

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

PARSHA BOOKLET

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PARASHAT DEVARIM

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Yisrael. (1:1)

Tochachah, reproach, is easy to give. If the target is to receive it in a positive manner, the reproacher must deliver it in such a manner that it seems to be difficult to present. In other words, the key to effective reproach is not simply to criticize, but to consider the feelings of the other person: his position, attitude and emotions. It is only through thoughtfulness on the part of the one administering the rebuke that his criticism will be constructive, and the individual will be able to receive it as such. Horav Mordechai Miller, zl, suggests that this is the primary difference between Sefer Devarim and the other Sefarim of the Torah. The first four books are Hashem's Divine word, transmitted to the people and written from a Divine perspective. In order to gain an intellectual appreciation of the material, the Jewish People must constantly forge ahead and delve into its Heavenly message. The Book of Devarim is written mitzad ha'mekabel, from the perspective of the recipient. Thus, it is much easier to grasp, more readily accessible, and closer to the spiritual level of the people. The change in syntax is due to the nature of the material: reproach. It is a book filled with critique. Moshe Rabbeinu's castigation is not merely to fill space. It is there to be heard and accepted, to be recognized for the good it brings to the people. It is, therefore, written in a manner that is readily understood, in which the people can relate to it, so that they will recognize their shortcomings and identify the manner in which they can improve.

In an attempt to allude to their sins, rather than to call attention to them emphatically, the Torah details geographical locations whose names carry hints to various sins that the people committed. Subtle hints, not explicit remarks, gently remind the people of their sins in order to preserve their dignity.

Indeed, this is the reason that Moshe did not rebuke Klal Yisrael until shortly before his death. The timing was deliberate, and its purpose was more than just lending weight to his words. It protected them from shame. Had Moshe rebuked them during the course of their sojourn, it would mean that they would have to continue to face him countless times, and they would have been overcome with shame each time. Having to face him on a constant basis for years would really affect their self-esteem. To avoid inflicting this humiliation, while not denying them their critique, Moshe waited until shortly before his death to deliver his reproach. Yaakov Avinu acted in the same manner. He did not want to cause shame until the last possible moment, and then he said what had to be said. The most important

principle is to preserve the dignity of the individual being addressed.

The Maharal, zl, m'Prague posits that, for this reason, out of extreme sensitivity for the Jewish People, Moshe did not list the transgressions in chronological order. Were he to recount them in order, the sins would have been more explicit, more glaring. In summation, Moshe waited as long as possible to rebuke the people. Even when mentioning the error of their ways, he did so with care, only alluding to the sin, and not listing them chronologically. The people sinned; they are aware of it; Moshe was aware of the need to address these sins, but he knew he had to do so subtly and with great sensitivity.

Regrettably, this is not always the best possible scenario. At times, it is necessary to deliver a scathing rebuke, a humiliating condemnation of an individual's or a group's activities. Rav Miller points to Yeshayah HaNavi's ambiguous admonishment of the Jewish People. He upbraids them, claiming that their lack of gratitude to Hashem renders them inferior to animals. An animal instinctively knows its master, recognizing the good it receives. Klal Yisrael failed dismally in that category. He chastises them for not thinking, for insensitivity to authority, recklessly continuing along on the path of corruption without a care in the world. Why did Yeshayah not follow the model of Moshe and Yaakov?

Likewise, the punishment of makkos, lashes, seems to be excessively degrading. The sinner who incurs this punishment is struck with a very special whip - one that is designed to send an emotional, as well as physical, message. It must be constructed of two tongues of the hide of a donkey. The purpose is to ingrain in the sinner's mind that he has descended to a level even lower than that of a donkey. Let us reflect on this scene for a moment. The sinner is out there in the presence of bais din. He is painfully struck with a whip that causes physical pain. In addition, he is directed to take note of his lowly spiritual level. With each crack of the whip, one more layer of human dignity is stripped from him. Even those who might be able to tolerate the physical pain most certainly have a difficult challenge in overcoming the emotional degradation. Why do we disregard his pride, his dignity, his emotions?

In short, the people of the two eras were different. The generation of Moshe was the dor deah, generation of knowledge. The people had their failings and this is why they were rebuked, but they were knowledgeable, thinking individuals who recognized an error when it was intimated to them. They strove to attain new heights and a closer relationship with the Almighty. Thus, they were willing to accept any infraction when it was presented to them. They felt that every small occurrence which was not executed to perfection had direct bearing on their Divine service. They waited longingly to hear if anything had been improper in their service. Therefore, when Moshe issued a rebuke, however subtle, the people understood it and immediately internalized it. The mere hint of rebuke engendered repentance.

During the era of Yeshayah, the people were on a lower intellectual and spiritual level. They were far removed from the generation of knowledge. They needed to hear words, clear words - everything spelled out to them in graphic terms, with their errors blatantly painted in their true, undisguised form. They wouldn't have heard a subtle rebuke, and it would have had limited efficacy in promoting repentance. An open rebuke which brought to light the nation's transgression was necessary to awaken them. Yeshayah had to direct the people to the correct path. This same idea applies to the sinner who receives lashes. Only after he is struck with the whip made of a donkey's hide does he realize that he has acted on a level even below that of a donkey.

Listening is critical, but to listen without understanding is a waste of resources. We have heard the message countless times throughout history, yet we have failed to respond, because we did not think. We responded in a thoughtless manner: it applied to someone else; we really are not that bad;

everybody is overreacting; it is only a phase; things will get better, etc. We always found an excuse to justify our behavior, any excuse as long as it meant not applying the message. Some did not listen. Others listened but did not think. In any event, the rebuke did not have the desired effect.

In order to achieve greatest efficacy when rebuking a fellow Jew, the one who renders the rebuke must do so out of friendship and caring, mindful of the most sensitive manner through which to convey his message. It is easy to tell someone that they did something wrong. It is totally another thing to guide them through their error and return them to the road to recovery. Throughout the millennia, our spiritual leadership has been creative in conjuring up different schemes that would allow them to subtly impart their message, while continuing to preserve the dignity of the recipient and achieve the greatest effect.

One popular rav in Poland ascended the bimah, lectern, during Chol HaMoed, Intermediate Days of the Festival, declaring, "I am ashamed to pray in shul with thieves!" Naturally, the membership was quite taken aback. They were certainly aware of their personal failings, but theft was not among them.

The rav explained the reason for the startling statement. "It is now Chol HaMoed, a period in which observant Jews do not shave or take haircuts. Yet, a number of our members have come to shul sporting newly-shaven faces. How can I justify this blatant disregard for halachah? Unless there is a dispensation allowing one who has been released from prison during Chol HaMoed to shave. Clearly, this must be the case. Then I wondered: Why would a member of my congregation have been incarcerated? It must have been for theft. If that is the case, I am davening in a shul among thieves. This is something I can neither reconcile nor accept."

The congregants received the message. Had the rav confronted them head-on concerning their self-sustaining exemption from halachah, they would have balked and provided a number of rejoinders to validate their behavior. This way, they absorbed the message, and they took the hint.

While to rebuke is a mitzvah, as it says in Vayikra 19:17, *Hocheiach tochiach es amisecha*, "You shall reprove your fellow," there are situations in which one might achieve more by maintaining silence. At times, an observant Jew finds himself in a non-observant environment, coming face to face with a fellow Jew who is desecrating Shabbos - as a matter of fact. What should his reaction be? The Chazon Ish, zl, was once asked if it is proper to rebuke a fellow Jew who is working in his garden on Shabbos? The Chazon Ish replied in the negative, since this incident took place in Bnei Brak, a community in which others had certainly reproved him already.

The Chazon Ish then added that, veritably, it would be best not to rebuke him. He cited the pasuk in Mishlei 9:8, "Do not rebuke a scoffer, lest he hate you." This implies that to rebuke a person for no purpose is destructive. In other words, if the other individual certainly will not listen to you, and all you will cause is a hatred on his part for a frum Yid, an observant Jew, it is better to leave well enough alone. In addition, now when he carries out his sin, it is considered b'mezid, knowingly, because he has already been told it is wrong.

The Chazon Ish explained that when we see a Jew who is clearly non-observant driving on Shabbos, we might shout at him, "Shabbos! Shabbos!" The driver says to himself, "Shabbos? What do I know about Shabbos? No one has ever taught me the meaning of Shabbos." "Therefore," says the Chazon Ish, "if one seeks to admonish, he should reach out to the children in schools and inspire them concerning Torah and mitzvos. Perhaps if they continue in a Torah school of higher learning, they will opt for an observant way of life."

The lesson is clear: Our function is to reach out and inspire those who do not know any better, to teach them the beauty of a Torah way of life and to inspire them towards observance. Admonishing those who do not know any better only increases *sinaas chinam*, unwarranted hatred among Jews.

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael. (1:1)

This Torah presents two powerful speakers from contrasting backgrounds with very divergent characters. In fact, one represents the zenith of spirituality, integrity and piety, while the other signifies the nadir of spiritual contamination, moral bankruptcy and corruption. One admonishes the people and foreshadows the curses that will result from a defection from the Torah way of life, while the other blesses the people and details the wonderful rewards in store for those who maintain a commitment to Torah and mitzvos. We would imagine that the admonishment and rebuke emanated from the mouth of moral decadence, while the blessings were the words of the righteous sage. Not so. Moshe Rabbeinu, Klal Yisrael's quintessential leader, commences Sefer Devarim with a review of the nation's activities during their sojourn in the wilderness. He admonishes Klal Yisrael for their failures and criticizes their errors. He holds nothing back. In contrast, as we read earlier in Parashas Balak, the wicked Bilaam, the pagan's spiritual leader, a man who represented moral pollution at its most base level, was the one who served as Hashem's vehicle for blessing. Does this not seem a bit unusual?

Chazal address this anomaly in the Midrash. "It would have been appropriate for the rebukes to have been presented by Bilaam and the blessings by Moshe, but, had Bilaam rebuked them, Klal Yisrael would have said, "Our enemy is rebuking us." Had Moshe blessed them, the pagan nations of the world would have said, "The one who loves them is blessing them." Therefore, Hashem said, "Let the one who loves them rebuke; and Bilaam, who hates them, shall bless them, so that it is clear to all that the blessings and the curses are both in the hand of Yisrael."

Everything which Moshe and his counterpart, Bilaam, uttered, was a transmission of G-d's prophecy. Indeed, Sefer Devarim, which is the word of Moshe, was actually the Shechinah speaking through him. It was pure prophecy, transmitted through Moshe. Likewise, when Bilaam blessed Klal Yisrael, he was speaking the Divine Prophecy.

Something needs to be clarified. Since Moshe and Bilaam were both media for transmitting the Divine Prophecy, what difference does it make which one blessed these people and which cursed them? They were both agents of Hashem. The premise of the Midrash seems to be that there is a distinct reason for Moshe to admonish the people and Bilaam to bless them.

The Shem MiShmuel approaches this Midrash pragmatically. One who cares deeply for his friend is invariably inclined to notice his positive attributes and ignore his faults. In contrast, one who dislikes an individual almost exclusively gravitates towards his antagonist's shortcomings and glosses over any positive characteristics that he might have. This idea applies on a national level, as well. In other words, had Moshe been given the task of blessing Klal Yisrael, he would naturally have focused on their positive qualities and blessed them accordingly. Bilaam would have, likewise, focused on their failings and issued forth whatever curses he could manipulate.

While the above sounds acceptable, it does, however, carry a risk, since Moshe would have blessed a nation comprised of spiritual giants - because that is what he, who loved them, was seeking. Thus, the blessing would be applicable to such a nation that is on a lofty spiritual pedestal, deserving of such blessing. This might present a problem, since we have not maintained ourselves on that lofty

spiritual status-quo throughout our checkered history.

Bilaam cursing the people presents a problem, since he would only have been able to look at the worst aspects of our national character. He would have been happy to curse a nation of spiritual failures. Therefore, the curses would have applied to Klal Yisrael at their spiritual nadir - something which has hardly occurred. If this had been the case, the criticism which was to catalyze teshuvah, repentance, would not have been effective. The blessings would have achieved nothing, since we have not always been worthy of blessing. The curses would have been equally meaningless, because Baruch Hashem, we have not strayed that far or that deep.

We now understand why Moshe had to admonish, and Bilaam had to bless. Otherwise, the blessings and the curses would both have been biased. Moshe rebuked a nation that he loved, a nation whose positive character he perceived, a nation of righteous, G-d-fearing Jews, who needed to be prodded once in awhile. In contrast, Bilaam blessed a nation whose deficiencies were in front of him and whose insignificance and lowliness he emphasized. Yet, he still blessed them. Even the coarsest, most spiritually underdeveloped Jew is deserving of blessing. Moshe saw the positive, yet he reprovved. Bilaam saw the negative, yet he blessed. Yes, they both issued forth Divine Prophecy.

I cannot carry you alone. (1:9)

Rashi explains that while this pasuk seems to be digressing from the theme of entering the Land, it is actually a part of the ongoing rebuke contained in this parsha. Moshe Rabbeinu admonished the people for accepting intermediaries, rather than learning directly from him. He goes so far as to say, "You should have answered, 'Moshe our Teacher! From whom is it most fitting to learn, from you or from your disciple? Surely from you, who exerted yourself so over receiving the Torah.'" The psychology here is straightforward: One should study from the master - if possible. There is one point, however, that should be addressed: the reason for learning from Moshe, as opposed to anyone else. Clearly, exertion and toil which is expended over Torah study plays a critical role in understanding the Torah, but was this the primary reason for studying from Moshe? Does exertion catalyze such a difference?

Horav Meir Bergman, Shlita, cites the incident in the Talmud Shabbos 33b in which Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, son-in-law of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, came to greet his father-in-law. Noticing that his body was covered with cracks in his skin, R' Pinchas began to weep, and the tears that fell on R' Shimon's cracks caused him great pain. R' Pinchas said, "Woe is to me that I see you in such a state!" R' Shimon responded, "Happy are you that you see me in such a state; for if you did not see me so you would not find so much in me." The Talmud goes on to imply that the tremendous suffering sustained by R'Shimon when he was in the cave precipitated for him greater access to Torah knowledge.

Consequently, R' Shimon had an entirely different view of his father-in-law. When he realized the effort and toil expended by R'Shimon to achieve such heights in Torah, his appreciation of the sage became more profound. Every word of Torah that he uttered had greater meaning, because it was the result of painful exertion. This is why R' Shimon told him, "Happy are you that you see me like this." Otherwise, the Torah he would teach him would not be the same.

It is human nature to attach greater significance to something into which one has put much work. Torah is no different than secular pursuits when it comes to this reality. Rav Bergman cites his father-in-law, Horav Eliezer M. Shach, zl, who writes in the preface to his *Avi Ezri*, "Whoever studies

these matters will see what a help this work can be, G-d willing, for I achieved it with much toil and exertion."

When Horav Shimon Shkop, zl, was a young student in Volozhin, he at first did not attend the shiur given by the Rosh Yeshivah, the Netziv, zl, thinking that he would accomplish more during that time by studying himself. One night, he experienced a sudden change of heart. It was quite late, in the wee hours of the morning, and Rav Shimon was still studying in the bais medrash. He was stuck on a very difficult statement made by the Rashbam in his commentary to Meseches Bava Basra. It had gotten to the point that Rav Shimon had begun to despair understanding the Rashbam's commentary, when suddenly the Rosh Yeshivah entered the Bais Medrash. While it was not a common occurrence, it was not unusual for the Netziv to enter the yeshivah hall at all hours of the night. Rav Shimon decided to approach the Rosh Yeshivah and ask his opinion concerning the Rashbam's statement. The Netziv replied, "My child, I have several times visited the graves of the holy tzadikim, righteous persons, to entreat Hashem to reveal to me the meaning of this passage." When Rav Shimon became aware of the Netziv's toil in learning Torah, he began to attend his shiur.

This, explains Rav Bergman, was Moshe's underlying critique. If the real purpose of studying under the other judges was to learn Torah, then they should have learned from Moshe, because no one expended as much exertion in acquiring Torah knowledge as he did. The criteria for success is exertion. When a student considers the amount of effort his rebbe put in to mastering the subject matter, he pays more attention to each and every word that he hears. Clearly, Torah learning was not the reason they chose the "judge's" option.

Learning from a rebbe and accepting his teachings are both critical components of the appreciation process. The respect for the rebbe; the appreciation one has for his learning; the awareness one has of the effort he has exhausted in achieving his profound erudition, all play crucial roles in the student's learning process. When a talmid truly acknowledges how much his rebbe "knows" and appreciates how much effort he has put in to achieving this milestone, he will realize the tremendous depths that lie before him. With the discovery of this depth, he will begin a new phase in his ascension up the ladder of Torah knowledge.

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Sefer Devarim is different in nature from the other four Chumashim. The mere fact that this sefer begins with the words, "These are the words that Moshe spoke," speaks volumes about its unique character. As a preface to the entire sefer, we will select the approaches to understanding this sefer's uniqueness. In the Talmud Megillah 31b, Chazal state that Moshe Rabbeinu himself declared the curses in Sefer Devarim. The Avnei Nezer explains that while Hashem clearly presented the material in Sefer Devarim to Moshe, it contains greater human input than the previous four. Indeed, we can view Sefer Devarim as the transition stage between Torah She'Bichsav, Written Law, and Torah She'Baal Peh, Oral Law. Sefer Devarim contains both: the Written Law with an element of human content similar to the Oral law.

The Shem MiShmuel explains his father's statement. The Talmud in Nedarim 27b states, "Had Klal Yisrael not sinned (with the Golden Calf), they would have been given only the Five Books of the Torah and Sefer Yehoshua, which contains the details of Eretz Yisrael's boundaries. Clearly, this does

not mean that if not for their sin they would have received only the Written Law. The Oral Law is indispensable to understanding the Written Law. Without Chazal's interpretations, the Chumash as we know it is totally untenable. Every aspect of the Torah is given meaning and depth only with the accompaniment of the Oral Law. Every aspect of Jewish life, every mitzvah, is dependent upon the details provided to us compliments of the Torah She'Baal Peh. What do Chazal mean by this sweeping generalization?

The Midrash in Shir HaShirim teaches that each of the Aseres HaDibros, Ten Commandments, went to every member of Klal Yisrael and asked, "Do you accept me upon you? I contain so many mitzvos, so many laws, so many punishments, so many kal v'chomer, a fortiori inferences, so many rewards." Klal Yisrael responded with a resounding affirmative. In understanding this Midrash, the Shem MiShmuel explains that, at some level, the Aseres HaDibros contain all of the Taryag, 613, mitzvos of the Torah. The entire system of Torah law is included in the Ten Commandments. This may be nearly impossible for us to comprehend today - but, at the time of Divine Revelation, Klal Yisrael's perceptive and cognitive powers were enhanced beyond our ability to grasp. Thus, they perceived every word that Hashem spoke with such clarity of vision that they were able to detect every nuance of each word. Had they been able to retain this spiritual plateau, they would not have needed the vast interpretation rendered to them by the Oral Law, which is no less Divine than its written counterpart. However, they sinned. The Golden Calf debacle reduced their spiritual position, and they were no longer able to decipher the details of each mitzvah directly from the text of Torah She'Bichsav. Their perception and depth of understanding were now limited. This necessitated the transmission of Torah She'Baal Peh, in order to explain the Written Law and endow it with meaning.

Until this very day, the harmonization between the two types of Divine Torah has been the focus of Talmudic scholars throughout the generations. In the attempt to trace the laws in the oral tradition to their source in the Written Law, they not only create an intellectual appreciation of the law, but they actually create the opportunity for a return to the sinless state of mind that characterized Klal Yisrael prior to the sin. Thus, to a certain extent, the resolution of these two depths of understanding serves to counteract the ramifications of the sin of the Golden Calf.

Sefer Devarim bridges the gap between the Written and Oral Law. Due to the human element, symbolized by Moshe himself presenting the content of Sefer Devarim, it was not as difficult for Klal Yisrael to grasp its laws, derivations, and textual hints and to see the foundation of the Oral Law within it. The ethical messages of Sefer Devarim are more explicit than those of the previous four books, and, thus, are more easily appreciated. People could relate much quicker to this book as a result of its intrinsic dichotomy.

This is why the speech that Moshe delivered at the end of his life had greater impact. It had greater transparency than anything that had preceded it. As such, it aroused a feeling of power and spirituality which Klal Yisrael had not experienced since the Revelation at Har Sinai.

Horav Yaakov Weinberg, zl, cited by Rabbi Boruch Leff in his volume, "Forever His Students," takes a more basic, but similar, approach to understanding the tenor of Sefer Devarim. In the previous four books, Moshe was instructed by Hashem exactly what to write. Even the conversations that we encounter, were those selected by the Almighty to be recorded for posterity. Hashem dictated the text to Moshe word for word. Sefer Devarim was also written by Moshe in accordance with Hashem's will, but Sefer Devarim manifests a slight variation. Moshe had deep, profound thoughts that he wanted to share with the people he had led for forty years. He was about to pass on from this world, and he wanted to say "goodbye" in an instructive manner. Moshe shared his thoughts and emotions with the

people. Hashem decided to include these speeches in the Torah. In other words: in the first four books Moshe simply said what Hashem had told him to say. In Sefer Devarim, Moshe spoke first - then Hashem told him to record it. In essence, they are both Hashem's words.

Rav Weinberg concludes that Sefer Devarim should be studied on two different levels. First, what was Moshe, the quintessential rebbe and greatest prophet, thinking when he said the words that comprise Sefer Devarim? Second, what are the eternal, essential values and lessons to be derived from these words once Hashem had decided to transform them from being an extraordinary human statement to be included in His Torah?

Hence, Sefer Devarim should be studied in a fashion that differs from the manner in which one studies the other four books. Each pasuk, each halachah, each ethical lesson, must be analyzed on both of the two aforementioned levels. Furthermore, we now infer that Sefer Devarim offers a more natural, innate, emotional, human connection to us. Its human element reaches in to our psyche in a manner unlike that of the other four books. Its mitzvos and ethical lessons connect to us emotionally, as well as spiritually. As we begin to study Sefer Devarim, let us take note of our warm, almost filial, relationship to its verities.

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Parashas Devarim is also Shabbos Chazon, named after the first words of the Haftorah (Chazon Yeshayahu), which coincides with the Shabbos preceding Tisha B'Av, our national day of mourning. Moshe Rabbeinu begins this last of the five Chumashim with his rebuke to the nation that he had led for the last forty years. Likewise, Yeshayahu HaNavi rebukes the people of his generation for their misdeeds - behavior which led to the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash. Rebuke is certainly important and necessary, but is it a function that is reserved only for the gadol ha'dor, preeminent leader of the generation? Does the Torah not admonish us to offer rebuke to our fellow Jew on a one-to-one basis? "Hocheah tocheach es amisecha," "You shall reprove your fellow" (Vayikra 19:17). It is the function of every Jew to correct his fellow when he sees him erring. Is it possible that the only one to notice Klal Yisrael's infractions was Yeshayahu? Where were the others?

Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, cites the Brisker Rav, zl, who explained this with the following analogy. Imagine a beautiful, verdant garden containing a large variety of flowers, replete with an orchard of all types of trees. The scent that emanates from that garden is captivating. The streams and waterfalls that flow throughout the garden are clear and pure. Many people make a point to visit this luscious paradise of beauty and scent to enjoy this most pleasing sight. Whoever comes by to visit leaves enraptured by the experience. They rave for days after participating in this exhilarating experience. Well, almost everyone is excited about the garden. There is one person, however, upon whom you can always count to say something negative about the garden. He notices a flower that is wilting, a branch of a tree that has lost some of its color, or a section of grass that is too dry. Who is this person that is always pointing out the negative aspects of the garden? It is the gardener - and that is his job. In order to protect the future of the garden, he must constantly be on the alert for anything that might cause concern.

The average person who visits the garden of "life" does not sense the responsibility to make sure that it remains pristine and beautiful, nor does he voice concern about those inhabitants who act inappropriately. He is here to enjoy - for himself - not to be concerned about others. Not so the gadol,

who senses that his function extends beyond visiting rights. He is like the gardener who must ensure the continued beauty and health of the garden. When he notices a tree that is not growing properly, he attends to it. When he notices a flower that is wilting, he quickly fertilizes and waters it. He weeds and waters the grass that should be greener. He addresses every aspect of the garden, so that it continues to be verdant and fruitful.

Rav Schlessinger suggests that this is why the Navi concludes his rebuke with the pasuk, "Then I will return your Judges as in earliest times, and your counselors as at first. After that you shall be called City of Righteousness, Faithful City." (Yeshaya 1:26)

The prophet prays for the day in which there will be more judges who reprove with sincerity and integrity. This communal sense of responsibility enhances people's relationships and elevates Klal Yisrael's spiritual plateau. The Talmud in Shabbos 119 teaches, "Why was Yerushalayim destroyed? Because they did not rebuke each other." Reproach catalyzes improvement in observance and ethical character. Once this takes place, the perfection that has been eluding us for so long will finally occur. At times, the most positive attitude is manifest by he who seeks out negativity - and corrects it.

A true friend will not shy away from subtly pointing out his friend's failings. This mission must be executed with sincerity, love and respect. Indeed, if one can get by without rebuking altogether, it would be more advisable. At times, it is better to close one's eyes and not see. The Pele Yoetz writes, "At times one should make himself like he does not hear and does not see, or he should acquiesce to the other's will to prevent a negative reaction." Do not look for trouble. If you find it, however, do not ignore it.

When one is compelled to offer words of admonishment, it should be couched with dignity, always making sure not to destroy the self-esteem of the individual he is rebuking. Often when someone who is already dealing with serious issues is rebuked in a negative manner, whatever is left of his self esteem descends to even lower pits of depression. This will only serve as a reason for him to continue along on his path of deviation from a life of Torah.

The Shalah HaKadosh interprets the pasuk in Mishlei 9:8, "Do not rebuke a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you," in the following manner. Do not rebuke a person by calling him a letz or any other derogatory term, in that it will only alienate him from you. Rather, tell him that he is a chacham, wise, and intelligent man, so that he will feel close to you and love you. Praise him and subtly inject some of the criticism in between words of praise. Talk to him with respect; elevate him and encourage him to continue along a path of positive service, reparation and return. By denigrating him, we only put him off.

Nobody is perfect. Everybody has some sort of deficiency. When we focus only on the individual's negative traits and deficiencies, our rebuke can backfire. The sinner will say, "I am so bad; I am so far gone, why bother turning around? I am surely not going to make it." Instead of repenting, he quite possibly will deteriorate even more. A rav of an average sized community in Poland once came to the Chafetz Chaim and complained about his inability to inspire his congregation to increase their level of shemiras Shabbos, Shabbos observance. One derashah, lecture, after another did not seem to effect any positive change in their behavior. The Chafetz Chaim asked him, "How do you speak to them?" "Oh Rebbe," he replied, "I lash into them with fire and brimstone. I scream and speak dramatically and passionately. I certainly get their attention. No one sleeps through my derashah."

Hearing this, the Chafetz Chaim asked, "Do you scream when you put on your Tefillin? Surely not. The mitzvah of tochachah, rebuke, is no different than the mitzvah of Tefillin. It is carried out with patience, relaxed, with devotion and awe - not by screaming."

Sometimes, the lack of rebuke - or a smile rendered precipitously - at a moment when one expects to be admonished can create a positive mood, which facilitates the ultimate communication. An Israeli cabdriver who recently became a baal teshuvah, returnee to mitzvah observance, revealed what had catalyzed his return. He was driving a group of Arabs on Shabbos through the streets of Yerushalayim. As he slowed down for a light, an obviously observant Jew dressed in Shabbos finery and wearing his Tallis walked by the cab. The Jew looked at him with a big smile and, in a gentle voice, said, "Shabbat Shalom." That is it. Just a simple Gut Shabbos couched with a smile of brotherly love. It penetrated years of uncertainty, years of animus, years of fear. When the cab driver dropped off his fares, he decided to park his cab and call it a day. He was no longer driving on Shabbos. Shortly thereafter, he became fully observant. All because of a smile. He expected to be called, "Sheigatz!" and, instead, he received a smile and Gut Shabbos. It saved his life. We should remember this story the next time we see one of our misguided brethren. Perhaps, our attitude might change.

Last, one Shabbos in Yeshivas Ateres Yisrael, Rebbetzin Ezrachi noticed a student who "stole" a container of milk. This bothered her greatly. Her husband, the Rosh Yeshivah, Horav Boruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, was away for Shabbos. She decided to go to the Mashgiach, her father, the venerable Horav Meir Chodosh, zl. "As the ethical supervisor of these yeshiva students, I implore you to censure him for stealing the milk," she said to her father. The Mashgiach listened and said, "Go speak to your husband." "My husband is not in town," she countered. Once again she demanded that her father castigate this student for stealing.

The Mashgiach finally told her to sit down, so that he could explain his reluctance of criticizing the student - now. "If I will speak to him now, I might gain a few containers of milk that will not be pilfered, but I might lose a student with enormous potential. My function is to teach and guide him not to succumb to his desires, not to fall prey to his yetzer hora, evil inclination. Chastising him is not the correct way to bring him to this goal."

Your G-d was with you; you did not lack a thing. (2:7)

The Torah admonishes Klal Yisrael not to act like ingrates, but rather to acknowledge and appreciate all of the abundance that Hashem has granted them. Unwarranted complaining is reprehensible. It is especially loathsome when one ignores all of the wonderful gifts that have been bestowed on him and instead focuses on the small inconveniences. In Bamidbar 11:7, Klal Yisrael complains about the "food," the manna they are receiving. Rather than thank Hashem for all of the good, for a food which provides them with total nourishment and any taste they could fathom, they complain. Hashem "said" to the nations of the world, "See about what my children complain!" In other words, Hashem announces to the world community the ingratitude of His children. This is not a common statement, and it is not often found in Torah literature. When people, however, do not appreciate what they receive from Hashem, it becomes the basis for public criticism. Horav Avraham Pam, zl, adds that it is quite possible that each and every one of us who does not properly acknowledge Hashem's beneficence deserves His punishment. We have become so spoiled with His benevolence that we no longer properly acknowledge it.

Horav Yitzchak Zilbertstein, Shlita, cites a number of instances which are examples of this type of self-centered behavior. A young man came to Rav Zilberstein to complain about his wife. It seems that every day when he would return home, the floor would be littered with various toys and children's clothing. He is extremely fastidious and, therefore, the mess bothers him. What should he do? Rav

Zilberstein told him that he would have been among the ingrates who complained about the manna. He should realize that the mess is caused by his children who are a blessing from Hashem. Let him enter a home where the people have not been blessed with children, and he will not encounter a mess! He should first appreciate his gift before he complains about some of its fringe "benefits."

Another fellow complained that his wife, who supposedly had an incredible reputation prior to their marriage, was constantly putting him down. By listening to the entire story with an astute ear, Rav Zilberstein noted that the husband, who also had been touted as an exceptional young man, both academically and ethically, was himself not so perfect. The rav pointed out to the young man that a number of men his age have not yet been blessed with a mate. Perhaps his complaint was premature. If he would appreciate his wife more, she would reciprocate with greater deference.

This attitude is prevalent wherever we lose sight of the positive forces in our lives. Parents do so much for their children. Do we acknowledge what they do, and what they are giving up to act accordingly? Hashem said, "See about what my children complain!" Let us learn to appreciate our gifts and not complain about trivialities.

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael. (1:1)

Most human beings have an aversion to listening to mussar, rebuke. No one wants to be admonished, to be told that he has acted inappropriately. Sefer Devarim is primarily a mussar sefer, a volume of discipline and admonishment. Moshe Rabbeinu waited until the end of his life to deliver his rebuke - amid sincere love and a desire for the happiness and success of each and every Jew. He rebuked as a parent - with love, with a desire for happiness and success, to guide and inspire his child. A father knows best. He has experienced life and recognizes the pitfalls, obstacles and the dangers which he seeks to convey to his child. Likewise, he knows the sources of good which will benefit his child. Constructive discipline is a gift. Regrettably, it is a gift that many of us foolishly shun and reject. The Admor zl, m'Peshischa, would read a few pesukim from Sefer Devarim daily, intimating that it was the definitive source from which one may derive guidance and discipline.

Nonetheless, we shy away from listening to constructive discipline. The excuses are classic and many, but it all boils down to a lack of maturity, an insecurity about hearing that one might be wrong, an inertia that naturally resists change of any kind. By listening to rebuke one might have to accept that his behavior might be inappropriate. This would necessitate a change in his behavior, something no one is comfortable initiating. Furthermore, there is the authority issue. While one might acquiesce to the actual rebuke, it is the individual who is communicating this reproach that is a problem. Why should I accept his critique? What makes him better than me? Young people tune out their parents and teachers because they represent authority. Indeed, quite often the words of a peer have a greater effect than those of an authority figure.

Moshe waited until the end of his life to deliver his rebuke, because he understood human nature and he feared the reaction his words would generate. Chazal tell us that Yaakov Avinu did not lecture his sons until shortly before he died, because he was afraid of their response. He said, "Reuven, I did not discipline you earlier, because I feared that you would react negatively and leave me for Eisav." Imagine, Yaakov was concerned that his righteous Reuven, who certainly despised everything that Eisav represented, would reject him to follow Eisav! This is how far one can go in rejecting

criticism. It was not what Yaakov had to say - it was Yaakov! It is difficult to accept rebuke from certain individuals. Yaakov understood this. Thus, he waited until shortly before he would be out of the picture to rebuke Reuven. The threat of authority would now be gone, and the words of rebuke would have their therapeutic effect.

In Europe, and later on in Eretz Yisrael, the function of delivering mussar was often assumed by a maggid, an individual who was not only a Torah scholar and ethical personality, he was also a powerful speaker who would captivate his audience with strong words interspersed with poignant vignettes and anecdotes. One of the greatest of the European maggidim was the Kelmer Maggid, who had the privilege of inspiring thousands with his powerful addresses. He courageously and valiantly fought the Maskilim, members of the Enlightenment, who were bent on doing everything possible to transform Yiddishkeit from a religion into a secular culture. Their bitter venom poisoned many unsuspecting Jews who fell prey to it, assimilated and even became apostates. Certainly, they could not permit the Maggid to undermine their efforts at destroying the Jewish People. Hence, they did everything possible to discredit him, slandering and fabricating vicious rumors to disparage him. This did not deter his efforts at reaching out to the people. On the contrary, he rebuked when necessary and did not mince words in calling attention to the people's shortcomings.

He was constantly rebuking the businessmen of his community to maintain standards of rectitude and to be the paragons of integrity for which the Jewish nation has long been known. Yet, there will always be those who have slipped through the cracks, who have fallen prey to the allure of a quick and easy return on their investment - even if it means acting unscrupulously. After all, one has to live! His community, being a crossroads town, served as a marketplace for many merchants. One of the primary items that was in high demand was salt. Indeed, there were two types of salt: the common white salt, and a very expensive strong red salt. One of the crooked merchants would take white salt and dye it red in order to sell it for the elevated price. When the Maggid heard about this scandalous act, he proceeded to the store, berated the merchant and, upon receiving no reaction, stood in front of the store proclaiming, "Whoever is in need of melach Sodomis, salt from Sodom, should come here." He publicized the names of the perpetrators and directed customers to go to the other merchants instead.

This, of course, did not sit well with the merchants or with the members of the Haskalah, who did not tolerate the power the Maggid was wielding in the community. They went to the governor and disparaged the Maggid, claiming that he was poisoning the minds of the people against the government. He was initiating a rebellion and must be stopped. This was a serious enough allegation to prompt the governor to have the Maggid arrested on these trumped up charges and placed in a jail cell to await trial.

The Maskilim were ecstatic. The merchants were overjoyed, as business could now continue as usual. A few days later, the superintendent of police released the Maggid with a proclamation that anyone who impugned the character of the Maggid would be severely punished. This came as a surprise to the Maggid's detractors who thought that they finally had him tucked away out of sight. No one could understand what prompted this new ruling. Clearly, someone had pulled some strings.

As usual, they were wrong. When one lives by the truth, his integrity shines through and protects him. It is the prevaricators and the chameleons who have the most to fear. Apparently, the maggid had a habit that, whenever he would send a letter via messenger, rather than sending it through the mail, he would go to the post office, purchase the amount of stamps necessary to mail that letter and proceed to tear the stamps up in the post office. This behavior confused the post-master, who could not

understand why this elderly gentleman would purchase stamps and then tear them up!

The Maggid explained that, upon occasion, he would send a letter via messenger. Feeling that this act incurred a loss to the government because he had not availed himself of the mail service, he would purchase the stamps anyway and tear them up. This way his letter arrived at its destination, and the government did not lose out in the process. When the postmaster had heard that the Maggid was interred in prison, he immediately sought out his good friend, the superintendent of prisons, to inform him of the Maggid's integrity. A person of such rectitude was surely the victim of fictitious allegations designed to hurt him. This demonstrated how far people will go to avoid being rebuked with the truth, and it also shows how maintaining a sterling character can serve as one's greatest legacy.

You shall not tremble before any man, for the judgment is G-d's. (1:17)

The judges are enjoined to be unwavering in their commitment to truth and justice. Nothing should sway them from rendering an impartial verdict. Moreover, Rashi adds that if a judge errs in judgment and grants remuneration to an individual who is undeserving of it, then the judge "compels" Hashem to repay the other person the money he has lost. On Rosh Hashanah, Hashem decrees how much money "Reuven" will earn during the course of the year. If "Shimon" comes along and falsely claims that he is owed five thousand dollars by Reuven, it affects Hashem's decree. He now must provide another five thousand dollars to Reuven if the judge rules against him. This may be alluded to in the pasuk in Tehillim 82:1, "G-d stands in the Divine Assembly." Hashem is also a litigant in every monetary claim. An error in rendering justice affects Him.

This idea should present to us a new vista in understanding our relationships and actions vis-?-vis our fellow man. Every indiscretion, every penny that we take from someone, because we feel it is owed to us, we must take into consideration that not only are we stealing from man, we are infringing on the Almighty and causing Him to repay that individual what we have taken from him.

All of you approached me and said, "Let us send men ahead of us and let them spy out the land." (1:22)

Rashi notes the disparity between the way that the people approached Moshe Rabbeinu with their request for spies and the way that the people came forward before the Giving of the Torah. Here, Moshe uses the word, "kulchem" - all of you - to emphasize that they all came together, in a disorderly and disrespectful manner. Young people had no respect for their elders and pushed in front of them. Older people showed a similar disrespect for their leaders, when they surged in front of them. This was in sharp contrast with the order and decorum that reigned during the Giving of the Torah. We wonder why Rashi finds it necessary to draw a contrast to the Giving of the Torah. Why can he not simply say that the people approached Moshe in an undignified manner, without drawing any parallels to any other episodes?

The Kli Yakar explains that citing their behavior concerning the Giving of the Torah was, in effect, a crucial part of Moshe Rabbeinu's rebuke to the People. When he saw them arrive at Har Sinai in an orderly fashion, everybody in his place, with dignity and restraint, he was slightly taken aback. After all, this was to be the zenith of their lives, the apex of Jewish history. Where was the trembling? Where was the excitement, the passion, the awe? The Heavens were opening up. The mountain was

aflame. The Shechinah was about to be revealed in a manner heretofore unprecedented and never to occur again. Yet, these people came as if it were just another day. It must be that they were of such a refined, noble nature, that exerting self-control over their emotions was second nature for them.

When they approached Eretz Yisrael, however, they manifest a totally different attitude. Here, they trembled. Suddenly, they were nervous and overwhelmed with fear. They began pushing and shoving, acting in a manner atypical from that of the orderly, dignified people they had presented themselves as at the Giving of the Torah. What catalyzed this sudden change in emotion and personality?

Veritably, they did not change. It was the same people who were finally showing their true colors. At the Giving of the Torah, they simply did not have it. They were going through an experience in which they were more spectator than participant. When someone cares about something, when the experience has meaning for him, he reacts accordingly.

Two hundred years ago, there lived a tzaddik, righteous person, called Horav Avraham HaMalach. Rav Avraham, the "angel," was the only son of the Mezritcher Maggid, zl. Horav Yitzchak, zl, m'Radvill heard of him and wondered how a human being could be called "the angel." Determined to discover the truth about Rav Avraham, he traveled to Chustov to find out what earned this individual such a unique appellation.

Arriving in town just before Tisha B'Av, he davened Maariv and sat down on the ground with the other worshippers to read Megilas Eichah. As soon as the word "Eichah" was uttered by the reader, a piercing cry emanated from the "Malach's" mouth. He bent over, his head positioned between his knees and began to weep. He remained in this position throughout the reading of Eichah and the Kinnos that were recited afterward. During this time, Rav Yitzchak just watched and waited for the "Malach" to rise up and go home. He did not.

It was midnight, and the "Malach" was still bent over - crying for the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash. Rav Yitzchak, exhausted from the trip, and in a weakened state from fasting, decided to take a short nap. He woke up at dawn when the people were slowly returning to shul. Looking for the "Malach," he noticed that he had not changed his position all night. His head was bent over between his knees - and he continued to cry.

Rav Yitzchak said that such a person rightfully deserves to be called an angel. This individual was beyond the scope of the human dimension. One manifests his true feelings. The "Malach" felt the pain of Klal Yisrael and reacted accordingly. Exhibiting self-control does not always mean that one has self-control. It might mean that one has no understanding of the proceedings or simply does not care. The litmus test is how he reacts in other instances.

And we turned and we journeyed to the wilderness... and we went around Har Seir for many days. And Hashem spoke to me, saying, "Enough of your going around the mountain. Turn yourselves northward.." (2:1-3)

Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, renders this pasuk homiletically. He cites the Midrash that explains the words, Penu lachem tzafonah, "Turn yourselves northward." Klal Yisrael complained to Hashem, "Master of the Universe, Eisav's father, Yitzchak, blessed him with the words, By your sword shall you live (Bereishis 27:40). You approved of this blessing. Yet, You say to us now to hide from him. To where shall we flee?" Hashem replied, "When you see that he is prepared to attack you, flee to the Torah." Tzafonah is a reference to the Torah, as it says, "He lays up (Yitzpon) sound wisdom for the upright" (Mishlei 2:7). What is the Midrash teaching us, and how can we apply it to contemporary life?

Rav Rogov explains that our efforts to approach Eisav and his descendants reflect our insecurity in searching for ways to ingratiate ourselves to the host countries that have become our homes during our long exile. We are scared. We are different. We do not realize that being different is our distinction. Yet, we constantly attempt to develop a relationship based on ironing out our differences, by becoming more like them and less like we should be. We have erred by clinging to the belief that all of our woes are the result of our life of separation. If we would only acculturate and assimilate with the gentile world, we think that we will be accepted. This tragedy of Jewish history has repeated itself many times. Whenever we humble ourselves, when we fawn over our gentile neighbors, the strategy backfires. We are rebuffed as they remain unwilling to tolerate us, their innate hatred clouding any intellectual appreciation they might have for us.

Our only hope for improving our lot is to stop "circling the mountain," stop running after Eisav, obsequiously trying to blend in and receive his acceptance. It is time to "turn ourselves northward," to apply ourselves to the holy Torah. Rather than chase them in the streets, malls, and theaters, let us return to the shuls and batei medrash and do what we do best: daven and study Torah. By immersing ourselves in our heritage, we will develop a sense of mission that will ultimately lead to our meriting salvation and an ingathering of exiles.

This is the Midrash's message, "Enough of your going around the mountain!" There is no reason to search the mountain of Eisav for salvation or assistance. You will not find it there. Turn to the only true source of Jewish salvation: the Torah. As we return to the inner sanctums of our people, we will discover the sanctuary within ourselves and, consequently, merit Divine salvation.

And Di Zahav. (1:1)

Was there such a place as Di Zahav? Rashi explains that this term is an allusion to a place in which Klal Yisrael sinned. Di Zahav literally means, "enough gold." Moshe Rabbeinu chastised the people, saying, "You became spoiled because you had so much gold, causing you to make the Golden Calf." The problem with this exposition is that it seems to be more of a defense than a rebuke. Moshe justified the Golden Calf, explaining that the people had overreacted to the multitude of gold that was suddenly theirs. Another question asked by Horav David Feinstein, Shlita, concerns the fact that Moshe seemed to be implying that wealth only leads to evil. In Parashas Lech Lecha (Bereishis 12:2), however, Hashem promises Avraham Avinu, "And I will bless you." Chazal interpret this to be a blessing for wealth. Which is it: good or bad?

Rav David explains that essentially people manifest two different attitudes towards wealth: one good and one bad. One who is arrogant about his financial success will most likely ignore his responsibility to Hashem. After all, his wealth is his doing. He conveniently forgets the "Hashem factor" in life.

The individual, however, who maintains David Hamelech's words (Divrei Hayamim I, 29:14), "Everything is Yours, and from Your hand we have given to You," understands that all wealth belongs to Hashem, and the person is nothing more than a banker in Hashem's employ. Whatever he has received from Hashem is everything that he needs. He has whatever he requires for himself, and the remainder is to be distributed to the poor and used for other mitzvos. For him, wealth is a blessing. He does not feel that he has more than he needs. Indeed, he has exactly what he needs.

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, notes that these two attitudes distinguished Yaakov Avinu from Eisav. When the two brothers met, Eisav remarked about his wealth, Yeish li rav, "I have plenty" (Bereishis 33:9). He was indicating that he had more than he could use. It was all his, and he did not

feel obligated to anyone else for it. Yaakov, however, said, Yeish li kol, "I have everything." He realized that he had everything that he was supposed to have. It was now his responsibility to figure out what it is that Hashem, Who was the source of his wealth, wanted him to do with it.

This was Moshe's criticism of the Jews: "You thought that you had enough money, that your money was a play thing, something to enjoy, something to serve you. That is why you deviated and created a Golden Calf. Had you realized that wealth comes with a purpose, that Hashem's gifts are yours for a reason. Had you been aware that with wealth comes obligation, you would not have acted so foolishly."

On the other hand, Hashem knew that Avraham understood how to value and appreciate the wealth that He would grant him. He would help those in need, and he would sanctify Hashem's Name in the world. For someone with such a lofty attitude, wealth is truly a blessing.

These are the words which Moshe spoke to all of Yisrael. (1:1)

During the five weeks prior to his passing, Moshe Rabbeinu reviewed with Klal Yisrael their errors and the sins that they had committed during their forty-year trek in the wilderness. He neither castigated them harshly nor admonished them in an angry manner. Rather, he alluded to incidents and places in which their actions angered Hashem. Reproving a sinner is a mitzvah and a moral obligation. When we see someone engaged in a wrongdoing, we are enjoined to call his errant behavior to attention. This reproof must be carried out with love, sensitivity and consideration. The individual's dignity must be upheld. Our goal must be to help him avoid falling into the abyss of sin and to encourage his return to a Torah way of life. If our reproach, however, will have a negative effect, if it will deflate the individual, catalyzing depression and despair, the reproach can be counterproductive. Our critique must be couched in such a manner that it catalyzes teshuvah, repentance, - not despair.

Another instance in which rebuke is not the correct course of action is in a situation in which the rebuke is likely to be scorned. We find that Hashem informed Avraham Avinu of His plans to destroy the wicked city of Sodom. Avraham risked the wrath of Hashem by attempting to ameliorate the sentence. He succeeded in receiving a major concession from Hashem: Hashem would spare the city if it contained a certain number of righteous persons. Sodom was not spared, however, because the city lacked the requisite number of righteous persons. The question that should confront us is: Why, during this entire time, did Avraham not admonish the people of Sodom concerning their behavior? If they were so cruel, they should have been rebuked and taken to task. Nowhere do we find that Avraham attempted to offer words of reproach, or even tried to influence their return to a life of moral rectitude.

In response to this question, Horav Avraham Pam, zl, cites the Dubno Maggid who quotes the Talmud in Yevamos 65b, which says that just as there is a mitzvah to offer rebuke when it will be accepted, so, too, is it a mitzvah to withhold rebuke when it will not be accepted. They cite a pasuk in Mishlei 9:8, "Do not rebuke a scoffer, lest he hate you. Rebuke a wise man and he will love you." The second part of the pasuk (rebuke a wise man) seems to have no bearing on the point Chazal are emphasizing.

The Maggid explains that Chazal are teaching us an important lesson with regard to rebuke. One should not criticize people when he knows that they will not listen to his words. He who insists on rebuking others, despite a clear knowledge that he will be ignored, risks being considered a fanatic and

even losing his credibility altogether. This will affect his later capacity to effect any influence on the sinner. His potentiality for success in helping others has been compromised as a result of his being labeled a fanatic.

In an attempt to emphasize this point, Chazal quote the entire pasuk, which tells us that if one wants to succeed in rebuking a wise man, he must refrain from rebuking a scoffer, lest he hate him and destroy his validity and effectiveness. We now understand why Avraham Avinu did not bother to critique the people of Sodom. He understood that he would not succeed; his words would fall on deaf ears. Moreover, they would scoff at him and even hate him. This would preclude his ability to reach others. In order to inspire and influence the rest of the world, Avraham had to maintain his credibility. He could hardly afford to undermine his facility to influence and teach. By not castigating the people of Sodom, Avraham was preserving his ability to reprove others who would listen more responsibly.

This also explains why Noach's reproof of the people of his generation did not succeed. For one hundred and twenty years, he built an ark. He explained to everyone that he was trying to save them from certain death. They laughed; they scoffed; they ridiculed him. His pleas fell on deaf ears. Why? Because they labeled him a fanatic. Once the label was placed, it was readily accepted by all, because no one wants to hear a negative assessment of himself. If they could subvert his efforts by destroying his credibility, they could continue along their merry way, sin after sin, without being hampered by Noach. When it comes to rebuke, it is not what is said, but how it is said, and to whom.

Horav Mendel Kaplan, zl, the legendary Rosh Yeshivah in both Chicago and Philadelphia, was known for his acute sensitivity to people's feelings. When he gave mussar, reprimanded his students, he was as sensitive to their feelings as he was to the one they had inadvertently hurt. The students in the yeshivah were upset with the cook for the usual reason: no "variety" in their lunches. For the last thirteen days, the lunch menu had consisted of egg salad and red jello. A group of bachurim, young men, sent a sarcastic letter to the administration requesting a change - yellow jello and red egg salad. The administration responded, but the cook was crushed. She was so upset that for months she could not face the bachurim, turning her head away as they came into line for their portion.

One day, as Rav Mendel gave shiur, he interrupted the regular topic to discuss the importance of not embarrassing others. He cited the Talmud Berachos 43b that posits that it is better to jump into a fiery furnace than to embarrass someone in public. None of the students understood why the rosh yeshivah was interjecting this quote into the regular Talmud shiur until Rav Mendel concluded, "It would be better to eat nothing but jello and egg salad for an entire lifetime than to embarrass someone publicly." They suddenly realized to what he was referring. In his subtle and sensitive manner, he had conveyed his message to them.

Like everything He did for you in Egypt, before your eyes. (1:30)

When Hashem liberated Klal Yisrael from Egypt, He did more than free them from physical bondage. He made sure that the torment and misery to which they were subjected would also come to a halt. Hashem saw to it that the upheaval of the Egyptian experience would not be the Jew's companion when he left the bondage. The Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh notes this in his commentary to Parashas Beshalach. This is indicated by the fact that each Jew recognized his individual Egyptian tormentor. Prior to that Egyptian's drowning in the Red Sea, he was brought before the Jew, who assailed him for his subjugation. Afterwards, the Jew instructed his dog to eat the hand which the Egyptian used to beat

him. Furthermore, after the sea drowned the Egyptians, they were thrown back on the shore, so that the Jews could see that they were all gone. The Jews could now live safely, secure in the knowledge that the demons who persecuted them were destroyed.

Horav A. Dunner, Shlita, suggests that this is the reason for Chazal's exposition on the pasuk in the Shirah, Zeh Keili v'anveihu, "This is my G-d I will beatify Him," Chazal say, "Beatify yourselves before Him with mitzvos." They emphasized the significance of hiddur mitzvah, performing a mitzvah to its fullest, in the most dignified and beautiful manner. What relationship does hiddur mitzvah have with the parting of the sea and the drowning of the Egyptians? Rav Dunner explains that Klal Yisrael are hereby expressing their overwhelming appreciation to Hashem for saving them "b'hiddur" in a complete, fulfilled manner, making sure that they would not be anguished with the memories, or accompanied by the demons that normally follow a person after sustaining such an ordeal. In appreciation, we will perform His mitzvos with the utmost of hiddur.

And you shall not provoke war with them. (2:9)

Rashi notes the disparity between Hashem's admonishment concerning Bnei Ammon and the manner in which He instructed them not to engage Moav in battle. He did not tell them that they were forbidden to put the fear of G-d into them. Nothing was wrong with a display of weapons and armor - as long as there would be no war. Concerning Ammon, however, they were told explicitly that there was to be no contention whatsoever. Ammon was to be left alone: no fear, no battle. Why did Ammon receive such preferential treatment? What did they do to deserve such "favorable status"? Rashi attributes this to their great-grandmother's tznius, modesty. While she was no different from her sister, in that they both cohabited with their father, Lot, during his drunken stupor, she did not publicize her illicit behavior. Her moral "chastity" in contrast to that of her older sister merited her protection many years later for her descendants.

Our initial reaction to Rashi's statement would probably be, "That's it?" Does one little display of decency following an act of perversion make such a difference? It just seems a bit surprising. As Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, notes, however, Hashem has a different standard, and long after a simple action has been forgotten, He remembers it and issues the appropriate reward.

Two women: one aggrandized her perversion by publicizing it; the other was discreet about her degeneracy. Both received their due - or, at least, their descendants were either punished or rewarded. Their actions were neither ignored, nor forgotten.

With this in mind, let us now take into consideration the perek, chapter, of Tehillim recited by one's great-grandmother fifty or one hundred years ago. If Lot's daughter's decency was not forgotten, how much more so does Hashem remember our bubba's Tehillim, her tearful supplication for her progeny - both present and future? Now, it all makes sense. We see people who have strayed from the Torah way, who have deviated completely from the path chosen by their ancestors. We have given up hope for them. They will surely never return. Then, all of a sudden, they are back. They come to shul; they daven. They study Torah, and their children attend yeshivah. What happened? It was their bubba's Tehillim, her tears, her entreaties; They were not ignored. It just took a while.

We present two short stories about a mother's tears, a bubba's tears, and the effect they had many years later. Horav Aryeh Levine, zl, the venerable tzaddik of Yerushalayim, was once walking late at night in the dark streets of Yerushalayim when he chanced upon a woman sitting outside of her

tiny hovel, bent over, stitching a pair of pants to the dim light of a kerosene lamp. "Excuse me," Rav Aryeh asked, "why are you sitting outside stitching those pants so late at night?" The woman noticed who stood before her, and she quickly rose in respect, explaining, "You see, I must work very hard and very long to earn the extra money I need to pay for a good rebbe for my son. I am a widow, and I have very little money. I cannot permit my son to lose out." As she spoke, tears ran down her cheeks, as the pain in her voice came through loud and clear.

This woman succeeded. Her hard work, but, above all, her sorrowful and sincere tears paid off. Her work paid for her son's Torah education, and the tears of this widow pierced the Heavens and Hashem listened. Her son became a gadol ba'Torah, preeminent Torah leader, and the Rav of Yerushalayim - Horav Betzalel Zolti, zl.

Rabbi Yechiel Spero, in his first volume of *Touched by a Story*, offers a vignette about a mother's tears. What makes this story interesting is that the woman was not even observant. Yet, she had the right goals and she knew for what to cry. The first Minister of Education in the newly formed State of Israel was a non-observant Jew by the name of Zalmen Oran. Although secular in ideology, his convictions were sincere. Taking his position seriously, he served with dedication and commitment.

His wife, also secular in belief, did maintain certain "traditions" that had been handed down to her from her mother. Every Friday night, she would light the Shabbos candles, covering her eyes and praying that her children grow up to be as great as the greatest Jew. To her, the greatest Jew was none other than David Ben-Gurion, the Prime Minister. Week after week, she continued with the same prayer.

During the early stages of the formation of the statutes of the state, Ben-Gurion met with the preeminent Torah leader of the generation, the venerable Chazon Ish, zl, to discuss issues that were important to the nation's spiritual survival. While Ben-Gurion did not necessarily accept everything the Chazon Ish suggested, he left the meeting incredibly moved and impressed to the point of awe from the Chazon Ish's sensitivity and saintliness. He related his feelings to his cabinet, emphasizing his amazement with the Chazon Ish's angelic presence. Zalmen Oran went home that night and related this incident to his wife. That Friday night, Mrs. Oran once again entreated the Almighty that her children grow up to be like the greatest Jew. This time, however, her appreciation of the "greatest Jew" had been altered. She now hoped they would grow up to be like the Chazon Ish.

Hashem listened to her prayers, as this incident was related to Rabbi Spero by Rabbi Baruch Heyman, a rav in Yerushalayim. A man involved in many successful Torah endeavors, he is the grandson of Mrs. Zalmen Oran. A bubba's tears never go to waste.

Between Paran and Tofel and Lavan, and Chatzeiros and Di Zahav. (1:1)

Rashi explains that these names are all allusions to a variety of sins committed by the people. Paran is a reference to the wilderness of Paran from where the meraglim, spies, were sent out. In an alternative explanation, Rashi says that Chatzeiros also refers to the sin of the spies, since Chatzeiros is where Miriam was punished for speaking ill of Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe said to them, "You should have learned a lesson about lashon hora, defamatory speech, from what Hashem did to Miriam at Chatzeiros. Yet, you went ahead and spoke against Hashem and Eretz Yisrael." We wonder why it was necessary to rebuke them twice for the same sin.

The Maharal m'Prague explains that the first rebuke was for the actual sin of speaking

disparagingly. The second reproach was specifically for not learning a lesson from the incident of Miriam. Exclusive of the actual sin is another indiscretion - that of a failure to derive a deterrent from what happened to Miriam as a result of her strong criticism of Moshe. One who sees the effect of a sin and does not take note to correct his own ways is by the omission itself committing a sin.

These are the words which Moshe spoke... between Paran and Tofel and Lavan. (1:1)

Rashi explains that Moshe Rabbeinu's words were an admonishment to the people, and the places that he mentioned are allusions to various sins that occurred. "Paran" is a reference to the sin of the meraglim, spies, who were sent from the wilderness of Paran, and "Tofel" and "Lavan" refer to the Jews' complaints concerning the manna. Upon studying the text, two questions present themselves. First, the word "between" (between Paran and Tofel and Lavan) suggests a connection between the two aforementioned incidents. Yet, this is hardly possible, since the two sins occurred thirty-eight years apart. The meraglim sinned right at the beginning of their forty-year sojourn, while the complaint about the manna occurred near the end.

Second, the names Tofel and Lavan are enigmatic. The word "tofel" in Hebrew means to attach, and "lavan" means white. These definitions imply that the people attached one word to another to formulate their complaint about the manna, which happened to be white. What aspect of the Torah's allusion to the manna underscores its color?

In addressing these questions, Horav David Feinstein, Shlita, suggests that the connection between the two sins was the Jews' complaining. In the incident of the spies, they complained about Eretz Yisrael; concerning the manna, they referred to it as lechem haklokeil, the light bread. The common thread that runs between them is that in both cases they were tired of living under Hashem's constant observation. Chazal teach us that the manna was white because it whitened, cleansed, Klal Yisrael's sins.

The manna communicated a compelling lesson to each individual when he gathered it. Each day, they were able to gather only one measure of manna per family member. This measure was edible for only that day. If they would attempt to gather extra, it was useless, since it would disappear by the time they arrived at home. Also, any leftover manna became wormy at the end of the day. Thus, it was essential that Klal Yisrael maintain its utmost faith that Hashem would provide their gift of manna on the next day. Every day, each Jew would examine his actions: Was he worthy of manna for another day - or not? He knew that if he was not worthy, he would not receive Hashem's gift. Consequently, the daily manna catalyzed a powerful teshuvah, repentance movement, by which daily introspection became a common and natural occurrence.

During the episode of the spies, the Jews were concerned that once they arrived in Eretz Yisrael, their every action would once again be under constant Heavenly scrutiny. Does not Moshe later tell the Jews that Eretz Yisrael is a land "where the eyes of Hashem are on it from the beginning of the year until the end of the year"? (Devarim 11:12) They knew that they were leaving the scrutiny created by the daily manna to live under the scrutiny of Eretz Yisrael. This was very likely why the spies' negative report made them want to go back to Egypt. They were not interested in living under such close perusal.

During both incidents, the spies and the manna, the people had a parallel complaint: Hashem was watching them too closely. It was more than they were willing to confront. When one is insecure about himself and diffident about his actions, if he questions the integrity of his service to Hashem, it

would make sense that he could not deal with scrutiny from above. He has two choices: either he cleans up his act and changes his ways; or he learns to live with scrutiny.

You shall not fear in the face of man. (1:17)

The Torah exhorts the judges not to adjudicate out of fear, lest it color their attitude toward the case.

When the Brisker Rav, zl, was rav in Brisk, there lived a young man from a wealthy family who was a moser, government informer, who was the cause of much pain and anguish in the community. When his mother died, she left in her will that when her son married, the rav of Brisk should officiate at the wedding ceremony. A short while later, the young man became engaged, and he requested that the Brisker Rav officiate at his wedding. The rav refused emphatically, saying that it was forbidden to officiate at the wedding of an informer.

The groom offered the rav a substantial amount of money to change his mind, to no avail. The Brisker Rav was not swayed by material benefits. The young man threatened to go to the authorities and inform on the rav, as he had done before to another rav. The Brisker Rav was not moved by his threats. The community was in an uproar. They were acutely aware of the groom's threats and the dire consequences. The leaders of the community, together with the Rav's closest students, entreated him to rescind his decision.

On Motzoei Shabbos, the rav raised his cup to recite Havdalah, and at that moment another one of the rav's close students entered the house. The rav, knowing fully-well the purpose of his visit, became so agitated that he spilled the wine from the cup.

After he calmed down, the rav told him, "I know why you have come here. You should know that only one thing determines my actions - halachah, Jewish law. If you will prove to me that halachah permits me to officiate at the wedding of an informer - I will do so. If, however, you cannot, and the halachah is as I arbitrated it, then there is no alternative but to refuse to go through with this travesty."

Once Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, was asked to arbitrate a monetary dispute. His response to the questioner was that he had nothing to worry about. The questioner was concerned, lest people circulate rumors regarding his integrity in business, asserting that he was not acting in accordance with halachah. Rav Chatzkel replied, "What will people say? This is a common malady. What did people say when they walked behind Boaz's coffin at his funeral? Surely, the slanderers were saying, 'He died the day after he married Rus, the Moabite. For transgressing a Biblical ordinance, Hashem immediately punished him.' This is what some people were saying. They were certainly not aware of Chazal's interpretation of 'Movi v'lo Moavis,' a (male) member of Moav, but not a Moabite, female member. Rus was totally permitted to Boaz, yet people talk. Who says we must concern ourselves with those who are unschooled and not proficient in Jewish law?"

Furthermore, not only was this absolutely not a punishment for Boaz, on the contrary, it was a blessing. Hashem, the Mesabev sevivos, cause of all causes, catalyzed a chain of events that Boaz should merit one more mitzvah, one more unprecedented opportunity - to sow the seeds of Moshiach

Tzidkeinu, one day before he was to leave this world." As usual, there are always those who will see things in the negative, because they look through a distorted spectrum. Then there are those who look with an emes, with veracity, and see the positive aspect of an occurrence. It all depends on the lens through which one gazes.

But Hashem did not listen to your voice and He did not give ear to you. You stayed in Kadesh many days, (as many) as the days that you dwelt. (1:45,46)

Rashi tells us that they remained in Kadesh for nineteen years, half of the thirty-eight remaining years they were to spend in the wilderness. In the Midrash, Chazal say that Tefillah oseh mechtzah, "Prayer makes/accomplishes one-half." The Netziv, zl, explains that when Klal Yisrael heard the terrible decree that befell them, that they would now have to spend thirty-eight more years in the wilderness, they cried bitterly and supplicated Hashem to rescind His devastating decree. While their prayer did not fully succeed in eradicating Hashem's decree, it did achieve partial success in that they were allowed to remain in one place for an extended period of time, cutting back on their wandering. The Netziv teaches us a compelling lesson. One should never despair, even if he does not notice an apparent response to his prayers. No prayer is wasted. The response may be negative, but there certainly is a positive consequence as a result of one's prayer.

Our gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders, exemplified the three pillars which sustain the world. Torah, Avodah and Gemillus chasadim - the study of Torah, service to G-d, i.e. prayer, and acts of loving-kindness. Yet, there were individuals who, besides exemplifying distinction in Torah knowledge, their avodas ha'lev, service of the heart, was quintessential. The Steipler Rav, himself an individual whose prayers were known for their wondrous efficacy, said about the Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, Horav Yehudah Zev Segal, zl, that he was the Amud ha'Tefillah, Pillar of prayer, of our generation. Anyone who saw the Rosh Yeshivah daven witnessed avodah sh'blev at its zenith. When the Rosh Yeshivah prayed, he felt himself in the presence of the Almighty in every sense of the word. I once had the privilege of seeing him recite the Birkas Asher yotzar; it was an experience I will always remember.

On a return flight from Eretz Yisrael, the Rosh Yeshivah was in the midst of Shemoneh Esrai, when the plane was struck by lightning. The passengers were understandably shaken and remained so, until the pilot announced the all-clear. A secular Jew who observed the Rosh Yeshivah continue his Shemoneh Esrai throughout the ordeal as if nothing had occurred, seemingly oblivious to the anxiety shared by all the passengers, said, "It was surely in the rabbi's merit that we were saved."

As an aid to proper kavanah, concentration, during his prayers, the Rosh Yeshivah recited every Tefillah from a text. His Asher Yotzar was recited from a Siddur with the intensity and concentration of a person saying Neilah, the closing prayer on Yom Kippur.

The Rosh Yeshivah saw nothing belittling in davening from a Siddur with a translation. In fact, he felt that this improved one's concentration. On Hoshanah Rabah one year, someone offered him a card on which were printed the Hoshanos to facilitate encircling the Bimah with a Lulav and Esrog. The Rosh Yeshivah thanked the person, but declined to use the card saying that he preferred to daven with his large Siddur, even though it was somewhat cumbersome, because it contained a translation.

Kavanah was something he would always emphasize concerning davening. He advised his talmidim, students, to be mindful of the axiom in Orach Chaim 1:4: "Better a little with kavanah than a lot without kavanah."

The Rosh Yeshivah felt that spiritual refinement was the result of proper Tefillah. He felt that the term avodas ha'lev, service of the heart, had a deeper connotation. Prayer, when approached

properly, is a service that refines the heart, as it draws the supplicant closer to the Almighty and deepens his understanding of his purpose in life.

His efforts in Tefillah were based to a large degree in his firm faith in prayer's power to help in the most devastating situations, even when everything seemed hopeless. Once, an x-ray indicated that a certain individual was stricken with a dreaded disease. A subsequent x-ray showed no sign of illness. The Rosh Yeshivah explained the apparent contradiction between the x-rays in the following manner. "The first x-ray was not wrong. Your disease was there, but the power of prayer rescinded the decree."

When a yeshivah student was diagnosed with a dreaded disease, the doctors attempted to save his life through surgery. Regrettably, the surgery was not successful in reversing the course of the disease, and the doctors soon despaired for his life. The boy's father approached the Rosh Yeshivah for a brachah, blessing, for his son's life. Following the Chafetz Chaim's suggestion, the Rosh Yeshivah told the father that if he would dedicate his son's life to Torah, he would have a complete recovery. Although the father had been planning for his son to pursue a secular career, he readily agreed to the Rosh Yeshivah's suggestion. That night as the Rosh Yeshivah davened the Shemoneh Esrai of Maariv, he was heard saying, Tatte! Ich hob em tzugezagt, "Father! I promised him." He felt that his Tefillah achieved success - a feeling that was soon substantiated when the family sought a second opinion. The second doctor felt that the patient's alarming weakness was attributed to having been given the wrong medication. As soon as a new prescription was administered, the boy's condition improved. Today, he is a healthy, outstanding talmid chacham, Torah scholar, and has raised a beautiful family.

Due to his total devotion to Tefillah, the Rosh Yeshivah became an individual that people would turn to from far and wide to receive his blessing. Even gentiles sought his blessing. A surgeon who operated upon the Rosh Yeshivah asked that he be blessed with steady hands, so that he could continue his work for many years to come. The Rosh Yeshivah was once hospitalized and was attended to by a talmid, student. The talmid happened to be in the corridor and noticed a gentile woman pacing nervously up and down the corridor. He asked her what was the matter. She replied that her four-year old son had fallen from a tree and lay in a coma. When the talmid related this later to the Rosh Yeshivah, he appeared pained and said, "And what if he is a gentile? - Does it not say, V'rachamav al kol maasov, 'And His mercy is on All His works.' And this is a child untainted by sin." He instructed the talmid to ask the woman for her son's name and then mentioned the name and repeated the phrase, V'rachamav al kol maasov.

A few days later, the woman joyfully informed the talmid that her son had regained consciousness, and the doctors were hopeful for a complete recovery. "It is all due to the Rabbi's prayers," she declared.

Upon being told the news, the Rosh Hayeshivah in his inimitable manner responded, V'rachamov al kol maasov.

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael. (1:1)

In the end of the fortieth year of their sojourn in the wilderness, Moshe Rabbeinu is about to take leave of the flock that he had nurtured. He commenced his rebuke on Rosh Chodesh Shevat and culminated his words on the day that he died - the seventh of Adar. The Sifri comments that Moshe purposely decided to admonish the people close to the time when he was leaving this world. He learned this practice from Yaakov Avinu, who also chided his sons prior to his death. Chazal suggest four reasons that one might leave the rebuke until the end - close to his death: first, so that one rebukes only

once and not many times; second, so that the one who is reprov'd will not continue to be embarrassed in the presence of he who rebuked him; third, so that he not have the opportunity to deliver any complaints or display hatred toward the individual who had rebuked him; last, when one lectures someone close to his departure from this world, the chances are good that the object of his rebuke will remain to listen to what he is being told. People manifest respect and affinity towards those who are on their deathbeds. It seems implied that people are more likely to listen and accept criticism from someone who is about to die. Why? What prevents the individual from turning his back on the person who is rebuking him? What is restraining him?

Horav Mordechai Miller, zl, explains that human nature dictates that one does not concede or recognize that he is the beneficiary of many blessings until that moment in which they are almost taken away from him. One appreciates what he has when he almost loses it. We take our lives for granted, paying lip-service to Hashem for this special gift, but only really showing our true appreciation when we are about to lose it. The Bnei Yissachar explains that people demonstrate material/physical love particularly when a separation is about to occur. Two friends can go through years of friendship without exhibiting any external signs of love for one another. Only when they are about to separate for an extended period of time do they display that dormant love.

To rebuke is to care; to reproach is to love. One who does not care about his friend does not bother to criticize his deficiencies, - simply because he does not care. One who is a true friend seeks every opportunity to raise the level of his friend's spiritual, moral and ethical standing. The capstone of a relationship comes to the fore at the moment when a separation is about to take place. This is especially true if the separation is to be permanent. What better and more appropriate time for Moshe, the quintessential leader, teacher, surrogate father and friend of the Jewish People, to bring their shortcomings to the attention of Klal Yisrael.

While it is essential for he who reprimands to do so lovingly, it is equally important that the individual he is reproaching be mature and realize that everything is being said for his own good. Regrettably, while we may have wonderful intentions when we offer rebuke, those constructive intentions must be conveyed to the one being rebuked or the rebuke will fall on deaf ears.

Horav Eliezer M. Shach, zl, derives a compelling lesson from Rashi. In his commentary, Rashi explains that Moshe's decision to rebuke Klal Yisrael shortly before his death is supported by the practice of Yaakov Avinu, who did the same. Rav Shach says that from here we learn that one must have a strong reason to delay rebuke, for he will need to explain why he waited. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, would demand of rabbinic leadership that they not tarry in critiquing their congregants. If something was amiss, it should be pointed out immediately. He would explain that when these congregants would one day stand in judgment before the Heavenly Tribunal, they would be asked, "Did you study Torah? Did you deal ethically with your neighbors?" No excuse would be accepted. Hashem does not tolerate empty reasons for one's failure to keep his end of the bargain. The congregants will then say, "We thought that we were acting appropriately, since the rav in our community never complained about our religious activities or lack thereof. We then figured that all was well." This excuse is a powerful one - one that will regrettably bring the onus of guilt upon the rav for his failure to carry out his responsibility as a Torah leader.

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael. (1:1)

Rebuke is far from simple. It is difficult for the one who renders the admonishment and difficult for he who is being reproached. In his commentary to Sefer Mishlei 9:8, the Gaon M'Vilna writes that *tochachah*, rebuke, is like a mirror that presents before an individual a clear picture of his real self. He can either look at the image and accept what it shows, or he can ignore the image and go about his business as usual. The Sefas Emes says that the word *tochachah* has its root in the word *toch*, which means inside. The purpose of rebuke is for the words to enter into the person's psyche and be internalized, so that it can have the greatest effect on him.

There is much to be derived from Moshe Rabbeinu's method of reprimand. He spoke only in allusion, so that he would not embarrass the people - in order to maintain their self-esteem. He spoke shortly before his death for many reasons. He sought no dialogue. He said what had to be said and hoped it would be accepted in the manner that it was rendered - with love and sensitivity.

In deference to Klal Yisrael, we must add that while not everyone can dole out criticism correctly, it is equally hard to accept. Yet, Klal Yisrael listened and accepted the critique, because they knew it was sincere.

Shlomo Hamelech says in Mishlei 9:8, "Do not rebuke a scoffer. The Shelah Hakadosh explains this to mean that one should not merely focus on the person's shortcomings and indiscretions, for if we emphasize the fact that he is a "letz," then he will only hate you. We should focus instead on his wisdom, build him up, praise him, and then offer our critique. When criticism is couched with praise, the reproval will be accepted, catalyzing the desired effect.

The Chafetz Chaim, zl, would travel from village to village selling his seforim. He was once in Vilna where he noticed a man enter a restaurant and in a gruff, insolent voice demand a piece of roast duck and a glass of whiskey. When the waitress served him, he quickly grabbed the portion. Without reciting a *berachah*, he gulped down his food and washed it down with his glass of whiskey. No thank you, no *berachah*, no *menschlichkeit* - whatsoever. The Chafetz Chaim was shocked at this display of uncouth, beastly behavior.

The innkeeper, seeing the Chafetz Chaim's shock, dissuaded him from saying anything to the man, claiming that he was a veteran of Czar Nikolai's Army. He had been taken from his home as a child and conscripted to Siberia and other miserable outposts for forty years. It was no wonder that he acted like such an untamed animal. He had not been in a civilized environment for most of his life. He never saw a Jew, let alone a *tzaddik*, such as the Chafetz Chaim. "Please Rebbe," the innkeeper begged, "ignore him. It is not befitting the Rebbe's dignity to speak to him. He will only act with disrespect and impudence towards the Rebbe."

"Do not worry about me," the Chafetz Chaim smiled. "I know how to speak to such a Jew. Trust me, good will yet emerge from our encounter."

The Chafetz Chaim approached the soldier, stuck out his hand and - in a friendly voice - said, "Shalom Aleichem, Is it true what I just heard about you: that as a young boy you were forcibly taken from your home and sent together with other youngsters to Siberia? You were raised among the gentiles, who many times had sought to estrange you from your religion. You never had the opportunity to study one word of Torah. You underwent many painful trials and tribulations. You were forced to eat non-kosher food. Indeed, you suffered the vicissitudes of Gehinom, Purgatory, on this world. Yet, you did not renege your religion. Despite all of your sufferings, you still remained a Jew. You are indeed fortunate. If I could only be worthy of your portion in Olam Habah, the World to Come. Your *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, for Judaism is unparalleled. To have suffered for almost forty years and to still identify with the religion of your ancestors is nothing short of incredible."

The Chafetz Chaim finished speaking. He looked into the eyes of the soldier who was shedding bitter tears - tears that emanated from a pure heart. When he was notified who it was that was speaking to him, he grabbed hold of the saintly Chafetz Chaim and kissed him, as he wailed bitterly for forgiveness for a life that was empty of religion, ethics and morals.

The Chafetz Chaim turned to him and said, "Someone such as you, who has sustained so much and remained a Jew - if you would only accept upon yourself from here on to observe the Torah and mitzvos, your eternal reward would be boundless." Needless to say, the Chafetz Chaim's unique approach to rebuke proved effective and the soldier became an observant Jew, fully committed to the Torah way of life.

How can I alone carry your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels? (1:12)

Parashas Devarim is always read on the Shabbos which precedes Tisha B'Av. This is due to the word eichah, how, the opening word of Megillas Eichah, which is read on Tisha B'Av. Indeed, the word eichah has become synonymous with Tisha B'Av and mourning. In the Midrash Eichah, Chazal say three prophesized using the word eichah: Moshe Rabbeinu, Yeshayah HaNavi, and Yirmiyahu HaNavi. Moshe said, "How can I alone carry your burdens?" Yeshayah said, "How did (Klal Yisrael) become like a harlot?" Yirmiyahu said, "How does she (Klal Yisrael) sit alone?" What is the Midrash alluding to? Is the association between the "eichahs" applicable to the word alone, or is there an underlying message to be derived herein? Perhaps the two eichahs echoed by the Neviim have a relationship with one another in that Yeshayah decries the sin and Yirmiyahu laments the punishment. What does Moshe Rabbeinu's eichah have to do with the others? Furthermore, Moshe's complaint regarding the need for judges to assist him does not seem to be in the correct place. Until this point Moshe has been criticizing Klal Yisrael for their past iniquities. He begins with the sin of the Meraglim, spies, and goes off on what seems to be a tangent, bemoaning the fact that he alone must shoulder the responsibility of judging the people.

I once heard it explained that in the words, "provide for yourselves distinguished men, who are wise, understanding, and well-known to your tribes," (1:13) Moshe was alluding to a serious problem that threatened the very existence of Klal Yisrael. He was acutely aware that it was necessary to get judges for each tribe who were members of that tribe, because no tribe would accept a judge that hailed from another tribe. Perhaps he was testing them: Would they accede to accepting a judge who was from another tribe? They responded in the affirmative. Yes, we think it is a great idea to appoint judges. Of course, we want one from our own tribe.

The lack of trust between the tribes was at the foundation of the spies' sin. The people wanted spies - one from each tribe, because filial trust was something they did not possess. When you have twelve spies from different tribes, with disparate perspectives, each with his own personal agenda and focus, is it any wonder that the mission resulted in disaster? They were not working together - they were working against each other. Each one had to demonstrate his own personal dedication to the nation. Thus, they could not accept what the other Nasi/spy said, because he was from a different tribe. Yet, if one Nasi claimed that it was dangerous to enter Eretz Yisrael, they could not triumph in battle against its inhabitants - the other Nesiim were compelled to agree. After all, if they disagreed, it would appear as if they did not care about the nation. In this manner, one Nasi could force the hand of the others. The eichah which decried the need to have different spies from each tribe led to the eichah which lamented the destruction of Yerushalayim.

Any matter that is too difficult for you, you shall bring to me and I shall hear it. (1:17)

Many people want to lead - most are incapable - but that does not seem to stop them. A rav should not be remote, inflexible and uncaring. He should have a profound influence on the daily lives of his flock. Yet, this does not stop many from seeking positions of leadership. A rav should certainly be a scholar, but not every scholar should be a rav. A rav should be people-oriented, a communicator, friendly, compassionate and sensitive to the needs of all his members. Yet, these criteria do not stop them from assuming positions of leadership.

Horav Eliezer M. Shach, zl, adds another perspective to the short list of criteria for successful rabbinic leadership: the rav has to be able to say, "I do not know." Rav Shach relates that when Horav Shmuel Salant, zl, rav of Yerushalayim, passed away, they were in a quandary as to whom to ask to fill this august position. The rabbinic leadership of Yerushalayim sent a request to Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl, Brisker Rav, to elicit his guidance in regard to a certain Torah scholar. Because he was a G-d-fearing individual who possessed a brilliant mind and an encyclopedic knowledge of the Torah, they felt they had found the right person to fill the vacancy left by Rav Shmuel Salant.

Rav Chaim responded with the following, "While it is certainly true that the rav in question is a great gaon, Talmudic scholar, I, however, wonder if someone were to refute his lecture, would he have the fortitude to concede error. Since I am unsure in regard to his ability to say, I erred, I cannot recommend him for the position."

Indeed, when Rav Shach lauded the attributes of a certain rav in Bnei Brak, he would say that his greatest virtue was the fact that regarding an area in which he lacked proficiency, he would say, "I do not know." Regrettably, even this criterion does not stop many people from assuming a position of leadership.

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael. (1:1)

As Moshe Rabbeinu was about to take leave of his earthly abode, he bid farewell to the nation he had shepherded for forty years. His farewell consisted of a rebuke which guided the nation through their forty-year sojourn and alluded to the various places where they had angered Hashem. A true leader is one who cares about his flock. One who cares about his nation will reproach them at the appropriate time. Certainly, the most propitious time for admonishment is before the sin has occurred. The rebuke will endeavor to imbue the "potential" sinner with values that will prevent him from sinning. Rebuke, reproach, admonishment, warning and criticism are all terms describing the manner in which one can administer a critique of his friend's behavior. For the most part, it is rendered by a sensitive individual who has only the best interests of the other person on his mind. He feels compelled to speak out to prevent his friend from falling further into the abyss of sin.

The primary function of a mashgiach in a yeshivah is to be a spiritual guide and mentor to the students. He is an ethicist who admonishes with love, rebukes with sensitivity, and instructs the students in the spiritual and ethical standard of a ben Torah. Rebuking is a very difficult responsibility - one that -- if it is not performed correctly -- can do more damage than good. Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, was a contemporary mashgiach in the Kamenitz Yeshivah in Eretz Yisrael, who was well-known for his unique sensitivity towards each student. When he criticized, he was as concerned with

the presentation as he was with the actual content of his critique. Everything was weighed according to one criterion: What could he do or say that would make his criticism more palatable to the student?

He would never ask a student to act in a manner which he would not do himself. His integrity and sincerity prevailed on his students, opening their hearts to his words. He had a maxim for rebuke: "If reproof is necessary, present it in such a manner that indicates that you truly do not want to do what you are doing."

Rebuke should be soft-spoken -never harsh. Horav Dov Ber, zl, m'Lubavitch was a sensitive young boy. Upon hearing the Torah portion of the Tochechah, Rebuke, read one year, he became so disconcerted that a doctor was called to attend to him. The doctor questioned the young boy, "What happened all of a sudden this year that you became so agitated? The Tochechah has never seemed to bother you before." Rav Dov Ber replied, " Every other year, it was my father who read the Torah portion, and he would recite the Rebuke. When he recited it, it did not sound like a curse. This year, someone else read the Tochechah, and it sounded absolutely terrifying."

The manner in which the rebuke is given should inspire the listener, not agitate him. This is especially true when dealing with students. Rav Stern would focus on a student's sense of hakoras hatov, appreciation/ gratitude, when he was asked to discipline a student. "Do you have any idea what your rebbe does for you, to what great lengths he goes in order to prepare a lucid, well-thought out lecture? It is important that you appreciate your rebbe's devotion to you, so that you will accord him the proper respect." Gratitude is a fundamental of life. One who does not possess this character-trait is missing a vital component in his Jewish persona.

Indeed, a person is measured by the degree of hakoras hatov that he manifests. The greater the individual, the more appreciative he is of those from whom he has benefited. Rav Stern was once invited to a Bar Mitzvah celebration. It was a miserable, cold and rainy day. Yet, he felt obligated to attend the simchah. As he neared the hall, he noticed a taxi pull up and an elderly man struggle to get out. As he hurried to assist the man, Rav Stern noticed that it was none other than Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, the venerable Rosh HaYeshivah of Mir. He had that day delivered a hesped, eulogy, for Horav Mendel Saks, zl, and was now coming from the Mirrer Yeshivah where he had given his weekly shiur, lecture. "Why would the Rosh HaYeshivah trouble himself to come out in this weather after such an exhausting day to attend a Bar Mitzvah?" Rav Stern asked. Rav Chaim explained, "I feel indebted to the boy's father because he regularly attends my shiur."

Rav Stern was taken aback. "But, thousands come to hear the Rosh HaYeshivah's shiurim each week. Does the Rosh HaYeshivah feel indebted to each and every one of them?" Rav Chaim answered, "If this one did not come and that one did not come, I would soon be talking to the walls. Each and every one is significant." As I said before, it is the great people who recognize the obligation to appreciate and repay the benefit they receive from others.

Provide for yourselves distinguished men, who are wise, understanding and well-known to your tribes...So I took the heads of your tribes, distinguished men who were wise and well-known. (1:13.15)

Yisro mentioned seven attributes that Moshe should seek in a leader/judge. Moshe found only three. The Torah here mentions that he was to look for "distinguished men who were wise and well-known." As Rashi notes, he did not find nevonim, men with understanding. This seems strange. We can well appreciate that finding men of integrity who hate bribes might be somewhat difficult, because everybody has his own individual vested interests that can cloud over his perception of the truth. Quite often, one will even be able to justify taking a slight bribe if it is for a "good purpose." How is it possible, however, not to find men who are nevonim, understanding, in a nation that is called navon

v'chacham, understanding and wise?

Horav Shmuel David Walkin, zl, cited by Harav Zalmen Sorotzkin, zl, explains that veritably, there was a shortage of nevonim in Klal Yisrael. The Mishnah in Avos 4:1, defines a chacham, wise man, as one who is lomeid m'kol adam, learns from all men. He has an insatiable desire to study, to know, to develop greater proficiency in Torah. So too, a nation should be one that is lomeid mikol davar, learns from every episode, incident, experience. Nothing occurs just by chance. There is always a reason, and there is always something that can be derived from the experience.

Regarding the word/place Chatzeiros, Rashi explains that Klal Yisrael were being criticized for not learning a lesson from what happened to Miriam in Chatzeiros, for speaking against Moshe. They ignored the episode and the ensuing tragedy concerning the meraglim, spies, who spoke against Eretz Yisrael. This clearly indicated a lack of kavanah, understanding, on their part. To be witness to the effects of lashon hora, evil speech, and ignore the repercussions, demonstrates an unforgivable shortcoming, a deficiency in the ability to understand and act upon one's perceptions.

You shall not provoke them, for I shall not give you of their land...for as an inheritance to the children of Eisav have I given Har Seir. (2:5)

Rashi explains that Seir was Eisav's inheritance from Avraham Avinu. Lot, also, was compensated for standing by Avraham during his time of need. This is a reference to the incident of Sarah and Pharaoh. Lot was fully aware that Sarah Imeinu was Avraham's wife - not his sister. Lot kept the secret to himself, not exposing the truth, thereby saving Sarah. Hashem appreciated Lot's act of decency and granted him the lush, fertile lands that he sought. We wonder if this is the first time Lot was paid back for his kindness. Was he not spared the fate of his copatriots in Sodom? It would seem that being granted life is a very fair reward for keeping Avraham's secret safe. Why was he rewarded again?

It seems implied from here that hakoras hatov, gratitude/appreciation, is a far-reaching responsibility, because the favor that one receives has a far-reaching effect. The gratitude must be commensurate with the effect of the favor. Do we have any idea what would have happened had Lot divulged Sarah's true relationship to Avraham? That is what we owe him. Indeed, the land that he received hardly reimburses him for the far-reaching effect of his favor.

Let us look back for a moment at whom we - our generation of Torah-observant Jews - owe for our opportunity to live a Torah life, with yeshivos, day schools, and Bais Yaakov schools. For our children. It was not always like this. Indeed, seventy years ago, the scene was quite different. The spiritual landscape of America was hardly developed. The spiritual bounty that we have today is the result of the hard work, blood, sweat and tears of a small group of determined individuals who risked everything to build Torah on these shores. Interestingly, their approaches to Yiddishkeit were varied: Some were yeshivishe; others were chassidishe; and yet others were modern orthodox. Yet, they all worked together with great mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, to prepare the soil of America so that the spiritual landscape would be fertile and produce crops. We are their beneficiaries and, consequently, we are in their debt. Regrettably, it is so easy to take what we have for granted and ignore the sacrifice of our spiritual progenitors.

Perhaps it is because we might not want to recognize all of those in whose debt we are. After all, we have outgrown our forebears. We think that we are more observant, have more yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, are definitely more yeshivishe, and certainly are greater scholars. I wonder, however, do we have more mesiras nefesh for Torah? It certainly is easier to be smug when others have prepared everything for you.

It is imperative that we recognize all of those from whom we have benefited. There would be no yeshivos or kollelim if it were not for those "American" Jews working hand-in-hand with the Roshei Yeshivah, embers spared from the fires of the Holocaust, to build Torah in America. Yes, those old American Jews sitting in the back of the shul, who might appear to be simple people, are the giants who sixty years ago built our Day Schools, who went from door to door collecting pennies and searching for Jewish children to educate in the Torah way. No! Those Jews are far from simple; they are the pioneers and vanguards of Torah life in America. We owe them so much!

You shall not distress Moav. (2:9)

Chazal teach us in the Talmud Bava Kama 38a that Moshe was certain that Hashem would send him to vanquish the nation of Moav. After all, they were behind Midyan in the plan to destroy the Jewish nation. Their daughters were dispatched to seduce the Jewish men and lead them to immorality and idolatry. If Moshe was instructed to avenge Klal Yisrael of the Midyanites, surely at least the same was to apply to the Moavites. Hashem told him no. They were to be spared because of Rus, the Moaviah, who would later descend from this nation. She would be the Matriarch of the Jewish nation's Davidic monarchy. They would be spared because of her. How are we to understand this?

In his classic sefer, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, submits the following explanation. A person who has a pocket-watch invariably attaches it to himself via a chain. Similarly, we use key chains for the same purpose - to attach the key to us. Although there is no actual use from the chain itself, it becomes a necessity if one wants to make sure that he does not lose the watch or the key. The actual chain's only significance is its function as an attachment. This concept, likewise, holds true for each individual link in the chain. It is there for one purpose: to secure the watch or the key. If but one link in the chain were to break, the entire chain loses its viability -- and the key or watch will be lost.

This idea may serve as an analogy to explain the concept of zchus avos, the merit of ancestors. Hashem ensured the Patriarchs that the purpose of the entire Creation would be fulfilled through their descendants. The greatest merit, the climax of the trial and travail that has been an integral part of this world, will be reached when Moshiach Tzidkeinu is revealed and Hashem's truth will be recognized and disseminated throughout the world. From Avraham Avinu until Moshiach is a journey of thousands of generations and millions of people - all links in the chain from Avraham to Moshiach. They are all attached together for a reason: to connect the past to the future. Without the generations in between, there would be an insurmountable void between Avraham Avinu and Moshiach.

It is, therefore, quite possible that there have been individuals, families and even generations that have not been worthy to be sustained of their own accord. Yet, they serve as a necessary link in the chain of generations. Without them, there would be a gap -- a gap that would break the chain and cause the previous spiritual zenith to be lost. This is what Hashem told Moshe. You might think that Moav has no value and should be obliterated, especially after leading Klal Yisrael to such grave sin. What about the chain? From where will Rus descend? If there will be no Moav, there will be no Rus! Moav will be allowed to live, so that Rus will descend from them, and she will be the matriarch of monarchs. Horav Dessler suggests that this idea can in some way shed light on the age old query of "rasha v'tov lo": Why do the wicked prosper? With the above understanding, we perceive that in some situations they are part of a chain that can only continue through their existence. The wicked would not survive if they will not be sustained favorably. So the next time we see the wicked prosper, let us give some

thought. Perhaps down the road, they will have a descendant that will help us in some way. This is where trust in Hashem plays a pivotal role in our lives.

These are the words which Moshe spoke to all Yisrael...in the wilderness, in the waste, opposite the suf, between Paran and Tophel, and Lavan, and Chatzeiros, and Di Zahav. (1:1)
In this pasuk, Moshe Rabbeinu bids farewell to his flock. His leadership of the nascent nation is coming to an end, as he is about to leave this world. His predecessor, Yaakov Avinu, blessed his sons before he left this world. His blessing took on the form of rebuke, since rebuke represents true blessing. To guide someone out of love, to point out his shortcomings constructively with the hope that it will steer him onto the correct path of life is a blessing of the highest order. Indeed, when we see another person doing something wrong, we are obligated to call his errant behavior to his attention.

The act of rebuke must be sincere. It must be administered with love and sensitivity, with consideration and respect for the individual one is rebuking. Not everyone can cope with rebuke. At times, the rebuke can be stressful to the relationship. Moshe Rabbeinu took great care in choosing the correct words of rebuke. He only alluded to Klal Yisrael's sins by mentioning places whose names referred to their sins. Moshe was concerned that a direct rebuke might be counterproductive.

It is essential that the individual who is being rebuked be acutely aware that the one who is reproving him cares deeply for him. Otherwise, the reproof can have a negative effect. At times, one may choose not to rebuke, feeling that since it would probably not be accepted, it might be better to say nothing and simply leave the door open. One day, the individual who has strayed might realize the folly of his lifestyle and return "back home." If we close the door, if we turn our back on him, he may leave permanently, as illustrated by the following letter written by an individual who was lucky enough to see the way back - and found that he still had a place to which to go.

"Until a few years ago, I didn't take anything very seriously. I had graduated from a yeshiva high school and, unlike most of my class, I didn't feel I had what it took to be a learner. I didn't want to go to college right away, and I thought I would get a job and have a good time before I would settle down. My parents were not very pleased with this decision, but at that point in my life what my parents wanted was not terribly important to me.

"Regrettably, during this time I fell in with a group of friends who were not observant. At first, I told myself that I would not be influenced by them, but this turned out to be very far from the truth. In a very short period of time, I became exactly like them, and maybe worse, as I should have known better. Shabbos meant nothing -- Kashrus meant nothing, and I lived my life in a haze which even today I have trouble remembering.

"My parents were devastated. Maybe they didn't expect me to be the best of the best, but they certainly didn't expect this. As well as having destroyed my own life, I was on my way to destroying my family. Because of the bad influence I was having on my younger brothers, my father asked me to leave the house. When I moved out, I said some really cruel and spiteful things to my father. I can remember him standing silently at the door, with my mother crying at his side.

"I realize now that what I had seen in them as a weakness was actually enormous strength. I had no contact with anyone in my family for almost a year. Deep inside, I missed them very much, but I foolishly thought that I would be viewed as weak if I contacted them.

"One morning, I was shocked to find my father waiting for me outside of the apartment building I lived in. He looked at me with tired, worn eyes and asked if we could talk. Stubborn to the core, I

only nodded, and we walked to a corner coffee shop where we sat down. He told me how much everyone missed me and how I had been in their minds and hearts every second that I had been gone. He told me how my mother agonized over what had happened, blaming herself for not having been there for me. While he was talking, tears began rushing from his eyes.

"He told me that he wasn't here to lecture me. He just had one request. He wanted me to drive with him that afternoon to Monsey, NY, and say one chapter of Tehillim at the grave of a certain tzaddik. As far removed as I was from Yiddishkeit, I was still moved by his request.

"I told him that I couldn't go that day, but that I would go with him another time. In truth, I had plans to go with some friends to Atlantic City that evening, and I didn't want to cancel them. When I told him that I couldn't go that day, but that I would go with him another day, he reached across the table and took my hand in his and just looked at me with his tear-streaked sad face. I felt my own eyes begin to water and, rather than have him see me cry, I just agreed to meet him later that day.

"I made the necessary apologies to my friends, and later that day I met my father. We didn't talk much during the trip up. I remember getting out of the car with him and walking over to one of the graves. He put some rocks on top of the grave and gave me a Tehillim. We must have looked quite strange. My father in his long coat, a black hat perched on his head, and me with my leather bomber jacket and jeans. We didn't stay long. Ten minutes after we had arrived, we were on our way back. The return trip was as quiet as the trip there. My father let me off in front of my apartment building. I still recall the words he said to me as I got out of the car. He told me that no matter what may have happened between us and no matter what may happen in the future, I was always going to be his son and that he would always love me. I was emotionally moved by his words, but I was not experiencing the spiritual inspiration for which he may have been hoping. I shook my head at his words, and we parted company.

"The next morning, I woke up to some shocking news. On the way back from Atlantic City, my friends were involved in a head-on collision with a tractor trailer. There were no survivors.

"As I write this letter, I am overcome with emotion. I made a Bris today for my first child. My father was sandek and, as he held my son on his lap, his eyes met mine and we smiled. It was as if we had finally reached the end of a long journey.

"We have never talked to each other about that trip to Monsey, nor have I ever told him about the death of my friends. I just walked into their home that evening and was taken back with open arms and no questions asked.

"I don't think I will ever understand what happened that day. I just know that sitting here late at night with my son in my arms, I will try and be the father to him that my father was to me."

This poignant letter, a testimonial to the power of teshuvah, repentance, and the overwhelming love of a father for his son, conveys many messages. In truth, each of us will derive his own personal message. Some will learn that one never closes the door on a child. One must always retain hope that something will inspire his return. Others will observe that, regardless of how far a child strays, the innate love and filial bond that a child has for a parent endures. A child's negative behavior is usually his way of crying out for attention and love - not a rebellion against his parents. Last and most important, we now begin to have an idea of Hashem's love for us - His children. If a father of flesh and blood can forgive his child due to his undying love for him, how much more so does the Almighty, our Father in Heaven, wait patiently for our return.

How can I alone carry. (1:12)

In the annual cycle of parshios, we always read Parashas Devarim, on the Shabbos preceding Tisha B'Av, our national day of mourning. This Shabbos is known as Shabbos Chazon, after the opening word of the Haftorah, Chazon Yeshayahu, where the Navi Yeshayahu foretells of the great tragedy to befall the Jewish nation. Also, an obvious connection to Tisha B'Av is the word "Eichah," how it appears in Megillas Eichah, Book of Lamentations, which is read on Tisha B'Av. The Gaon M'Vilna sees a deeper connection between this parsha and Tisha B'Av in the third word of our pasuk, "levadi" - "Eicha esa levadi." "How can I alone carry?" He notes that a form of this word appears in the beginning of Megillas Eichah, "Eicha yashvah badad ha'ir" "How the city sits alone." This gives us a clue to the essence of our national tragedy.

Alone, loneliness, isolated, forsaken, deserted: these synonyms may shed light on Moshe Rabbeinu's critique and, by extension, Klal Yisrael's tragedy. Moshe was used to bearing the nation's burden. His complaint was that he was alone. We may add that Moshe certainly did not need any assistance. He was quite capable of leadership - even alone. As the popular maxim states, "It is lonely at the top." The quintessential leader of our nation was at the proverbial "top," and he was alone. Did anyone care? There are certain areas in life, particular endeavors, that can only be performed alone, by one individual undertaking projects, or making the critical decisions himself. The question is: Does anybody care? Is anybody aware of the responsibility placed on the shoulders of our leadership, a responsibility which they shoulder all alone? Do we empathize? It would be so much easier to shoulder the responsibility, if he knew that he was not really alone.

This same problem occurred in Yerushalayim. In the first chapter of Eichah, a variation of the phrase, "ein menachem lah," "there is none to comfort her" (Yerushalayim), occurs no less than four times. This is what we mourn. Yerushalayim is alone, without anyone to comfort her, with no one who cares. We may suggest that the loneliness which Yerushalayim experienced was not only a product of Klal Yisrael's seclusion from the other nations. It was the separation within, their divisiveness and discord resulting from the sinaas chinam, unwarranted hatred among them, which was the cause of the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash that left them all alone.

We cannot change what has happened. We can, however, focus on the source of our suffering, the reason for our misery, in order to attempt to correct our problem so that it happens no more. Perhaps, with a little ahavah, love, for our fellow man, we can reverse the trend of isolation from one another which has caused so much of our suffering. Let us share the burden with our fellow man, ease his plight, or just be available for moral support. When we are present for our fellow, we can hope that Hashem will, likewise, be present for us.

Returning to our original statement connecting the "eichah" of our parsha to the "eichah" of Tisha B'Av, Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, takes an alternative approach. He sees the word eichah as an expression of amazement. Rav Moshe's remarks are addressed to the Midrash Eichah, which contrasts Moshe's comment with the exclamations of the later neviim, Yeshayah and Yirmiyah, who also used the word eichah. Moshe saw the people in their moment of glory and tranquility and said, "Eichah," an expression of lamentation. Yeshayah saw them in distress and also said, "Eichah." Yirmiyah, on the other hand, saw them at a point of total degradation and also said, "Eichah."

In a departure from the standard pshat, explanation, Rav Moshe explains the word eichah to mean, "How could such a thing be possible?" Moshe wondered how an individual could rise to such eminence that he might even begin to think that he alone could shoulder the burden of leading an entire

nation as complex as Klal Yisrael. Rav Moshe adds that this same question may be asked of any great leader. Later, Yeshayah wondered how a city that was referred to as a "faithful village," which had leaders who served as paradigms of virtue and piety, could sink to such a nadir of depravity. Finally, Yirmiyah wondered why the destruction occurred. Regardless of the nature of their sins and the seriousness of Hashem's grievance against them, Klal Yisrael was still on a much higher moral/spiritual plateau than any of the other nations of the world. This interpretation conveys a profound message to us: Our highest priority should be to raise ourselves to the spiritual level of old, about whom Moshe Rabbeinu wondered, "How can I alone carry the burden of such a distinguished People?" Whatever our ancestors were, or were not, we have no inkling of their spiritual eminence. This is the meaning of the word eichah. In other words, one must be on a rather high level for people to question how it could have happened to them. Let us aspire to return to that distinguished position.

You answered me and said, "The thing that you proposed to do is good." (1:14)

Rashi explains Moshe's critique in the following manner: "You decided the matter to your benefit without considering that you were being disrespectful. You should have responded to the suggestion about instituting sub-leadership by saying, 'our teacher Moshe. From whom is it more appropriate to learn: you or your student? Is it not better to learn from you because you suffered over the Torah?'" The last few words, "because you suffered over the Torah," seem to be superfluous. It would have been sufficient merely to posit that it is better to learn from the master than to learn from the student. Why does Rashi add the fact that Moshe toiled and suffered over the Torah?

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, explains that as far as the student is concerned it is quite possible, at times, that the "student" teacher can have a greater success rate - or be more effective in reaching the student than the "master" rebbe/teacher. Rashi is, however, teaching us a very significant lesson in education by defining the essence of a rebbe, Torah teacher, and, by extension, indicating from whom we should learn. A true rav/rebbe is one who toils and suffers over the Torah that he will later expound to perfection, exactly as Hashem transmitted it. He does not rely on his own acumen. Regardless of his brilliance, he labors to the point of suffering, leaving no stone unturned in his quest to understand the Torah fully. This is the type of teacher from whom we should learn Torah. Scholarship does not mean everything - it is how one achieves that level of scholarship which determines if he is an appropriate person to transmit Torah to others.

They came until the valley of Eshkol, and spied it out. (1:24)

Avraham Avinu had three close friends and confidants: Avner, Eshkol and Mamre, whom he consulted when he was commanded to circumcise himself. Avner advised him not to do it because of his advanced age. Eshkol presented arguments in support of Avner's advice. He felt that in Avraham's weakened condition post-circumcision, his enemies would be able to overpower him. Mamre encouraged Avraham to circumcise himself. When the meraglim, spies, came to Eretz Yisrael, they stopped at Nachal Eshkol and picked a cluster of grapes which they brought back to Moshe.

Horav Eli Munk, zl, suggests an analogy between the episode of the spies returning with a cluster of grapes and the name Eshkol. The spies brought back the grapes to support their position that,

just as the fruit of the land was abnormally large, so, too, were its inhabitants unusually powerful. This is why that place had already been called Eshkol at the time of Avraham's circumcision. It was characterized as a place where one's fear of future enemies would dishearten him from doing the right and proper thing today. In other words, Nachal Eshkol is a place that characterizes a lack of bitachon, trust in the Almighty. It is interesting that the meraglim seemed to gravitate to that one place in Eretz Yisrael where their lack of faith would appropriately fit in.

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael. (1:1)

Sefer Devarim begins by presenting Moshe Rabbeinu as a "speaker" who admonishes Klal Yisrael before he takes leave of this world. Interestingly, when Hashem approached Moshe regarding his mission to Pharaoh, Moshe begged to be relieved of this responsibility asserting, "I am not a man of words," (Shemos 4:10). When did his ability to speak change? The Midrash addresses this transformation: "Before Moshe received the Torah, he was not a man of words. After he merited the Torah, he began to speak." Horav Elazar Menachem Man Shach, Shlita, explains that prior to the Giving of the Torah, Moshe had no responsibility to convey his thoughts or words to the people. Refraining from speaking was not inappropriate on his part. It is similar to a Navi, prophet, who subdues his prophecy and does not foretell his revelation. Once the Torah was given, however, it no longer mattered whether he was capable of expressing himself eloquently or not; he became responsible to teach Torah and to reprove the people.

Horav Shach derives from here that there are times and circumstances which demand that one publicly make known the dvar Hashem, word of G-d. In these circumstances one is required to do so even if he knows that the truth is being blurred by sham artists who are capable of concealing the evil they perpetrate by painting over it with a coating of humanitarianism. One must speak up specifically in situations such as these, when we are confronted by those who represent a fusion of evil and goodness, so that we really need the clarity of vision that is derived from the Torah. Those who sabotage their mission, who refrain from protesting against the chameleons who would rob us of our heritage, are themselves moral hypocrites. While it is important to know when to be silent, it is equally significant to know when to express oneself in words.

Hashem, your G-d, has multiplied you and behold, you are like the stars of Heaven in abundance. (1:10) The Midrash comments about the comparison of Klal Yisrael to the stars. They cite three areas in which the Jewish People bear a likeness to stars. Just as one star is greater than another, so, too, does Klal Yisrael have different levels, one greater than another: some Jews are Kohanim, some are Leviim; and others are Yisraelim. Just as there is no end to the stars, so, too, there is no end to our People. Just as the stars have power from one end of the world to another, so, too, does Klal Yisrael manifest such power. Chazal are teaching us that Hashem's blessing to Avraham Avinu, that his descendants will be likened to stars, is multifaceted. Not only will they be compared to stars in quantity, but also in attributes.

Horav Yaakov Dushinsky adds a unique quality, that is intrinsic to stars, which has a profound meaning in regard to the Jewish People. In contemporary times, through remarkable technological advances, scientists have been able to discover stars that, due to their extreme distance, have previously been impossible to locate. They are so far that we measure the distance in light years, which is the distance that light travels - hundreds of thousands of miles per second - in one year. In other words, it is quite probable that the illumination we see from a star is the energy of a star that burned out a long time

ago. Yet, its effect continues far beyond its physical life.

Regarding the pasuk in Daniel 12:3, "And those who teach righteousness to the multitudes (will shine) like the stars, forever and ever," in the Talmud Sanhedrin 92b, Chazal say that this is a reference to righteous judges, charity collectors, and melamdei tinokos, teachers of children. The judge who does not swerve from the truth maintains the integrity of the judicial system. Chazal say that he becomes a partner with the Almighty in the creation of the world. He maintains discipline within society. He who raises much needed funds for the poor, grief stricken, and hungry is undoubtedly the paragon of virtue, sustaining those whom society regrettably often forgets. Last, he who defers a life of material/financial security, who rejects the opportunities of this world so that he may give all of himself to Hashem's children, to the future of Klal Yisrael, truly sanctifies his life. How are they compared to stars? Their work continues far beyond their times. Their reach extends far beyond their grasp! They involve themselves in chayeit netzach, eternal life, as they give up their olam hazeh, opportunities in this world.

Thus, the fruits of their labors, the results of their toil, live on as shining examples of their work. The effect a teacher has on a student is eternal. Is there a greater reason for choosing such a field of endeavor? One must remember, however, to make sure that this effect is of a positive nature, for the opportunity is accompanied by the awesome responsibility.

Provide for yourselves distinguished men, who are wise, understanding, and well-known to your tribes, and I shall appoint them as your heads. (1:13)

The Midrash notes that the word "va'asimeim," "and I shall appoint," can easily be read as "va'ashimeim," "and I will hold them guilty/responsible," if the "sin" were to be replaced by a "shin." It all depends where the "dot" on the letter is placed: to the right, and it's a "shin;" or to the left, and it is a "sin." Chazal derive an important message herein. Moshe was telling Klal Yisrael that if they do not listen to their leadership, he will hold the leadership responsible! This is like a snake whose 'tail' told the 'head' "Why should you always lead, while I bring up the rear? Let us change things around. I will lead, and you will follow." We can imagine what occurred. The tail, having no eyes, dragged the head into places that were certainly not conducive to its continued health and well-being. First, it was dragged through a river, then into a fire, and last it became impaled on a thorn bush. The lesson is clear: When the Torah leaders, the "eyes" of the nation, are guided by those who should be following, they become critically impaired.

In the Talmud Chagigah 14a, Chazal relate that the Navi Yeshayahu cursed Klal Yisrael with eighteen curses, yet he was not content until he pronounced, "The youngster will behave insolently against the elder, and the base against the honorable." Yeshayahu's curses affected every possible class of Jew. He included the learned who were erudite in Torah, who had mastered its profundities. He included judges, kings, wise men and counselors. Yet, nothing he said was as extreme as the curse that the authority of Klal Yisrael's leadership would be usurped. He was not content until he had promised this ultimate curse. Why?

Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, explains that when the youth lose respect for their elders -- when they wrest the reins of leadership away from those whose wisdom is tempered by life's experiences, from a leadership whose counsel is inspired by the Torah giants of a previous era -- Klal Yisrael is as good as dead. This is not life! Indeed, such a circumstance represents the greatest curse. A nation whose leadership is not "mekabel," will not accept advice from their elders, who are obsessed with their arrogance and sheerchutzpah; who denigrate the authority of their elders and render decisions based upon their own brash ideas, and shaped by their own vested interests, is not living a Torah life. Such a generation does not truly live.

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, explains that the Jewish people are unlike other nations, in that they cannot survive without the institution of "zekeinim," elders. While other nations manage to survive without the leadership of sages or elders, our uniqueness renders our elders an essential prerequisite for our existence, rather than a mere luxury. It is Rabbi Akiva who says, "Yisrael is likened to a bird. Just as a bird cannot fly away without its wings, so, too, is Yisrael helpless without its elders." Rav Chaim explains that a bird without its wings is in a worse situation than an animal who never had wings. It remains a helpless, pitiful creature, victimized by any creature bigger and more powerful than it. Klal Yisrael without elders is just like that bird. It cannot survive. Undermining the power of our elders is tantamount to striking a powerful blow to the core of the life force of the Jewish People.

The Satmar Rav, zl, commented that not just anyone can possess the necessary qualities for wearing the mantle of gadol b'Yisrael, Torah leader. He felt that such a person should be endowed with the following attributes: First, he must be a talmid chacham muvhak, Torah scholar of the highest order, erudite in all areas of Torah law and literature; second, he must be a yarei Shomayim, G-d fearing Jew, who will not be influenced by his personal emotions or interests; third, he must be a chacham and pikeach, wise and crafty, knowledgeable of the world scene, understanding people; knowing what makes them "tick;" being able to recognize evil when it confronts him. Only one who is blessed with these traits may issue forth his judgement in regard to inyanei ha'klal, communal affairs.

One of the distinguished laymen who heard the Satmar Rav's comments questioned him regarding a certain rav who fit the criteria, yet whose views regarding Orthodoxy were in contradiction to the Satmar Rav's. The Rav responded that indeed the gadol in question truly "fit the bill," but was deficient in one area. He was not "meshamesh," did not serve in such a capacity that he understood how to deal with the incursions against Torah Judaism. Only certain rabbonim, such as those who served in a number of the larger communities in Hungary, in which they were compelled to fight a holy war to preserve the sanctity of Torah and mitzvos from those who would do anything to impugn and destroy the Torah way of life, were able to impart lessons based upon their own life's experience. The Satmar Rav was an individual who, in addition to being a brilliant talmid chacham and pikeach, had absorbed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge from his rebbeim, who themselves were the gedolei Yisrael of the previous generation.

Horav Yechezkel Abramski, zl, put the idea into perspective with the following illustration: Imagine sitting at a distance of one hundred yards from a given point and asking a group of people if they are able to see a picture at this distance. One person will say he can only see thirty yards, while another will see forty yards, and yet another will see up to seventy yards. Suddenly, someone comes along with incredible eyesight who can see up to one hundred yards! Indeed, if all of the other people would get together, they could nevertheless not see as well as he, because the sight is limited. Having them all get together is to no avail because the eyesight of the individuals is still deficient.

The same idea applies to our Torah leaders: They see what others cannot; their vision extends beyond the grasp of the average person. Thus, if an entire group gets together to express their opinion in opposition of one gadol, their position carries no weight, because they cannot see what he sees. Their vision is stunted; their perspective is myopic. This is the reason that our Torah leaders are referred to as "einei ha'am," the eyes of the nation.

All of you approached me. (1:22)

Rashi says they all came "birvuvya," mixed together, in a tumultuous, disorderly and disrespectful manner. The young pushed ahead of their elders, and the elders pushed aside the leaders. The approach for the meraglim, spies, sharply contrasted the manner in which they had come together as a nation during Kabolat ha'Torah. Then there had been decorum, decency and dignity. Moshe Rabbeinu is rebuking Klal Yisrael for the sin of the spies, the sin that ultimately cost them their own entrance into Eretz Yisrael. He seems to focus on the disrespectful manner in which they presented their request. One would think that in a sin of such magnitude, the approach would not play such a significant role. Does Moshe really have to belabor the issue of their disrespect, especially in contrast to their later rebellion?

In his commentary on the Torah, The Netziv, zl, cites Horav Yitzchak Mi'Volozhin, who explains that by rebuking Klal Yisrael regarding the manner in which they arrived, Moshe was actually magnifying the gravity of their later sin. They could no longer attempt to ameliorate their sin by saying that in the beginning their request had been innocuous. They could not say there was "no harm" in coming forward with a "simple" request. They could not say that everything had been fine until the meraglim returned and slandered Eretz Yisrael. They could not mitigate their sin, because it was not realistic. From the very beginning they were wrong! The manner in which they approached Moshe Rabbeinu bespoke their spurious intentions. We derive from here that when an endeavor is constructive, the various courses that are followed in achieving this endeavor are also inherently proper. If, in contrast, the goal of an endeavor is improper, then the avenues leading to this goal will be equally inappropriate. The Alter M'Kelm feels that it was their impulsiveness, their utter recklessness, that was the genesis of their mishap. They should have waited for Moshe; perhaps he had been planning to send spies anyway. Had they given the matter some thought, they might have arrived at a different conclusion. They were not, however, able to wait; they had to respond immediately to make sure that the land was investigated. Their inability to exhibit patience, and their self-indulgence, led to their involvement in an endeavor that demonstrated a lack of emunah on their part. Their lack of waiting caused them to remain in the wilderness.

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael... After he had smitten Sichon... On the other side of the Yarden in the land of Moav. (1:1,4,5)

Moshe Rabbeinu begins the fifth book of the Torah with an admonition to Klal Yisrael, reminding them of the myriad of sins which they had committed throughout the past forty years. Moshe spoke to all the people, not giving any individual the opportunity to say, "Had we been there, we would have refuted him." We can learn from Moshe's rebuke concerning the correct manner in which to reprove someone who has erred. Moshe waited until the last five weeks of his life to rebuke Klal Yisrael. He wanted to be sure that they would listen. The commentators offer a number of reasons for this approach. We simply suggest that at an emotional time, such as the end of one's days -- when life is coming to a close -- the speaker and listener are more attuned to another. Each one is particularly careful not to offend, not to embarrass. One does not want to make a mistake at a time like this.

The manner in which one presents his rebuke is critical. Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl, writes in the name of the Gaon m'Vilna that one should never rebuke using strong words. He should speak softly, in a mild, soothing tone to assure the listener that he is there to help him. He concludes that one who is not capable of speaking softly is absolved from the responsibility of rebuke.

The Torah adds that Moshe chose to rebuke Klal Yisrael "after he had smitten Sichon." Their triumph over the feared Emorite kings heartened Klal Yisrael to enable them to listen to Moshe. They could no longer say, "What right has he to rebuke us? Did he bring us into the Land as he had

promised?" Timing - Moshe sought the appropriate time to maximize the effect of his rebuke. He wanted to make sure the people would listen to him. We are talking about the leader who sacrificed himself for Klal Yisrael. For forty years he endured their criticism, their rebellious nature, their ingratitude. He provided leadership for them through the splitting of the Red Sea, the Giving of the Torah, and every significant occurrence in the wilderness. Yet, he was still concerned that they might think he did not keep his promise! As Horav Moshe Reis, Shlita, points out, this is the way one rebukes. The evil inclination has the "habit" of covering up the wonderful things people do for us. It makes sure that we see only ourselves - not others who have done so much for us.

Moshe commences his rebuke by emphasizing his mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, on behalf of Klal Yisrael. When he concludes his words, he blesses the people. The mochiach, one who rebukes, should show his love and caring to the one whom he rebukes. The purpose of giving mussar, ethical reproach, is not to simply hear one's own voice; it is to effect a response, a change in the individual. This will occur only if the person knows that the rebuke is the result of someone's love.

It is important that the subject of the rebuke be in a proper frame of mind, tranquil and at ease, so that he will be able to listen, concentrate and integrate the lessons into his life. Sforno writes that the significance of "after he had smitten Sichon," is that the people would be predisposed to listen. Nothing was hanging over their heads, that which they had most feared was now behind them. They were now able to listen to mussar. Rebuke does not simply place blame; it is an opportunity for bringing someone back, to correct their prior mistakes, to adjust their lifestyle to give it more meaning. The listener must be attentive and willing in order for the rebuke to meet with success.

I said to you at the time... Let yourselves - wise, understanding men, known to your tribes, and I will place them at your head. And you answered me and said, "This thing which you have proposed to do is good." (1:9,13,14)

Chazal view Moshe Rabbeinu's words as a critique of Klal Yisrael. They should have answered, "Moshe, our teacher! From whom is it better to learn: From you or from your disciple? Surely from you, who exerted yourself so over the Torah." Moshe understood what motivated their silence. They assumed that it would be easier to sway a judge who was one of them to their point of view. This type of attitude is not novel. Everybody wishes to face a judge whom they think will readily acquiesce to their point of view. One area of Moshe's critique needs explaining. It seems that it is better to study from Moshe because he exerted himself over the Torah. What advantage does exertion provide that it is the sole factor for studying from the master instead of the pupil?

Horav Meir Bergman, Shlita, suggests that it is human nature to attach greater significance to something for which one has exerted himself. As this is true in the area of materialism, how much more so regarding Torah insights. In his commentary on the Talmud Shabbos 99b, the Rashba suggests, "Take great care to understand this explanation fully, for only after great effort was it revealed to us!" Horav Eliezer M. Shach, Shlita writes in his preface to his Avi Ezri on Nashim/Kedushah, "Whoever studies these matters will see what a help this work can be, G-d willing, for I achieved it with much toil and exertion." Torah is acquired through ameilus, toil; it is ours, if we work for it. But, work we must. Moreover, our toil indicates our love and esteem for the Torah. In order to succeed in an endeavor, one must truly enjoy and love his work. One who enjoys what he is doing will exert himself -- joyfully -- in order to succeed.

Horav Bergman writes that he once heard from Horav Shmuel Rosovsky, zl, how Horav Shimon Shkop, zl, related a similar thought that he derived from a conversation with the Netziv, zl, Rosh Yeshivah of the famed Volozhin Yeshivah. Horav Shkop related that he never attended the Netziv's

shiur, Torah lecture, feeling that he could accomplish much more by studying on his own during this time period. Late one night, he experienced a change of heart. It happened that he was studying Talmud Bava Basra, when he came across a difficult passage in the Rashbam's commentary. Try as he would, he could not make headway in understanding the depth of the commentary. He was about to give up, when suddenly the Netziv entered the Bais Medrash, as he was accustomed to do at all hours of the night. Rav Shimon went over to the venerable Rosh Yeshivah and asked him "pshat," to explain the Rashbam. The Netziv responded, "My child, I have several times visited the graves of tzaddikim to supplicate Hashem to reveal to me the meaning of this passage." This response so impressed Rav Shimon that from that day on he made sure to attend the Netziv's shiur.

We now have an idea of the effort which our gedolei Yisrael, Torah giants, expended in the study of Torah. It was not merely an exercise in mental gymnastics. It was Toras Hashem which must be understood. They gave their lives for the Torah - not only for its preservation and dissemination, but also to understand its profundities and hidden message. Is it any wonder that they attained the distinction of gadlus ba'Torah?

This was Moshe's admonition to Klal Yisrael: If they had really cared about knowing the Torah, if proficiency in it really meant something to them, they should have insisted upon learning from Moshe Rabbeinu, whose life was a lesson in exertion and devotion for Torah. By relinquishing their right to the master, they indicated their true attitude. A student respects the teacher who exhibits his own effort in acquiring the knowledge he transmits. This is manifest with the joy inherent in teaching and conveying the Torah's message. One is enthusiastic in transmitting that which he has toiled to master.

These are the words that Moshe spoke... All of you approached me. (1:1,22)

Moshe begins his rebuke of Klal Yisrael. He alludes to a number of sins, most of them by "remez," hinting. He does not want to embarrass the people. He seeks to preserve their dignity. Why should the Torah list all of the details? He does this for most - except for two sins. Twice Moshe goes into detail, describing their error, how it began and what the consequences were. He agonizes about how they requested new judges. They would rather appeal their litigation to Moshe's "students" than to the "teacher" himself. Moshe relates how his acquiescence to their request brought a joyful reaction from the people. They thought these leaders would be more predisposed to responding to their needs. In truth, they thought it would be easy to sway them.

Moshe also addressed the sin of the meraglim, spies, who returned from Eretz Yisrael and slandered the land. They incited the people against Moshe and Hashem, causing irreparable damage. This damage foreshadowed the decree against this generation's entrance into Eretz Yisrael. That night, Tisha B'av, was a night when the people overreacted. They cried and cried. It was a "bechiah shel chinam," unwarranted weeping. They had nothing to fear but fear itself. Their punishment is our punishment, a bechiah l'doros, weeping for generations. On this same date, many years later, the two Batei Mikdash were destroyed. Tisha B'av became our day for commemorating national tragedy. All this was a result of their unwarranted reaction to the disparaging comments made by the spies.

Before Moshe rebuked them for the sin of the meraglim, he told them what had preceded the sin. "All of you approached me." They all came. Chazal note that there was no order to the way that they came. They approached Moshe in a disorderly, disrespectful manner. The young pushed ahead of

their elders, the elders pushed aside their leaders. This was in sharp contrast to the decorum that prevailed during the Giving of the Torah. When disrespect reigns, it is a sign that the motivation is not proper. They were not interested l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven. They sought to rebel, to undermine Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership, to repudiate the yoke of Heaven from controlling their lives.

Herein, says Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, zl, lies the root of their sin. Two sins - one goal - one origin. They sought other judges, and they pushed their way disrespectfully, demeaning their elders and leaders. They fought for their goal. They pushed for their goal. Their goal represented the antithesis of Jewish values. Their intention was to find a way to revoke their present leadership. This is why the Torah details and emphasizes these two sins. They are the source of so much agony and tragedy for our People. We must understand the source of our problems: a lack of respect for our spiritual leadership; a disdain for their guidance; an indifference to their rendering of halachah - if it does not coincide with our way of thinking.

We read Parashas Devorim on Shabbos Chazon, the Shabbos preceding Tisha B'av. We are to study the underlying message conveyed by this parsha. The churban, destruction of the Batei Mikdash, began then, when our ancestors rejected Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership, when they rejected any form of leadership. A generation that repudiates its elders, that refuses to accept guidance from its spiritual leadership, is destined to be destroyed - by its own doing. The Midrash sums it up beautifully: There was once a snake in which the tail asked the head, "Why should you always lead?" Since the tail and the head of a snake really look similar to one another, it seemed like a fair suggestion. Thus, they changed positions, so that the tail was leading. We can imagine what transpired as a result of this change. The tail naturally did not know where to go. First, it went into a deep river where it nearly drowned. It then went through searing fire where it was almost roasted alive. Afterward, it dragged the head through an area that was strewn with rocks and sharp thorns. Finally, the snake came to its senses and realized that without eyes it cannot lead, without direction it will only die. Regrettably, by the time the snake learned its lesson, it was too late. Hopefully, we will take this lesson and integrate it into our lives before it is too late for us.

Enough of your circling this mountain; turn yourselves northward. (2:3)

After thirty eight years in the wilderness, Klal Yisrael was once again at Har Seir. The nation was now instructed to turn to the north. The Kli Yakar interprets the word "tzafonah," which usually means "north," in its alternative definition, "hidden." Accordingly, Hashem was telling Klal Yisrael, "Turn inward, hide yourselves." He was implying that a Jew should maintain a low profile among his gentile neighbors. There is no reason to arouse their envy. This is similar to what Yaakov Avinu told his sons when he sent them to Egypt to purchase food, even though they had food at home. Yaakov said, "Lamah tisrau?" "Why should you make yourselves conspicuous?" (Bereishes 42:1). Why should the pagans that surround us become jealous of the prosperous Jews? Let them think that we are in as bad a situation as they are.

It is not entirely foreign to hear such an accusation leveled at us. The Kli Yakar lived in the beginning of the seventeenth century. How much worse have things become? We live in a world that is far from sympathetic to the Jewish way of life. Is there any reason that some of us feel it is necessary to "shtech ois di oigen," "pierce out the eyes," of our neighbors? Do we have to have the fanciest homes or drive the fanciest cars? Would it be such a tragedy if we would not call so much attention to ourselves? Is it necessary to make the gentiles around us envious of the "prosperous Jews"?

Furthermore, what about the insecure Jew who spends much more than he actually possesses just so that he can impress those around him?

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, once cited a similar idea from Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl. In a number of places, Chazal compare Klal Yisrael among the nations to, "a single sheep among seventy wolves." Simply, the analogy is that as a sheep among so many menacing wolves is in a perilous position, so, too, is Klal Yisrael in a dangerous situation. We can rely only on Hashem to protect us. Rav Elchanan suggested an additional message to be derived from Chazal. If a sheep is attempting to hide from seventy wolves, it would certainly try to call as little attention to itself as possible. It would look for every avenue to remain inconspicuous. One thing it would surely not do: is to jump up and down, it would not make all kinds of noises in attempt to taunt and enrage the wolves. Hence, the Midrash is teaching us how to act as one sheep/nation among the many wolves/nations of the world. We should maintain a low profile, not acting in such a manner that those around us will be "incited" against us.

There are people who will read this and remark that such a statement might be appropriate for the shtetl in Europe, but in our progressive, modern society it would be demeaning to live simply and unobtrusively. We should take pride in our accomplishments, and let the world around us acknowledge us. To paraphrase Horav Solomon, "To live quietly is not a galus complex; it is rather a galus code of behavior." Our mistake is thinking that the gentiles have changed. They have not. They have only changed their methods. Eisav remains Eisav. Regrettably, some of us do not want to remain Yaakov.

These are the words Moshe spoke to all Yisrael...(1:1)

Chazal tell us that these "devarim," words, constituted the content of Moshe's speech - divrei tochachah, words of reproachment. Moshe spoke to all of the Klal Yisrael, so that no individual would later say, "Had we been present we would have challenged his words." Anyone who had an objection to Moshe's admonishment had the opportunity to challenge Moshe, although nobody did so. Offering tochachah, reproach, is a serious endeavor which should not be undertaken lightly. It obliges every member of the Jewish community to try his hardest to improve his fellow man. Indeed, as Horav Shlomo Breuer, zl, writes, "The rebellion against Hashem's Torah could never have reached such tragic proportions, if men -- by virtue of their conviction and zeal for His Torah -- did not stand idly, focused on their own personal considerations." Many people have thought that the Divine cause would continue to best be served by political expediency. In other words, they believed we should be silent, in order not to "rock the boat." Actually, the individual who admonishes truthfully -- in order to bring someone back to a life of Torah and mitzvos -- will ultimately find more favor than the individual who flatters people with a glib tongue.

Moshe Rabbeinu did not offer praise; rather he admonished Bnei Yisrael with divrei tochachah that comprised his farewell. His legacy is truth. His legacy catalyzes blessing by modelling the way to achieve closeness too Hashem. Moshe's words flowed from a heart that demonstrated love for his people. Moshe directed his words to all of the people. Why? Only a minority had sinned, only a minority had complained, only a minority had been dissatisfied and rebelled. Why should everybody have been admonished? If Moshe had not assembled the entire people, each group would have blamed the other for the sins that had been committed. The old would have blamed the young, the rich the poor, the intellectuals the ignorant ones, and so the list goes on.

Moshe lays the blame for all of the tragic events in the course of their travels at the feet of every single Jew. He directs his tochachah both towards the perpetrator and to the one who should have prevented the crime. Those who were actively involved in the sin, as well as those who were indifferent, who looked away, who ignored, who were apathetic, are all equally responsible! Our mutual responsibility towards one another demands that we work ceaselessly in convincing our fellow man to accept a life of Torah consciousness. By accepting Moshe's admonition, by standing up to their responsibility, Klal Yisrael earned Hashem's blessing.

Enough of your dwelling on this mountain. (1:6)

A year had passed in which Klal Yisrael was situated at Har Sinai. It became time to move on to Eretz Yisrael. The Midrash defines the word "rav" as "abundance"; Klal Yisrael's encampment at Har Sinai brought much benefit to them: the Torah, the Mishkan, the Zekeinim and other leaders. The Kli Yakar views the summons to leave Har Sinai as a practical lesson in attitude toward Torah. Moshe observed Klal Yisrael lingering at Har Sinai. They had become content with the Torah as a book of thought, a wonderful collection of laws brilliantly formulated by their Divine Author. They were, however, not prepared to move on to Eretz Yisrael, to put the Torah into practice. Moshe was, therefore, commanded to instruct the people to move on to the land, to build the Bais Hamikdash, to approach the ultimate destination.

All too often, many of us get bogged down "along the way," ignoring our objectives - if we have even developed them. A Jew has a purpose in life. Fulfilling that purpose must be his goal. We are here to serve Hashem in a positive manner. For some, the instrument is Torah study in its purest form, unimpeded by material or secular pursuits. For others, the vehicle is serving Hashem through active participation in community-oriented endeavors, such as various acts of chesed, kindness. One must, however, establish a set of goals which he strives to attain. Otherwise, he simply stagnates, proceeding through life as a Jew by rote, with no zest or enthusiasm, not appreciating the beauty and vigor of Yiddishkeit. Whatever one does, it should be goal-oriented. Even in Torah study, one should make demands on himself, setting specific goals and areas of accomplishment, aspiring for greatness with a sheifah, ambition, to master all areas of Torah. This attitude will not only enhance one's learning, but it will also transform his entire character.

How can I alone bear your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels? (1:12)

The word "Eichah," "how", in this context is contrasted by Chazal to the exclamations of later prophets, who also used the word eichah to allude to the churban, destruction, of the Batei Mikdash. Notably, the baal koreih, Torah reader, chants this pasuk differently than the others, singing it to the tune of Eichah, Lamentations, which is read on Tisha B'Av. The obvious connection is the single word, eichah. The Gaon M'Vilna suggests a deeper connection between the two pesukim. In the third word of the pasuk Moshe says, "levadi" "alone," (How can I alone bear?). A form of the word levadi is found in Sefer Eichah, "Eichah yashvah badad," "How the city sits in solitude." This, says the Gaon, is the common essence of the tragedy of Tisha B'Av and Moshe's complaint. They both produced conditions of loneliness.

Moshe was not complaining about the burdens of leadership. He was addressing the fact that it is lonely at the top. He was able to bear the burden of their problems only to the extent that the people were able to empathize with his position. Leadership is an awesome responsibility, but it is easier to accept when one knows that he has the support and encouragement of his flock. Moshe did not need this support; he was quite capable of directing the affairs of Klal Yisrael. The role is significantly more satisfying when the leader does not feel that he is alone. When his decision is appealing, he is popular; when it is controversial, because he does not meet the self-generated criteria of the people, suddenly the leader is under siege: He finds himself alone.

The Navi lamented a similar condition in Yerusholayim in which people were left to fend for themselves. The plight of the individual remained just that - the individual's concern. Nobody else seemed concerned with helping. There are individuals all over our communities who are alone. They do not seek charity; they do not seek any gifts. They yearn only for a bit of friendship. They do not want to be alone: A simple hello; a quick visit on Shabbos; an invitation for a meal; a ride to the store; someone with whom to share their joy and their pain; just someone to break the monotony and anxiety of being alone.

Parashas Devarim is traditionally read on the Shabbos prior to Tisha B'Av, the saddest Shabbos of the year. The Shabbos which precedes our national day of mourning carries a demanding message. "Eichah yashvah badad," "How the city sits alone." Let us make sure that no Jew will be left alone. In that merit, may the Almighty rebuild the Bais Hamikdash in our time, so that we will all together be able to worship Him in Yerusholayim.

I instructed your judges...saying, "Listen among your brethren and judge righteously." (1:16)

Moshe adjured the judges to be deliberate in judgement, to listen to the litigants and to understand their claims -- not to make rash decisions. Rashi adds, if a case comes before you two or three times, do not say, "I have already rendered my decision in this case. Rather, listen to each case, regardless of its redundancy, and be deliberate in rendering your decision". The Mizrachi contends that Rashi derives his thesis from the words, "Listen among your brothers." How do we infer from this phrase that one should view each case as original, regardless of how many times he has actually already heard it? Horav Yitzchak Goldwasser, Shlita, comments that the words, "Among your brothers" is the key to the lesson. If it is just another din Torah, judgement, once the judge has rendered his decision, it would remain the same despite the amount of times the case is heard. The Torah, however, admonishes the judge to view every case as involving two people, not simply the presentation of two angles of the same question. He must look at each individual that stands before him, reflecting upon the decision he will render and its impact upon the person. If this is the case, he can obviously no longer look at the case as just another case, for now it affects a person.

The Anshei Knesses Hagedolah, Men of the Great Assembly, demanded, "Hevu mesunim badin," "Be deliberate in judgement." They emphasized the benefit of rendering a well-thought-out decision and the tragedy of an ill-considered or hastily formed opinion. Formulating opinions by jumping to conclusions causes one to overlook important considerations, which could have catalyzed a change in his decision. By deliberating prior to a judgement, the judge maximizes the possibility of arriving at a settlement or compromise to the satisfaction of both litigants. Deciding in haste will invariably preclude this option.

The judge must remain impartial if he is to render a just decision. He must scrupulously eliminate all elements of self-interest and personal bias. This can only be accomplished when he

approaches the case with deliberation. On the other hand, as Reb Yitzchak Bunim, zl, warns, objectivity can lead to insensitivity. Indeed, the very element of subjectivity can be most helpful in viewing the issue from the perspective of the litigant. The judge must ask himself, "How would you have acted under similar circumstances?" The judge must be able to discern the crucial elements in the situation which establishes its true character, as opposed to the irrelevant factors. He must always seek out the truth and nothing but the truth, because truth retains its character at all times. This outlook is the only way to preserve the integrity of his judgement.

Reb Yitzchak Bunim observes that the characteristics of deliberateness and calm in judgement do not necessarily apply only to the judge; they pertain to the litigants as well. They should not permit anger, depression, greed or immaturity to reign over them. He tells the story of a butcher who came to Rav Yisrael Salanter, zl, to determine the kashrus of an order of meat. Rav Yisrael decided that the meat was treifah, causing a great monetary loss to the butcher. Being a G-d-fearing man, the butcher accepted his loss with dignity. A short while later, the butcher once again came before Rav Yisrael, this time as a party in a din Torah, monetary dispute, involving about five dollars. Regrettably, the unfortunate butcher lost again and was told to pay the five dollars to the other litigant. This time, however, the butcher attacked the decision with derision, ranting and raving about being victimized by the rav. He just could not accept this grave "injustice."

Taken aback by the butchers's shocking behavior, Rav Yisrael asked, "A few weeks ago, when a large order of meat was rendered not kosher, you accepted the great financial loss with not so much as a whimper. Why then, today, when the decision against you will only cost a mere five dollars, are you acting in a totally uncivilized manner?"

"There is a big difference," replied the butcher. "A few weeks ago, I lost, but nobody else won. Today, however, the other man won what I lost: That is intolerable!" This simple -- but profound -- story goes to the very core of human character. We cannot "fargin" - tolerate - that someone else has won what we have lost. Addressing this and all other human failings, Chazal say, "Be calm, be deliberate in your thinking. If the law goes against you, accept it, because the law originates from a much higher authority - Hashem.

All of you approached me and said, "Let us send men ahead of us and let them spy out the land. (1:22)

Chazal claim that the key to their error lies in the word "kulchem" - all of you. All of Klal Yisrael came together in total disarray, with disrespect for their elders, each one pushing ahead of the other. This approach contrasted the situation at Kabbolas HaTorah, when everyone maintained proper decorum as they prepared to accept the Torah. The Netziv, zl, contends that "all of you" is not factual. Certainly, not everyone came forward. Only the leaders of the tribes, the noblemen who represented the masses came forward, requesting that spies go to search out the land. Horav Elyakim Schlessinger, Shlita, comments that this in itself constituted a tragic error. Leaders do not follow the common citizen. They listen; they dialogue; they explain. They certainly do not "follow" blindly, acquiescing to the demands of those who should look to them for guidance. When the leadership of Klal Yisrael came before Moshe demanding spies, because that was what the people wanted, they were demeaning the very foundation of Jewish leadership. Daas Torah demands that the gedolim, leaders, lead and articulate Klal Yisrael's mission - not the converse. Moshe reprimanded the people, saying that the initial manner in which they came to him indicated their sinful intentions.

