

## These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael. (1:1)

Moshe *Rabbeinu's* “words” were words of reproof, in which he lectured the nation for their past indiscretions. He did not censure; rather, he subtly alluded to their sins by mentioning places which intimidated their sin: Why did he refer to the sins via the medium of place, rather than period/time during which the sin occurred? The *Mei HaShiloach* implies that since the place where they were encamped at the time of the sin's occurrence was not their decision, they had some sort of excuse to mitigate their behavior by blaming the effects of the environment in which they were located, over which they had no control. The journey followed Hashem's command. When He directed them to move – they moved. They remained encamped until Hashem issued their next moving orders. Thus, Moshe employed place in order to moderate – rather than excoriate. He rebuked with love and common sense.

*Horav Zev Weinberger, zl*, questions this. *Klal Yisrael* had no control over time either. Place is the “where?” – time is the “how long?” In any event, they had no authority neither regarding where they camped, nor how long they were there. *Rav Weinberger* explains that had Moshe employed time to allude to their sin, it would have magnified their guilt. He quotes *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, who comments on the Torah's description of the sin of the Golden Calf; *Saru meheir min ha'derech asher Tziveesim*; “They have strayed quickly from the way that I commanded them” (*Devarim* 9:12). The *Mashgiach* asks: What is the difference whether their deviation from the path which Hashem commanded took place quickly or over a period of time? A sin is a sin. It is almost as if the celerity of their turning to sin is what determined the sin's stark negativity. *Rav Yeruchem* explains that forty days had elapsed from the sixth of *Sivan*, the day the Jewish nation received the Torah, until the seventeenth of *Tammuz*, the day that Moshe shattered the *Luchos*. If the nation could descend to such a nadir in only forty days, it was an indication that their actual acceptance of the Torah on the sixth of *Sivan* was deficient. Thus, we see that “time” plays a role in defining the egregiousness of a sin. The period during which it occurred intensified the sin of the *meraglim*, spies. The nation was enjoying unprecedented miraculous intervention on an almost constant basis. To sin at this time exacerbated the sin. Therefore, Moshe chose the medium of place over time to allude to the sin.

Clearly, there is an appropriate way to rebuke, and while the sincerity of the rebuker plays a major role in the delivery and acceptance of the rebuke, his wisdom, i.e., common sense, is just as important. One must know whom and when to rebuke. Not all people can handle rebuke and not all times are propitious for accepting rebuke. Subtle actions which deliver a potent message work better than words. A lecture can be misunderstood. Saying nothing and acting in a manner that delivers the message: “I care about you; I know that you did something inappropriate, but I am not prepared to talk about it until you are willing to accept what I have to say,” can have greater efficacy without damaging the wrongdoer's emotions or ego. The following incident reinforces this idea.

A *talmid*, student, of *Yeshivas Mir*, *Yerushalayim*, asked the *Rosh Yeshivah*, *Horav Nosson Tzvi*

*Finkel*, *zl*, for permission to leave early. The *zman*, semester, would be over in two weeks, and, apparently, his grandfather was gravely ill. "I am very close with my grandfather, and it is only a question of two weeks. May I leave early?"

Rav Nosson Tzvi replied that guarding and adhering to the *yeshivah's* schedule is *kodesh kodoshim*, holy of holies. Furthermore, permission granted by the *Rosh Yeshivah* may be misconstrued by the other students who would similarly find some way to empower themselves to also leave early. While he would love to help, it would be detrimental to the student (questioner) and the rest of the *Yeshivah* if he would be lenient in this regard, "Continue to learn Torah and, perhaps in the merit of your studies, Hashem will send your grandfather a *refuah sheleimah*, complete recovery."

The young man respectfully left the *Rosh Yeshivah's* office, but did not respectfully return to the *bais hamedrash*. Instead, he called a taxi and went to the airport. He had decided (even before he went to the *Rosh Yeshivah*) that his love for his grandfather superseded everything, and nothing would stand in the way of his last good-bye. He was going home – regardless of the repercussions.

Unfortunately, he was unaware that Hashem had other plans. The *Malach Ha'Maves*, Angel of Death, had already been dispatched to return his grandfather's *neshamah*, soul, to its Heavenly Source. As soon as the plane landed in Kennedy Airport and he could now return to phone service, he noticed a number of text messages from his mother. He immediately called to ask what was wrong. To his chagrin, he was told that his grandfather had passed away during the interval of his flight from *Eretz Yisrael*. Since he was the closest and eldest grandchild, it was decided that he should accompany the body to burial in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Back-to-back flights are never easy. For a young man under the pressure of accompanying his grandfather's body to its final resting place, it was a difficult physical and its emotional journey. During the entire return trip, he had before his eyes the image of his revered *Rosh Yeshivah* who had just the other day admonished him concerning the *sidrei ha'yeshivah*. He did not know how he would be able to face him when he returned.

Not many people attended his grandfather's funeral. One person who came, however, was a complete surprise: Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel! He attended the funeral in order to render emotional support to his student – who had just returned from a grueling double overseas flight. The *Rosh Yeshivah* suffered greatly from an illness that physically debilitated him. Yet, despite his pain, he was present, and he remained until the *zibulah basrait*a, last shovel of dirt. The student turned to the *Rosh Yeshivah* and wanted to say "something." He was nervous, exhausted, fully-aware that he had acted in contradiction to the *Rosh Yeshivah's* advice. He was embarrassed. Before he could open up his mouth, the *Rosh Yeshivah* said, "You have just spent an entire twenty-four-hour period on a plane. You are exhausted, physically and emotionally drained from the trauma. You are certainly famished. I have asked my *Rebbetzin* to prepare a hearty meal for you. Now, you will come with me to eat and rest. Later, we will speak."

The *bachur's* eyes moistened when he heard the *Rosh Yeshivah*. No rebuke – despite his actions, which were counter to the *Rosh Yeshivah's* advice. No rebuke – yet, the *Rosh Yeshivah*, despite his pain and heavy schedule, had attended his grandfather's funeral, just to be present for him. No rebuke – the *Rosh Yeshivah* had his *Rebbetzin* prepare a large sumptuous meal for him, because after such an ordeal, he must be famished and exhausted. During the entire car trip to the *Rosh Yeshivah's* apartment – not one word of rebuke. It was not necessary; the *Rosh Yeshivah's* actions were, in and of themselves, the most powerful rebuke.