

And this is the blessing that Moshe, the man of G-d, bestowed upon Bnei Yisrael before his death. (33:1)

Moshe Rabbeinu blessed the nation shortly before he passed from this world. Is that not obvious? He certainly did not bless them after he died! This is why Rashi comments, Moshe said, "If not now, when?" The Maharal, zl, m'Prague, explains that the Torah is teaching us that the blessing of a manhig, leader, is most appropriate towards the end of his life. As long as the leader is vibrant and executing his duties with vigor and stalwartness, it is his function to admonish when needed, exhorting the people to raise their level of observance. He must point out their sins, regardless of the reaction and backlash that he may incur. He must move forward with intensity and fairness, never flinching, never holding back. When he approaches the sunset of his life, as he nears the very end, it is now time to change his tone – to display love and affection and bless his flock accordingly.

Perhaps there is another thought that might be implied by Moshe's blessing the people prior to his death. People fear death. It is a natural and normal fear, but it should not be that way. When a person understands the meaning of life and its focus on preparing oneself for the Eternal World, death no longer takes on the image of finality, but rather, as a bridge to a different and better world. Thus, one who has prepared himself, who has lived a "good" life in the Torah sense of the word, does not fear death. He does not welcome it, because one never knows if his achievements have rendered him worthy of eternal repose, but he is not obsessed with fear of the unknown.

Moshe achieved a spiritual status throughout his life like no other human. He understood the meaning of life and the meaning of death. He had nothing to fear. He was calm and relaxed as he blessed the people prior to his death. He was also teaching us an important lesson. One should not fear death. To fear death is to lose perspective on life. One should "respect" death, recognizing its compelling nature and the ramifications of this bridge to the world of truth. Throughout one's life,

he prepares himself for this experience. Such an individual may rightfully fear the unknown, but he does not fear the concept of death. To him, it is not an end, but rather, the beginning of eternal life. He can bless with dignity, thinking rationally, with courage, as he takes leave of a life well-lived. He can say goodbye to his family knowing that he did not let them down. Death is inevitable. Fear of death is not.