

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael... between Paran and Tophel, and Lavan, and Chatzeiros, and Di Zahav. (1:1)

Eileh ha'devarim is reference to Moshe *Rabbeinu's* rebuke of *Klal Yisrael* for their past insurrections. In his attempt not to embarrass and offend his listeners, Moshe did not mention the sins in detail; rather, he made veiled references to the sins by using place names which alluded to the sins. *Chazal* (*Tamid* 28a) teach that one who rebukes his fellow *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven (solely to help and guide his fellow back to a path of appropriate behavior), will merit to dwell in the portion of Hashem... Moreover, the Heavenly Court extends over him a cord of Divine grace. What an incredible reward for someone who fulfills the *mitzvah* of *hochachah*, rebuke, *l'shem Shomayim*. We wonder why it should be so. Why should one who performs this *mitzvah* for the sake of Heaven be any more meritorious than he who performs any of the other 612 *mitzvos l'shem Shomayim*? A *mitzvah* is a *mitzvah*, and performing it in accordance to the Heavenly directive is the standard that applies to all *mitzvos* – or is this *mitzvah* unique in this sense?

Horav Nosson Ordman, zl (*Rosh Yeshivah, Eitz Chaim*, London), explains that a fundamental difference exists between the *mitzvah* of rebuke and all other *mitzvos* with regard to *l'shem Shomayim*. All other *mitzvos*, even if one were not to mention the correct and proper intentions *l'shem Shomayim*, he has at least performed a *mitzvah*. He has shaken the *Lulav*, he has recited *Kiddush*. If one rebukes for ulterior motives – anything other than to carry out the Heavenly mandate that one rebuke his fellow – it is an *aveirah*, a sin. It is precisely the *l'shem Shomayim* that transforms ordinary rebuke into a *mitzvah*. Otherwise, when ulterior motives are present it may be an act of *sinaah*, hatred. We lose our sense of objectivity, often convincing ourselves that we are acting out of love and care.

It is for this reason that, concerning other *mitzvos*, the rule of performing *shelo lishmah*, acting not for the sake of the *mitzvah*, applies and is even encouraged. The more one performs the *mitzvah*, the greater his attachment to it, and, with time, the *mitzvah* will refine him to the point that he will execute it *l'shem Shomayim*. *Tochachah*, however, is a sin which is only ennobled by its Heavenly connection. An *aveirah* does not become a *mitzvah* with its replication. One must delve into the *mitzvah* of rebuke, understand its significance, comprehend how it promotes love of Hashem and love of one's fellow. Thus, if one implements the *mitzvah* properly, he is allowed entrance into the portion of Hashem.

Another area in which *l'shem Shomayim* determines the spiritual respectability of an action is *kanaus*, jealousy. Unless a *kanai*, zealot, acts *l'shem Shomayim*, he is not a zealot. He is a rabble-rouser, a vengeful person who is guilty of character assassination and, even, murder. One may not think of himself when he acts zealously. He thinks only of the affront that is being perpetrated against Hashem. He is motivated by Hashem's "pain," by the disgrace to His Name, by the defamation of His Glory. Anything less than this is a sinful act of subjective reprisal.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* acted *l'shem Shomayim*. Otherwise, why would he have glossed over the gory details of their sins? He cared about *Klal Yisrael* and wanted to be certain that he did not overdo it. He had one purpose in his rebuke: to promote the honor of Hashem's Name. Their sins created a spiritual stain that needed to be expunged with *teshuvah*. In order to repent, one must first acknowledge his sin. This is the purpose of rebuke: reveal the sin and help to guide the sinner on his trip of return.

One issue remains concerning Moshe's rebuke which demands clarification. Moshe's rebuke focused on past indiscretions, sins that had been committed throughout *Klal Yisrael's* forty-year journey. What is to be gained by hashing over their past shortcomings? They sinned; they were punished – now what? They certainly will not make the same mistake again. They learned their lesson. Now would be a good time for *chizuk*, strengthening their resolve, elevating their egos, reminding them who they are and what they were capable of achieving. The last thing they needed was rebuke.

Rav Ordman explains that Moshe's intent was to probe their weaknesses to demonstrate to the nation that it was not over. It could happen once again. The *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, is relentless in his mission to create obstacles and encourage us to sin. He alters his strategy from person to person, and, as a result, no person, regardless of his spiritual echelon, is safe from his wiles. Moshe admonishes the people concerning their past behaviors, because their demeanors manifest a deficiency that could reappear at any time. He preached vigilance and more vigilance, because one can never know.