

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

The *Midrash Tanchuma* (Va'eschanan 6) teaches: "Moshe *Rabbeinu* was (Heavenly) informed, 'The time for you to leave this world has arrived.' He said to them, 'Wait for me until I bless *Yisrael*. For they have not found contentment from me all my days, because of the rebukes and warnings with which I rebuked them.'" Moshe then proceeded to bless the nation. *Chazal* are teaching us that Moshe feared that the people would not correctly perceive his admonishments, and, rather than acknowledge his boundless love for them, they would think that he harbored anger and discontent concerning their behavior, and, by extension, towards them. Therefore, to ameliorate any doubts they might have concerning his feelings towards them, Moshe asked that his death be delayed, so that he could bless the nation. The Jewish nation must not question Moshe's love for them.

Let us grasp this. Moshe had just spent forty years – day and night – as *Klal Yisrael's* quintessential leader. As leader, he was, at times, compelled to admonish and discipline them. He might have manifest frustration and even anger, but, this should not detract from the times that he advocated for them. Following the sin of the Golden Calf, he told Hashem, "If they cannot be forgiven – erase me from Your Book!" I would consider this to be a sign of devotion and care for them. Was it really that urgent that he bless them in order to assuage their misgivings concerning the love he had for them? Furthermore, did Moshe not have anything else to do moments from his death? it was either now or never. Why was it so important that he clear up any misconceptions concerning his feelings for them?

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, explains that this was all part and parcel of Moshe's mission: to teach Torah to *Klal Yisrael*. We derive from here that the nation's adherence to the *mitzvos*, their devotion to Hashem, is ensured only when they know that their *rebbe* cares about them. The student who does not think (even if he is totally wrong) that his *rebbe* cares deeply for him does not learn as well as the student who does have this vital relationship with his *rebbe*.

When Moshe came to Hashem concerned that the nation was complaining – again, he said, *Ha'anochi horisi es kol ha'am hazeh?* "Have I conceived the entire nation?" (*Bamidbar* 11:12). *Sforno* comments, "Behold a father can lead his sons, even though they (father and son) have diverse opinions. This is because they all consider him as one who loves them and who attempts with all his might to benefit them. But these (people) have no trust in me at all, and are suspicious (of me), testing (me) to see what I can do for them." Moshe understood that a *talmid's*, student's, perceptions concerning his *rebbe's* feelings toward him make or break the lesson. A *rebbe's* love is the game changer. A student who does not feel love does not produce as well. One who does produce, regardless of his *rebbe's* feelings towards him, produces far more if he is aware of his *rebbe's* positive feelings towards him. A student is not a robot (and neither is a *rebbe* – for that matter); he has emotions that must be stoked. Not only should he care and respect the subject

matter, he must feel that his *rebbe* cares deeply about him. Yeshayah *HaNavi* (8:18) refers to his students as his children, which indeed they should be. The *rebbe* who is on an ego trip (deluding himself that this is *kavod haTorah*) is not as effective in reaching his students – unless they are extremely perceptive and realize that his “negativity” is all show, but beneath the cold, dispassionate surface, he really cares.

This emotion must be evident, especially at a time when the *rebbe* is forced to rebuke or discipline his students. Discipline is vital, rebuke is critical, but, such moments, the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, has the opportunity to nurture the *talmid*'s insecurity. If the *yetzer hora* can “convince” the student that his *rebbe* does not really care for him and the discipline is vindictive on the *rebbe*'s part, the discipline becomes ineffective. If the student senses that the *rebbe*'s rebuke emanates from a profound sense of love for his student and a deep-rooted desire to see him grow and maximize his potential – he will listen and change for the better.

Horav Yechiel Michel Tikuchinsky, zl, the venerable *Mashgiach* of Slobodka, Bnei Brak, established *Yeshivas Mekor Chaim* in Yerushalayim. He was convinced that never having taken courses in pedagogy and educational psychology might hamper him from effectively reaching the youth of Yerushalayim, who had much greater exposure to the outside world than the typical Bnei Brak *yeshivah bachur*. He met *Horav Yechezkel Sarne, zl*, *Rosh Yeshivas Chevron*, and expressed his concern to the *Rosh Yeshivah*. *Rav Sarne*, who was not only a brilliant *halachic* mind, but also an accomplished educator, said, “Do you love *bachurim*?” “Of course,” replied the *Mashgiach*. “Then you have nothing to worry about,” the *Rosh Yeshivah* explained, “One who loves his students will succeed in educating them. “Pedagogical/psychological skills might be important in understanding the student, but no skill is more effective than love. One who teaches with love, not an external façade of love, but real heartfelt love, which emanates from the *rebbe*'s heart, will succeed in penetrating the heart and mind of his student.