

## "And this is the blessing that Moshe... bestowed upon the Bnei Yisrael before his death." (33:1)

Moshe was acutely aware that the end was near; these would be his final words. In his last mandate to the people, he blessed them. All of the tribes to whom he had devoted so much of his life passed before him to receive their final blessing from the individual who had been more than leader and prophet - he was a compassionate father who had sacrificed himself for his children. He was a father who wished to leave this world with words of consolation, encouragement, and hope with which his children could face the future.

The *Sifri* states a number of reasons why a father should keep his rebuke for the final moments. By waiting until the end, the father will not find it necessary to repeat himself; he will not encourage ill feeling towards himself if his son does not take the criticism in the proper manner. Furthermore, the son will not be so hurt that he will leave his father.

This writer once witnessed a particularly poignant "final moments" between a father and his errant son. It happened a number of years ago when an elderly Jew was about to breathe his last breath. He was surrounded by his family, among whom was a son who had tragically gone off the "*derech*," left the ranks of the observant. Although he was a wonderful young man and a fine son, the non-observant lifestyle that he had chosen was a point of serious anguish for his father. Now, in his final moments, the father turned to his son and asked, "If I ask you to do something for me, will you do it?" "What is the question, Father? Whatever you ask of me, I will do," responded the son. "I want you to promise me that you will adhere to whatever I demand of you," was the father's response. "I promise, I promise," declared the son. The father was still not secure in his son's commitment. "Will you abide by your word regardless of the difficulty it may present for you?" asked the father. "Yes, yes! I promise to do whatever you ask of me," exclaimed the son.

"My son, you are apparently aware that your non-observance of *Torah* and *mitzvos* has caused me great distress. I understand that you love me and, obviously, as your father, I love you dearly. I cannot tolerate the fact that your lifestyle is antithetical to *Torah* dictate. I, therefore, demand that you do not recite *Kaddish* for me!" When the son heard his father's demand he cried out, "How can you do this to me? How can I not say *Kaddish* for my father?" "No!" retorted the father. "You gave your word. You promised that you will abide by my wish. This is my final wish. Do not say *Kaddish* for me!"

A short time later, the father passed on from this world. We can imagine the terrible frustration the son experienced. At the funeral, he stood near his brothers and listened tearfully as his brothers recited *Kaddish* for their father. He remained silent, broken, depressed and dejected - but he kept his word - he did not say *Kaddish*. The days became weeks and *shloshim* was over and still no *Kaddish*. Finally, about six weeks after his father passed away, the son came home from work, and, in a fit of rage, he began breaking dishes in his kitchen. His wife looked at him in shock, "What

are you doing? Have you lost your mind?" she screamed at him. "I cannot take it anymore. I cannot continue with such a lifestyle. I must say *Kaddish* for my father!" As long as I am non-observant, I am bound by my promise. This is my last link with his soul. I have decided to repent my ways and return to the tradition in which I was raised," declared the broken-hearted son to his wife.

It was not easy, and it did not happen overnight, but the family eventually became observant. The son attended *minyan* daily and recited *Kaddish* for his father. His whole life and that of his family were entirely changed because of the father's deathbed request of his son.