



## THE RIGHT TIME FOR REBUKE

The Jewish people sinned many times during their years in the desert. But Moses chose a very specific time and method to rebuke them, teaching us an invaluable lesson regarding interpersonal relations.

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TEACHER'S MANUAL



# JEWISH INSIGHTS

A TASTE OF THE REBBE'S TEACHINGS



PARSHAT DEVARIM

**Parshat Devarim**

*Dedicated In loving memory of*  
**Rabbi Shimon Potash**  
*Yartzeit 9 Av*  
**And Nochum Tzvi Potash**  
*Yartzeit 22 Teves*

*By the Potash Family*

**Book of Devarim / Deuteronomy**

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Shluchim of the Rebbe to Mumbai India

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Rashi also points out that Moses chose to rebuke them specifically just before his passing, and not prior to that (Source 2). Rashi mentions three other Jewish leaders who also rebuked their flocks on their deathbeds (Sources 3,4,5,6).

## B. Really?.....12

The Rebbe asks: 1) Is this really the first time that Moses rebuked the Jews? There were a number of prior occasions when Moses already did so. 2) What is the function of a hinted rebuke? The listener could easily miss the point. Conversely, if Moses felt the need to only hint at his true intentions out of respect for the Jews, why would Rashi reveal the true intent? We see from the Talmud that when Rabbi Akiva revealed the identity of the "wood gatherer" Rabbi Yehuda admonished him that one may not reveal that which the Torah concealed (Source 7).

## C. It's All About the Timing.....15

Preventing mistakes or transgressions is not rebuke. If a current and critical concern is at hand - a response must be forthcoming immediately. However, a lecture about multiple issues that took place in the past, should be given specifically prior to one's passing.

Similarly, when the pain is still fresh, and the children of those who actually sinned are present, the rebuke should be given very carefully and subtly.

However, when we speak about these topics generations later, the content should be given over clearly, and with names, in order that the student will understand it better and identify with the message.

The lesson closes with a story of an original method that Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli would use to rebuke those who needed it.

# Introduction:

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One of the mitzvot of the Torah is to critique a sinner and set them right. This mitzvah is all the more pertinent to a Jewish leader who must care for his flock and set them on the right path.

In our parsha, Moses decides that the time has come to rebuke the Jewish people, and proceeds to do so in an interesting manner.

This lesson is about the mitzvah of rebuke; how and when to rebuke and a lesson we can all learn.

## השיעור לפרשת דברים

משיחת שבת פרשת דברים,  
ה'תשמ"ז, בלתי מוגה.  
תורת מנחם, ה'תשמ"ז, חלק ד' עמוד 176

# A. How and When to Critique

Shortly before his one hundred twentieth birthday, Moses gathered the Jewish people and conveyed G-d's words to them, but from Moses' own perspective. The result: the book of Devarim (Deuteronomy)

What is the book of Deuteronomy?

Deuteronomy is the fifth of the five books of Moses, and primarily contains his final testament and words to the Jewish people who were about to enter the promised land.

The name "Devarim" in Hebrew comes from the opening verse "The [following] are the words (devarim) that Moses spoke to all Israel." Since Moses recalls many laws and events in this book that have already been spoken about in the previous four volumes, the book is also known as the Mishneh Torah, "the repetition of the Torah" - or Deuteronomy, in Latin.

Addressing the people, Moses summarizes the forty years in the desert, and recalls the nation's formative events, as well as the unfortunate events that took place along the way. He encourages them to fulfill G-d's commandments and follow His ways. In addition to reviewing already-mentioned commandments, Moses also enumerates a number of new commandments.

## Softly and Subtly

### Source 1 Deuteronomy 1:1

The following are the words of rebuke that Moses spoke to all of Israel on the eastern side of the Jordan river, in the desert, in the plain, opposite the Red Sea, between Paran and Tofel and Lavan and Chatzerot and Di Zahav.

Rashi

The following are the words: Since these are words of rebuke, and Moses enumerates here all the places where they angered G-d, he therefore makes no explicit mention of the incidents in which they transgressed. Rather, Moses merely alludes to them by mentioning the names of the places, out of respect for the Jewish people.

אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה  
אֶל-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן,  
בְּמִדְבַר בְּעֵרָבָה מִוֶּלַד סוּף בֵּינֵי  
פָּאֲרָן וּבֵינִי-תֶפֶל וְלָבָן וְחֲצֵרֹת  
וְדִי זָהָב.

רש"י

אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים. לְפִי שֶׁהֵן  
דְּבָרֵי תוֹכָחוֹת וּמִנָּה כָּאֵן כָּל  
הַמְקוֹמוֹת שֶׁהִכְעִיסוּ לְפָנָי  
הַמְקוֹם בְּהֵן, לְפִיכֶן סָתַם  
אֶת הַדְּבָרִים וְהִזְכִּירָם בְּרִמְזָא  
מִפְּנֵי כְבוֹדוֹן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל (ע"י  
ספרי).

**To all of Israel:** If he had rebuked only some of them, those who were not present might have said, “You heard this from Moses and did not respond a single word to anything he said. Had we been there, we would have responded to him!” Therefore, Moses assembled all of the people and said to them, “See, you are all here. If anyone has a response, let him respond now!”

אֵל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל. אֱלוֹ הוֹכִיחַ  
מִקְצֹתוֹ, הֲיֵינוּ אֱלוֹ שְׂבִשׁוּק  
אוֹמְרִים: אַתֶּם הֵייתֶם  
שׁוֹמְעִים מִבְּן עַמְרָם  
וְלֹא הִשִּׁיבוֹתֶם דְּבַר מִפֶּה  
וְכֵן? אֱלוֹ הֲיֵינוּ שֵׁם הֵיינוּ  
מְשִׁיבִים אוֹתוֹ, לְכֵן כְּנֹסֶם  
כָּלֶם וְאָמַר לָהֶם הָרִי כְּלַכֶּם  
כָּאֵן, כָּל מִי שֵׁישׁ לוֹ תְּשׁוּבָה  
יִשִּׁיב (ספרי).

**In the desert:** At that time they were not in the desert, but in the plains of Moab. What, then, is the meaning of “in the desert”? It means that Moses rebuked them for having angered G-d in the desert, by saying, “If only we had died by the hand of G-d” (Exodus 16:3).

בַּמִּדְבָּר. לֹא בַּמִּדְבָּר הָיָה  
אֲלָא בְּעֲרֵבוֹת מוֹאָב, וּמָהוּ  
בַּמִּדְבָּר? אֲלָא בְּשִׁבִיל  
מָה שֶׁהִכְעִיסוּהוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר  
שֶׁאָמְרוּ (שְׁמוֹת ט"ז) "מִי יִתֵּן  
מוֹתָנוּ וְגו'".

*About thirty days after the Jewish people were taken out of Egypt, they complained that they did not have what to eat, and reminisced about the “meat pot” from which they ate in Egypt. “If only we had died in Egypt, while still benefiting from the ‘meat pot’. Why did you take us out of Egypt only to die of hunger in the desert?” they complained.*

*This is what Moses was hinting at with the words “in the desert.”*

**In the plain:** [He rebuked them] regarding the plain, for they had sinned with [the worship of] Baal-Peor at Shittim in the plains of Moab (Num. 25:1-9).

בְּעֲרֵבָה. בְּשִׁבִיל הָעֲרֵבָה,  
שֶׁחָטְאוּ בְּבַעַל פְּעוֹר  
בְּשִׁטִּים בְּעֲרֵבוֹת מוֹאָב.

*When the Jewish people camped in Shittim in the plains of Moab, on the verge of entering the land of Canaan, many of them were led astray by the promiscuity of the Moabite and Midianite women, who further enticed them to partake of offerings and even bow down to the Midianite deity Baal Peor. It is to this that Moses refers with the words “in the plain.”*

**Opposite the Red Sea:** [He rebuked] them regarding their rebellion at the Red Sea. When they arrived at the Red Sea, they said, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt [that you have taken us to die in the desert?]” (Exod. 14:11) Likewise, [they sinned] when they traveled from the midst of the sea, as it is said, “and they were rebellious by the sea, by the Red Sea” (Ps. 106:7), as is found in [the Talmud tractate] Arachin (15a).

מול סוף. על מה שְּהָמְרוּ  
בַיָּם סוּף בְּבוֹאֵם לַיָּם סוּף,  
שְּאָמְרוּ (שם י"ד) "הַמְּבִלִי  
אִין קְבָרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם", וְכֵן  
בְּנִסְעָם מִתּוֹךְ הַיָּם, שְּנִאָמַר  
(תהילים ק"ו) "וַיִּמְרוּ עַל יָם  
בַּיָּם סוּף" כְּדֹאֵיתָא בְּעַרְכִּין  
(דף ט"ו).

*Only seven days after the plague of the firstborn, standing on the banks of the red sea, the people of Israel saw the Egyptian army chasing them and became frightened. Immediately they complained to Moses “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us to die in the desert?” This Moses hinted at with the words “opposite the Red Sea.”*

**Between Paran and Tofel and Lavan:** Rabbi Yochanan said: We have reviewed the entire Torah, but have found no place named Tofel or Lavan! Rather, the meaning of these words is that Moses rebuked the people for the foolish things they had said (taflu) about the manna, which was white (lavan), saying “And our soul loathes this light bread” (Numbers 21:5), and for what they had done in the desert of Paran through the spies.

בֵּין פָּאָרוֹ וּבֵין תּוֹפֵל וְלָבָן.  
אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן חֲזַרְנוּ עַל כָּל  
הַמִּקְרָא וְלֹא מָצִינוּ מְקוֹם  
שְּשֵׁמוֹ תּוֹפֵל וְלָבָן, אֲלָא  
הוֹכִיחוֹ עַל הַדְּבָרִים שְּתִפְלוּ  
עַל הַמָּן, שֶׁהוּא לָבָן, שְּאָמְרוּ  
(במדבר כ"א) "וַיִּנְפְּשֵׁנוּ קֶצֶה  
בְּלֶחֶם הַקֶּלֶקֶל", וְעַל מַה  
שְּעָשׂוּ בְּמִדְבַר פָּאָרוֹ עַל יְדֵי  
הַמְּרַגְּלִים.

*The people of Israel even complained (taflu) about the Manna - which was a white (lavan) color - that it was not flavorful enough, and asked for other food. Moses hinted to these events with the words tofel and lavan. Similarly, Moses referenced the sin of the spies, who convinced the Jewish people not to enter the land of Israel, with the word Paran, the name of the desert where it took place.*

**and Chatzerot:** Concerning the rebellion of Korach, which took place in Chatzerot. Another explanation: He said to them, “You should have learned from what I did to Miriam at Chatzerot because of her slanderous talk, but you nevertheless spoke against G-d.”

וַחֲצֵרוֹת. בְּמַחְלֶקְתוֹ שֶׁל  
קֹרַח; דָּבָר אַחֵר אָמַר  
לָהֶם הֲיֵה לָכֶם לְלִמּוֹד מִמֶּה  
שְּעָשִׂיתִי לְמִרְיָם בְּחֲצֵרוֹת  
בְּשִׁבִיל לְשׁוֹן הָרָע, וְאַתֶּם  
נִדְבַרְתֶּם בְּמִקּוֹם.

Here Moses is hinting to the rebellion of Korach, who turned the people against Moses, accusing him of appointing his closest family to high posts, as well as the incident where Miriam was smitten with tzara'at for speaking negatively about Moses. Both of these events took place at Hazeroth.

**And Di-Zahav:** (lit., enough gold). He rebuked them for the calf they had made as a result of their abundance of gold. As the verse states, “and I gave her much silver and gold, but they made it for Baal” (Hosea 2:10).

וְדִי זָהָב. הוֹכִיחוֹן עַל הָעֵגֶל  
שָׁעֲשׂוּ בְשָׁבִיל רַב זָהָב  
שָׁהָיָה לָהֶם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (הוֹשֵׁעַ  
ב') "וְכִסְף הַרְבֵּיתִי לָהּ וְזָהָב  
עָשׂוּ לְבַעַל" (עֵי ספרי;  
ברכות ל"ב).

The Midrash teaches that the sin of the Golden Calf took place because of the abundance of gold in the possession of the Jewish nation. Moses refers to this with the name Di-Zahav, “enough gold”

Rashi stresses that Moses wanted to remind them of the sins that were committed, but at the same time, he did not want to shame them. He therefore only mentioned the names of the places where they sinned, and everyone understood what Moses was referring to. This can be compared to a parent who tells their child, “do you remember what happened last time we went on a walk? I do not want it to happen again.” Both the parent and child know exactly what is being referenced, it does not need to be spelled out.

## On the deathbed

Four Jewish leaders who chose to rebuke their flock before their passing

### Moses

#### Source 2 Deuteronomy 1:3

In the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first of the month, Moses spoke to the Israelites concerning all that G-d had commanded him regarding them.

וַיְהִי בְּאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּעֶשְׂתֵּי  
עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ, דִּבֶּר  
מֹשֶׁה אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, כָּכָל  
אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים.

Rashi

רש"י

**In the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first of the month:** This teaches us that he rebuked them only a short while before his death. From whom did he learn to do this?

וַיְהִי בְּאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּעֶשְׂתֵּי  
עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ.  
מִלְמַד שְׁלֹא הוֹכִיחוֹן אֶלָּא  
סְמוּךְ לְמִיתָה; מִמֵּי לְמֹד?

From Jacob, who rebuked his sons only a short while before his death. He said, “Reuven, my son, I will tell you why I have not reprimanded you for your shortcomings during all these years: So that you would not leave me and join my brother, Esau.”

There are four reasons why one should not reprimand a person except shortly before one’s death: So that one should not rebuke repeatedly, so as not to cause his friend to feel ashamed when he sees him; etc. These appear in Sifrei.

Similarly, Joshua rebuked Israel only shortly before his death (cf. Joshua 24:1-29), as did Samuel, as it is said, “Behold, testify against me” (I Samuel 12:3). David also rebuked his son Solomon only shortly before his death (see I Kings 2:1-10).

מִיַּעֲקֹב, שְׁלֵא הוֹכִיחַ אֶת  
בְּנָיו אֶלָּא סְמוּךְ לְמִיתָה,  
אָמַר: רְאוּבֵן בְּנִי, אֲנִי אוֹמֵר  
לָךְ, מִפְּנֵי מָה לֹא הוֹכַחְתִּיךָ  
כָּל הַשָּׁנִים הַלְלוּ? כְּדֵי שְׁלֵא  
תִּנְחַנְי וְתִלַּךְ וְתִדְבַק בְּעֵשָׂו  
אָחִי.

וּמִפְּנֵי אַרְבָּעָה דְּבָרִים אֵין  
מוֹכִיחִין אֶת הָאָדָם אֶלָּא  
סְמוּךְ לְמִיתָה: כְּדֵי שְׁלֵא  
יְהֵא מוֹכִיחוֹ וְחוֹזֵר וּמוֹכִיחוֹ,  
וְשְׁלֵא יְהֵא חֲבֵרוֹ רוֹאֵהוּ  
וּמִתְבַּיֵּשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ, כּו' כְּדֵאִיתָא  
בְּסִפְרֵי.

וְכֵן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ לֹא הוֹכִיחַ אֶת  
יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶלָּא סְמוּךְ לְמִיתָה,  
וְכֵן שְׁמוּאֵל שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שְׁמוּאֵל  
א', י"ב), "הִנְנִי עֲנוּ בִי", וְכֵן  
דָּוִד אֶת שְׁלֹמֹה בְּנוֹ (מַלְכִים  
א ב'):

*Rashi indicates that Moses chose to rebuke the Jewish people immediately prior to his passing. Why?*

First of all - Rashi points out that he was not the only one. Great Jewish leaders throughout history have chosen to do the same. Jacob rebuked his sons while he was on his sickbed, shortly before his passing. The prophet Samuel gathered the entire people of Israel prior to his passing and delivered a lengthy rebuke.

Why did they do this?

Rebuke must be free of anger, hurt ego, or other personal emotional hang-ups. Jacob waited till the final moment to ensure a healthy rebuke, free of ulterior motives or emotional attachments.

Another reason that Jacob waited until the last minute to serve his rebuke was out of respect for Reuven - the recipient of the rebuke. Living in the presence of one’s admonisher is not pleasant. To feel like a “project” that needs to be worked on isn’t the peak of pleasure. Jacob waited till just before his passing to rebuke his sons, so that they wouldn’t be ashamed in his presence for long.

This is an honest rebuke which is intended purely for the benefit of the recipient.

Let’s now read Rashi’s three examples of Jewish leaders who rebuked their people just prior to their passing:

## Jacob

### Source 3 Genesis 49:1-4

Jacob called for his sons and said, “Assemble yourselves, and I will tell you what will happen to you at the end of days. Gather together and listen, sons of Jacob, listen to your father Israel. Reuven, you are my firstborn, my strength and the first of my might, foremost in rank and foremost in power. You showed yourself to be impetuous like running water; therefore you will not be foremost, for it was as if you had mounted your father’s bed; you then profaned the Name of G-d, whose Presence resided upon my bed.

וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶל-בָּנָיו, וַיֹּאמֶר:  
”הֲאֶסְפוּ וְאִגְדָּה לָכֶם אֶת  
אֲשֶׁר-יִקְרָא אֶתְכֶם בְּאַחֲרֵית  
הַיָּמִים. הִקְבְּצוּ וּשְׁמְעוּ בְּנֵי  
יַעֲקֹב וּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל-יִשְׂרָאֵל  
אֲבִיכֶם. רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹרִי אֶתָּה כַּחַי  
וְרֵאשִׁית אוֹנִי, יָתֵר שְׂאֵת וַיִּתֵּר  
עָז. פָּחַז כַּמַּיִם אֶל-תּוֹתֵר כִּי  
עָלִית מִשְׁכְּבִי אֲבִיךָ אֲזַ חִלַּלְתָּ  
יְצוּעֵי עָלָה.”

We read now Jacob’s rebuke of Reuven, but he goes on to admonish additional sons in the following verses.

## Joshua

### Source 4 Joshua 23:1-2,6-8

And it was after many days, after G-d had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and come along in years. Joshua called all of Israel, their elders, their leaders, their judges, and their officers, and he said to them: I am old and advanced in years...

וַיְהִי מִיָּמִים רַבִּים אַחֲרֵי אֲשֶׁר-  
הָנִיחַ ה' לְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל-אִיְבֹיָהֶם  
מִסָּבִיב, וַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ זָקֵן בָּא בַיָּמִים.  
וַיִּקְרָא יְהוֹשֻׁעַ לְכָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל  
לְזִקְנָיו וּלְרֹאשֵׁיו וּלְשֹׁפְטָיו  
וּלְשֹׁטְרָיו, וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם: ”אֲנִי  
זָקֵן בְּאַתִּי בַיָּמִים.”

You shall be very resolute to keep and do all that is written in the book of the Torah of Moses. Do not turn from it right or left. Do not come among these nations that remain with you; nor shall you make mention of the name of their deities, nor exact oaths by their name; and you shall not serve them, nor bow to them. Cling only to the L-rd your G-d, as you have done to this day.

וְחִזְקוּתְכֶם מְאֹד לְשָׁמֹר וּלְעֲשׂוֹת  
אֶת כָּל-הַכְּתוּב בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹרַת  
מֹשֶׁה, לְבִלְתִּי סוּר-מִמֶּנּוּ יָמִין  
וּשְׂמֹאל. לְבִלְתִּי-בֹא בְּגוֹיִם  
הָאֵלֶּה הַנִּשְׁאָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֶתְכֶם,  
וּבְשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵיהֶם לֹא-תִזְכְּרוּ  
וְלֹא תִשָּׁבְעוּ, וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדוּם  
וְלֹא תִשָּׁתַחֲוּ לָהֶם. כִּי אִם-בְּה'  
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם תִּדְבְּקוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם  
עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.”

## Samuel

### Source 5 Samuel I - 12:1-4, 6-7

And Samuel said to all of Israel... I have become old and gray, and my sons are here with you, and I have walked before you from my youth and until this day. Here I am; bear witness against me before G-d and His anointed: Whose ox or donkey did I take? Whom did I rob or oppress? From whose hand did I take a ransom, and then ignore; I shall restore to you all that is due. They replied, "You did not rob us, nor did you oppress us, nor did you take anything from anyone's hand."

And Samuel said to the people, "(It is) G-d Who made Moses and Aaron, and Who brought your forefathers up from the land of Egypt. And now, stand and I shall reason with you before G-d, concerning all the righteous acts which He did to you and to your forefathers."

*Here begins an extended rebuke by Samuel.*

## King David

### Source 6 Kings I 2:1-3

And David neared the day of his passing; and he instructed his son Solomon, saying: "I now go the way of all the earth. Therefore, be strong and show yourself a man. And keep the charge of the L-rd your G-d to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, in order that you prosper in all that you do, and wherever you go.

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל-כָּל-  
יִשְׂרָאֵל...: "וְאֲנִי זָקֵנְתִי וְשִׁבְתִּי,  
וּבְנֵי הַנֶּזֶם אֶתְכֶם, וְאֲנִי הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי  
לִפְנֵיכֶם מִנְעָרֵי עַד-הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.  
הֲנִי עָנּוּ בִּי נֶגְדָה וְנֶגְדָה מְשִׁיחוֹ,  
אֶת-שׁוֹר מִי לְקַחְתִּי וְחֲמֹר מִי  
לְקַחְתִּי וְאֶת-מִי עֲשָׂקְתִּי, אֶת-  
מִי רִצּוֹתִי וּמִי־מִי לְקַחְתִּי כֶּפֶר  
וְאֶעֱלִים עֵינַי בּוֹ - וְאֲשִׁיב לָכֶם."  
וַיֹּאמְרוּ: "לֹא עֲשָׂקְתָנוּ וְלֹא  
רִצּוֹתָנוּ, וְלֹא-לְקַחְתָּ מִי־אִישׁ  
מְאוּמָה."

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל-הָעָם: "ה'  
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֶת-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת-אַהֲרֹן  
וְאֲשֶׁר הָעֲלָה אֶת-אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם  
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. וְעַתָּה הִתְיַצְבוּ  
וְאֲשַׁפְטָה אֶתְכֶם לִפְנֵי ה'  
כָּל-צַדִּיקוֹת ה' אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה  
אֶתְכֶם וְאֶת-אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם."

וַיִּקְרְבוּ יְמֵי-דָוִד לְמוֹתוֹ, וַיִּצַּו  
אֶת-שְׁלֹמֹה בְּנוֹ לֵאמֹר: "אֲנֹכִי  
הֵלֵךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ כָּל-הָאָרֶץ וְחִזַּקְתָּ  
וְהָיִיתָ לְאִישׁ. וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת-  
מִשְׁמַרְתֵּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְלַכֵּת  
בְּדַרְכָּיו, לְשָׁמֵר חֻקֹתָיו, מִצְוֹתָיו  
וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וְעֲדוֹתָיו, כְּכַתּוּב  
בְּתוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה, לְמַעַן תִּשְׁכִּיל אֶת  
כָּל-אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה וְאֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר  
תִּפְנֶה שָׁם."

## B. Really?

### >> The Rebbe

#### Was this really the first rebuke?

On the verse “It came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first of the month,” Rashi comments, “this teaches us that Moses only rebuked them immediately before his death.”

This requires explanation: We find many prior instances in which Moses rebuked the Jewish people. For example, when they disobeyed at the Sea of Reeds and said “were there no graves in Egypt etc.,” Moses rebuked them and said, “G-d will fight for you, but you shall remain silent.” Moses also rebuked the people at Marah, and in the other instances when the people tested G-d, “they tested Me ten times,” and “all the places where they angered G-d” that were listed at the beginning of the Torah portion. In all of these cases Moses rebuked them immediately, in real-time. How then can Rashi say “Moses only rebuked them immediately before his death.”

#### Why in hints?

An additional, simplistic, question:

A. Since these are words of rebuke, what is the point of delivering them in hints? When people want to understand the hint they will

על הפסוק<sup>1</sup> “ויהי בארבעים שנה בעשתי עשר חודש באחד לחודש”, מפרש רש”י: “מלמד שלא הוכיחן אלא סמוך למיתה”.

וצריך להבין: מצינו ריבוי פעמים לפני זה שמושה רבינו הוכיח את ישראל, ולדוגמה, בעת שהמרו בבואם לים סוף שאמרו “המבלי אין קברים במצרים גו”<sup>2</sup> (שעל זה הוכיחן משה ואמר להם “ה’ ילחם לכם ואתם תחרישון”<sup>3</sup>), במרה וכו’, ועל דרך זה בשאר הנסיונות שניסו את הקב”ה, “וינסו אותי זה עשר פעמים”<sup>4</sup>, וכן ב”כל המקומות שהכעיסו לפני המקום” שנימנו בתחלת הפרשה<sup>5</sup> שהוכיחן מיד בעת מעשה, ואיך אומר רש”י ש”לא הוכיחן אלא סמוך למיתה”!?

ויש להוסיף עוד “קלאץ קושיא”:

א) מכיון שמדובר אודות “דברי תוכחות” - מהי התועלת להזכירם ברמז, שכאשר רוצים מבינים את

<sup>1</sup> וכן בהמשך הפרשה (א, לו) “גם בי התאנף ה’ בגללכם לאמר גם אתה לא תבוא שם”, דקאי על “מי מריבה” (חוקת כ, יג), שהוכיחם משה באמרו להם “שמעו נא המורים” (שם, יו”ד).

<sup>2</sup> דברים א, ג  
<sup>3</sup> בשלח יד, א  
<sup>4</sup> בשלח יד, יד  
<sup>5</sup> שלח יד, כב

understand, but when they don't want to understand they won't... The five-year-old student knows this from personal experience, when one wishes to deliver effective rebuke he needs to deliver it clearly.

הרמז, וכשלא רוצים, לא מבינים... כפי שיודע הבן חמש למקרא בעצמו: כשרוצים לומר "דברי תוכחות" כדי שיפעלו פעולתם, צריכים לאמרם באופן גלוי?

## Why does Rashi reveal the secret?

B. On the flip side, since the verse "conceals matters and only hints at them, to preserve the honor of the Jewish people," why does Rashi reveal what the verse concealed and alluded to, matters that reflect negatively on the Jewish people?

(ב) לאידך גיסא - מכיון שהכתוב "סתם את הדברים והזכיר ברמז, מפני כבודן של ישראל", היתכן שרש"י מגלה מה שסתם ורמז הכתוב, היפך כבודן של ישראל?

## Rabbi Akiva was punished for revealing secrets

We find an instructive story in this regard in the Talmud, about the man who gathered wood on Shabbat.

ועל דרך שמצינו בגמרא "מעשה רב" - בנוגע למקושש.

## Source 7 Talmud, Shabbat 96b

*The Torah relates a story about a Jew who gathered logs on Shabbat, a desecration of the holy day, and of the punishment he received as a consequence. The Torah does not divulge the identity of this individual, however, by analyzing the relevant verses, Rabbi Akiva identified him as Tzelafchad (the father of the righteous women who later requested (and received) a portion in the Holy Land).*

The Sages taught in a Baraita: The wood gatherer was Tzelafchad... this is the statement of Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira said to him: Akiva, in either case you will be judged in the future for this teaching. If your statement is accurate, the Torah concealed his identity, and you reveal it!? And if your statement is not accurate, you are unjustly slandering a righteous man!

תנו רבנן: מקושש זה צלפחד... דברי רבי עקיבא. אמר לו רבי יהודה בן בתירא: עקיבא, בין כך ובין כך אתה עתיד ליתן את הדין: אם כדבריך - התורה כִּיסְתּוּ, וְאַתָּה מְגַלֶּה אוֹתוֹ?! וְאִם לֹא - אַתָּה מוֹצִיא לְעַז עַל אוֹתוֹ צְדִיק!

## >> The Rebbe

We see here that Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteira criticized Rabbi Akiva for revealing that which the Torah had concealed. Our case is similar, the Torah conceals something and only records it cryptically. Why then does Rashi reveal the matter?

אנו רואים שם, שרבי יהודה בן בתירא התרעם על רבי עקיבא, על כך שהוא גילה משהו שהתורה העלימה. ועל דרך זה בנדון דידן, שהתורה כיסתה וכתבה בדרך רמז בלבד, ואם כן, מדוע רש"י מגלה את הדבר!

# C. It's All About the Timing

## >> The Rebbe

### Preventing transgression

The explanation for Rashi's comment "this teaches us that Moses only rebuked them immediately before his death":

All of the previous instances in which Moses rebuked the Jewish people for their undesirable conduct occurred at the time of the actual transgression. It is clear therefore, that these weren't matters of rebuke alone, but practical actions to prevent people from transgressing.

By contrast, the rebuke in our Torah portion is not about halting actual transgression because there was no specific sin being committed at the time. Rather, Moses was listing all of the undesirable actions that occurred over the course of forty years. In other words, this rebuke was (a) not about something current, but from a long time earlier, (b) not about just one issue, but many together, and, importantly, (c) not delivered to the sinners themselves—as it was after "all the men of war finished dying"—but to the generation that entered the Land of Israel.

The rebuke in this Torah portion is thus pure rebuke. Regarding such a rebuke (that isn't also serving the purpose of preventing transgression in real time) Moses "only rebuked them immediately before his death," as he learned from Jacob.

הביאור בפרש"י - "מלמד שלא הוכיחן  
אלא סמוך למיתה":

כל עניני תוכחה שמצינו עד עתה  
שמשה הוכיח את בני ישראל על דברים  
בלתי־רצויים - מכיון שנאמרו בעת  
מעשה, מובן, שאין זה ענין של תוכחה  
בלבד, כי אם, ענין הנוגע למעשה  
בפועל, "לאפרושי מאיסורא".  
מה שאין כן "דברי תוכחות" שבפרשתנו -  
אינם "לאפרושי מאיסורא", שהרי לא  
מדובר אודות חטא מסוים שאירע בעת  
ההיא, כי אם, שמשה רבינו מזכיר את  
כל הענינים הבלתי־רצויים שאירעו  
במשך ארבעים שנה. כלומר: (1) לא  
ענין שאירע עכשיו, אלא, לפני ריבוי  
זמן, (2) ולא רק ענין אחד, אלא ריבוי  
ענינים, ועוד וגם זה עיקר (3) שמזכיר  
כל זה לא לחוטאים עצמם, שכבר  
"תמו כל אנשי המלחמה למות", אלא  
לדור שנכנסו לארץ.

ונמצא, שאין כאן כי אם "דברי  
תוכחות" בלבד, ועל זה אומר רש"י  
שבנוגע ל"דברי תוכחות" (לא  
לאפרושי מאיסורא, כי אם, "דברי  
תוכחות" בלבד) - "לא הוכיחן אלא  
סמוך למיתה", כפי שלמד מיעקב כו'.

When Jews are doing the wrong thing, the leader's role is to prevent them from doing it. Like a father preventing his child from running onto the road. This isn't "rebuke," it's preventing transgression.

But when a leader gathers together his people—or children—and speaks to them about something that happened in the past, and not just one event but a series of events, and does so not to the sinners themselves but to their descendants, this isn't about preventing transgression. This is a speech of rebuke. This is something Moses never did over the course of his life, only "immediately before his death."

## Sensitivity for fresh wounds

The explanation for the fact that Moses only alluded to the transgressions, in order to uphold the honor of the Jewish people, and yet Rashi revealed these words of rebuke:

The need to be careful and only hint at the transgressions was primarily in the time of Moses, when the rebuke was actually delivered. But when we learn these verses many years later, in the generation of Rashi, since it's no longer in the actual "time of passion," the hints can be revealed and explained (even though these are matters that are uncomplimentary to the Jewish people). Moreover, it needs to be revealed and explained in order to understand the meaning of the verses.

הביאור בכך שמשה רבינו הזכיר את החטאים רק ברמז, מפני כבודן של ישראל, ואף-על-פי כן, פירש וגילה רש"י "דברי תוכחות" אלו:

הזהירות לסתום את הדברים ולהזכיר ברמז בלבד - נדרשת בעיקר בזמנו של משה, שאז נאמרו "דברי תוכחות" אלו, מה-שאינ-כן כאשר לומדים פסוק זה לאחרי ריבוי זמן, בדורו של רש"י - הרי, מכיון שאין זה "בעידנא דריתחא"<sup>8</sup>, יכולים כבר לפרש ולגלות את הרמז כו' (אף שמדובר אודות ענין שאינו כבודן של ישראל), ולא עוד, אלא, שצריכים לפרש ולגלות בשביל ביאור הכתובים.

*It's all a matter of timing. In the time of Moses, the sins were still a fresh wound for the generation entering the Land of Israel. Therefore, out of concern for the honor of the Jewish people, Moses only alluded to their negative actions, and this was enough. But in the generation of Rashi, 2400 years later, there is no longer any concern that mentioning the sins will embarrass anyone. On the contrary, it will help us better understand the story.*

8 על דרך לשון חז"ל - מנחות מא, א.

The same can be said regarding Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteira's criticism of Rabbi Akiva "the Torah concealed his identity and you are revealing it":

"The Torah concealed his identity" in real time. At the time, the identity of the person didn't matter, what was relevant was what his punishment should be. This is why the Torah concealed his identity. But many years later, in the time of Rabbi Akiva, this can be revealed.

Not only can it be revealed, it needs to be revealed. The proof for this is the fact that Rav Ashi included Rabbi Akiva's identification "the wood gatherer was Tzelafchad" in the Talmud, despite Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteira's protestations. Once Rabbi Akiva revealed that "the wood gatherer was Tzelafchad" this became a part of Torah.

*The same logic applies to revealing the name of the wood gatherer. At the time, his identity was concealed so as not to embarrass the famous daughters of Tzelafchad "who cherished the Land of Israel." But in the time of Rabbi Akiva, 1300 years later, there were no identifiable descendants of Tzelafchad around, so his identity could be revealed. Not only was this allowed, it was necessary, because an anonymous story is more difficult to relate to.*

*When we hear a story about an unnamed person who did something good, it doesn't affect us so strongly because we don't know who it was, and what the background circumstances were. But when we are told that a specific person, whom we have heard about and know his family, did something good, the story makes a deeper impression on us.*

ועל דרך זה יש לומר בנוגע לטענת רבי יהודה בן בתירא לרבי עקיבא "התורה כיסתו ואתה מגלה":

"התורה כיסתו" - בשעת מעשה, שאז, לא היה נוגע מי הוא המקושש, כי אם, שדינו של המקושש כך וכך ומפני כבודו כיסתו התורה, אבל, בזמנו של רבי עקיבא, לאחר ריבוי זמן, יכולים לגלות.

ולא עוד, אלא, שצריכים לגלות, וראיה לדבר - שלמרות טענת רבי יהודה בן בתירא לרבי עקיבא "התורה כיסתו ואתה מגלה", קבע רב אשי בגמרא את דבריו של רבי עקיבא "מקושש זה צלפחד", שכן, לאחר שגילה רבי עקיבא ש"מקושש זה צלפחד", הרי זה חלק בתורה.

On the contrary, Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira's criticism "the Torah concealed his identity and you are revealing it" was included in the Talmud in order to teach us that although there is an argument to be made for not revealing that which the Torah concealed, the final conclusion is that the time has come to reveal it.

ואדרבה: טענת רבי יהודה בן בתירא  
"התורה כיסתו ואתה מגלה" נקבעה  
בגמרא כדי להדגיש שלמרות שקיימת  
סברא שאין לגלות מה שהתורה כיסתו,  
מכל-מקום, המסקנה היא שסוף-כל-  
סוף בא הזמן שיש לגלות.

משיחת שבת פרשת דברים, ה'תשמ"ז,  
בלתי מוגה.  
תורת מנחם, ה'תשמ"ז חלק ד' עמוד 176

*Not many of us have the opportunity to do as Jacob and Moses did - to time a rebuke specifically prior to one's passing. What lesson can we nevertheless learn from them regarding the appropriate way to deliver critique?*

*Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli, the famed disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch, had a unique way of calling attention to an area where his fellow Jew could improve. He would stand within earshot of his fellow and rebuke himself out loud, saying "Zusha, Zusha, what will be with you? Again you were negligent with your hand washing? You spoke negatively about another Jew? You failed to judge your fellow favorably?" So he would continue to enumerate "his own" faults, which were actually the faults of the one standing nearby.*

*This charade caused the listener to repent from the sins that he committed without being embarrassed by a public rebuke as Rabbi Zusha was "speaking to himself." It wouldn't hurt if before the next time we rebuke someone, we would pay heed and consider well whether the fault we see in our fellow is one that we have as well.*

*More importantly, when we see a fault in someone and consider rebuking them, we should ask ourselves: what will be the outcome of our words? Will they be taken positively or G-d forbid the opposite? We should be careful to rebuke gently and subtly, and certainly not from a place of self-righteousness. This is the only way that we can ensure that our words hit their mark and have the intended effect.*