



Honorable Honor

Parashat Devarim opens with Moshe Rabbeinu's address to *Am Yisrael* in the last month of his life. Rashi offers a curious commentary on the first verse which lists a number of locations. Malbim maintains that these were places, "*asher diber Moshe el kol Yisrael*," where Moshe Rabbeinu spoke to the people. (*Devarim 1:1*) Yet Rashi, drawing on the words of Chazal, asserts that these were places where *Am Yisrael* had sinned throughout their many years in the desert. Moshe Rabbeinu shared words of rebuke albeit by way of hinting to their sins to protect the people's honor. This approach is not commonly used; why did Moshe Rabbeinu choose to admonish the people in this way specifically at this point in time?

The Tsher Rebbe *zt"l* in *Avodat Avodah* offers several explanations. He notes that this was an opportunity for Moshe Rabbeinu to

effect a full teshuvah for his angry response to the people at *Mei Merivah*, referring to them as "rebels" before striking the rock to give them water. Now Moshe Rabbeinu speaks with the people calmly, treating them with tremendous respect by hinting at their sins, instead of expressing his displeasure outright. This is indeed a lesson for all who find themselves in a position to rebuke others. Constructive criticism that emanates from love and shared in a gentle manner is much more effective and will be received in a more positive way.

The second approach offered by Tsher Rebbe focuses on the structure of Moshe Rabbeinu's remonstrance. He begins using hints to refer to the people's sin and only later throughout the text do we find a more detailed description. These two stages of rebuke parallel two different aspects of our *avodat Hashem*. Some of the mitzvot we do can be classified in the realm of thought, such as loving and fearing Hashem, other mitzvot belong in the domain of action. The former, "*hanistarot la'Hashem*," are known only to Hashem, and the latter, "*haniglot lanu u'levaneinu*," are revealed to us and to our children. By first hinting to the people, Moshe Rabbeinu directs them to examine those matters that are within one's mind and heart. Then, speaking in a more expanded fashion, he calls for them to scrutinize their deeds and engage in teshuvah for both.

This idea is particularly relevant during the period of the Three Weeks, notes the Tsher Rebbe, when we recall the primary sin, *sin'at chinam*, baseless hatred, that led to

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the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. We are told that the generation that lived prior to the *Churban Habayit* was involved in Torah learning and did acts of chessed, however, the inner workings of their hearts were sorely lacking. At this time, we must undertake to ensure that we rid ourselves and our communities of jealousy, anger and hatred.

Rav Chasman in *Ohr Yahel* remarks that Rashi's explanation gives us a positive message. "*Mi'pnei kevodan shel Yisrael*," Moshe Rabbeinu spoke in veiled terms to "protect the honor of the people." That is to say, the people were on such an elevated spiritual level that a mere reference to their sins was enough for them to engage in introspection and do teshuvah. When one has a healthy sense of self and *kavod atzmi* he has the self-awareness to welcome even subtle hints that can stimulate growth and change in a positive direction. ■

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