: Behind us lies the past (which is gone); before us stretches the future which we cannot foresee (and regarding which we are clueless); and the present, with each passing moment, is becoming the past. The actual time of our existence is the present during which we think, we do, we create. So, what are we waiting for? Every moment that passes is forever lost. One never knows how much "present" is left for him. Thus, he must spend every waking moment in (spiritually) useful activity. If not now – when? We must remember that a wrong that is committed can possibly be repaired/righted, but time that is wasted is irretrievable.

David *Hamelech* (*Sefer Tehillim* 90:12) says, *Limnos yameinu kein hoda, v'navi levav chochmah*; "Teach us well to number our days, that we may acquire a heart of wisdom." *Reb Yitzchak* (Irving Bunim, *zl*, explains the usual manner of counting our days is to count how old one is, to compute how many years of his life have passed. Is this really of any great significance? Does this teach us anything about his life or how close he is to its end? Veritably, as the saying goes, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." From the moment of birth, we are on a life journey heading towards its end. If this is the case, our counting of days should be more realistic, such as emphasizing the days that are left – not the days that are forever gone. It is no different than the signs on a highway informing the drivers how far it (still) is to the next city (or their destination). We must focus on the days that remain, the days that still belong to us.

If we can adjust our line of thinking to focus on what is important, rather than on what we can no longer change, we will, as David *Hamelech* says, "acquire a heart of wisdom," by planning our

future with common sense. “Killing time” is exactly that: an act of murder. One who has a set amount of money with him as he departs for a vacation will be astute, rationing his money so that he is not left with “too much trip at the end of his money.” He will be frugal and wise – accordingly. We should act likewise similarly concerning our allotted time in this world.

The dictum, “If not now, when,” exhorts us not to procrastinate. Our time is not our own. Therefore, we must not take it for granted. “Do not ever save anything for a special occasion. Every day that one is alive is a special occasion.” Children were cleaning out the home of a suddenly departed parent, when they noticed a number of brand new garments – some still in boxes, yet to be worn. Why, they wondered, had these items of clothing not been used? They had been purchased a few years earlier (at a sale, of course), and the purchaser had been saving them for a special occasion. The family members spoke of all the plans they had made – plans in which the deceased was to be an active participant: “Not this year, perhaps next year when I have more time” was the usual response. Looking back, they thought about all the things that they had planned to do which had never (and would never) materialize and fondly remembered all that they had done without realizing how special they would seem in retrospect.