

Parshas Devorim – David Freedman (reprinted)

ו' מנחם אב תשע"ז – 29th July 2017 – שבת פי' דברים

Devorim begins with Moshe's last 40 days and his rebuking Israel for their sins. The first posuk details their journeys to Arava, opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Lavan, Chazeros and Di Zahav. Rashi informs us that these were not the actual locations of their sins, but allusions by Moshe to the place and the sins committed by Bnai Yisroel.

בערבה	because in Shittim, in the plains of Moav they sinned with Baal Peor;
מול סוף	they rebelled at Yam Suf;
בין פרן ובין תפל ולבן	these place are not mentioned but they refer to complaining about the manna and the spies;
וחצרות	the rebellion of Korach; when Shlomo Hamelech instructed the building of an eruv of common courtyards to enable carrying on Shabbos, עירובי חצרות, (Shabbos 14b), Hashem rejoiced as this gave a new opportunity for unity among Jews: the antitheses of Korach;
ודי זהב	the abundance of gold; the golden calf.

Why was Moshe not more explicit and mention actual places and the precise sins committed by Bnai Yisroel? Rashi's opening comments to the Sedra explains "...since these are words of reproof.....He conceals the matters (in which they have sinned) and mentions by allusion out of respect for Israel".

Moshe wanted to ensure his rebuke was done in a positive manner that would not unduly shame or embarrass the people of Israel. The dignity of an individual is of paramount importance at all times.

Our sages throughout our liturgy illustrate time after time the importance of dignity and the lengths to go to, to refrain from shaming or embarrassing someone.

The Gemora (Berochos 27a) relates the story of the altercation between Rabbi Gamliel, the Nasi of the Sanhedrin, and Rabbi Yehoshuah. As a result, Rabbi Gamliel was removed from office and the Sanhedrin has to choose a successor. Although Rabbi Yehoshuah was an obvious choice, he was not chosen as his appointment would have caused Rabbi Gamliel too much distress.

The Gemora (Baba Metzia 95a) states that is preferable that a person throws himself into a fiery furnace, rather than shame his fellow man in public. The source for this statement is the episode of Yehudah and Tamar (Bereshis 28). Tamar refuses to identify Yehudah in public as the father of her unborn child, even though the consequence was she would be sentenced to death by fire.

Rabbi Yitzchok Velozin explains the extent of the embarrassment from as posuk in Parashas Noach, (Bereshis 9.6) "...who sheds the blood of a person in a person, his blood shall be shed, for man was made in the image of Hashem.....".

How is it possible to shed the blood of a person in a person? דם האדם באדם. He answers by explaining the verse refers to shaming a person in public, where the blood drains from his face or his blood rises to give him an embarrassed look because of the distress caused.

We need no reminder of the consequences of the story in the Gemora (Gittin 57a) of Kamza and Bar Kamza, whereby Bar Kamza was so incensed by the embarrassment caused, that the episode led to the chain of events that caused the destruction of the Holy Temple.

Our Rabbis provide guidelines to those who rebuke others to ensure we comply in all respects.

- It is essential to preserve the person's honour and dignity (Pirkei Avos 2.15 "...Let the honour of your fellow be as dear to you as your own..."). Moshe was careful in his final address to protect their honour.
- Rebuke can only be justified if it is effective. Criticism at the wrong time or in the wrong way will fail in its objective. Moshe waited to now to serve his rebuke, as he knew his flock after 40 years of monitoring.
- The rebuke must not divide, but must unite and bring those involved closer to Hashem. Moshe spoke to all the people, אל כל ישראל (Devorim 1.1) so he ensures his comments were of positive benefit.
- The person offering the rebuke must have knowledge, חכמה and understanding, בינה. We are told in Pirkei Avos (1.1) to obtain a good teacher. This is so we can learn from his teaching and from his rebuke, when necessary.
- To be effective, the rebuke must be listened to. The Gemora (Yevomos 65a) ".....Rabbi Illa says, in the name of Rabbi Elazar, just as it is a mitzvah to say when you know people will listen, so it is a mitzvah not to say when you know they will not listen....".

With Tisha B'Av approaching, we should carefully understand the opening posuk of our Sedra, and Rashi's explanation, to be careful what we say and how we say it, and to listen carefully to our Rav for guidance at all times.