



Parshas Devarim / פרשת דברים

“ויהי בארבעים שנה בעשתי עשר חודש באחד לחודש דבר משה אל בני ישראל...” דברים א:ג

“It was in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first of the month that Moshe spoke to the Bnei Yisrael...” Devarim 1:3

The Ramban in his introduction states that the Sefer of Devarim, otherwise known as “Mishnah Torah” begins with Moshe Rabbeinu reprimanding the Bnei Yisrael for their previously committed sins while simultaneously reminding them that despite their waywardness, Hashem still acted towards them with mercy. This helped them to see the extent of Hashem's kindness towards them. The Ramban continues to explain that Moshe Rabbeinu rebuked them so that they would refrain from repeating their wrongdoings, which would result in their deaths. This reproach served as well to strengthen the hearts of Klal Yisrael as they were made to understand that just as Hashem had treated them with compassion until now He would continue to be merciful until forever. We may ask, how did Moshe Rabbeinu manage to ensure that his Mussar would enter into the hearts of Klal Yisrael and remain there, affecting the aforementioned positive changes on the nation?

Rashi explains that Moshe only began to rebuke the Bnei Yisrael “סמוך למיתתו” – immediately prior to his death. Rashi writes that Moshe Rabbeinu learned the idea of this timing from Yaakov Avinu who only gave his sons Mussar once he was upon his deathbed. The reason for this was that Yaakov feared that if he spoke too harshly to his sons they would abandon him and take up the side of his brother Esau. Rashi then brings down the ספרי, which counts four reasons why a person should only rebuke his friend close to the time of his death. The first reason is so that one should not come to reprimand his friend and be forced to return and follow up on his initial critique. The Toras Moshe explains that the nature of a man who has just been told off is to begin crafting an answer as to why he has acted in this inappropriate fashion, in an attempt to vindicate himself. This forces his accuser to prove that his answers are false and unfounded, which will inevitably lead to an argument between the two parties. On the other hand, if the protagonist remains silent and does not challenge the answers of the contender, the man on the receiving end will come to believe that his answers were indeed valid and thus carry on with his sin. Therefore the ideal way to rebuke someone is “סמוך למיתתו” so that the receiver will not be able to respond. This will allow the words of Mussar to penetrate the depths of his heart and implant themselves there, as no one remains to hear his excuses. Consequently he will understand that his friend was not correcting him for the sake of putting him down, rather only for his own good.

We are on the verge of yet another Tisha B'av. The Beis HaMikdash is still in a state of destruction. Our situation is dire. If there was ever a time for self-improvement; how about now? The Nine Days are a time to seek out Mussar and listen to it with open hearts, to allow the words of rebuke to enter and place themselves upon our hearts so that it stings and inspires us to do better and try harder to bring back the Beis HaMikdash B'Mheira B'Yameinu Amen.