

# SPEAKING LOUDER

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Moshe is saying his last good-byes to his beloved nation. He stands at Israel's border and reviews forty years of trials and tribulations, the good times and the bad, and how his nation Israel matured to become the inheritor of the Promised Land. The first verse in this week's portion alludes to the ensuing topics of discussion. The Golden Calf, the incident with the spies, and the time when Israel faltered at the idol Ba'al Pe'or are amongst the many issues that are re-examined.

But the Torah defines Moshe's rebuke by confining it to a specific time frame. The Torah tells us that only "after smiting Sichon, king of the Amorites, and (the giant) Og, king of Bashan, did Moshe begin explaining this Torah (rebuke) to them." (Deuteronomy 1:4)

The fact that the Torah makes a point of stating that the reproofs occurred only after Moshe smote two powerful enemies has obvious connotations. Rashi explains: "if the Jews were to say, 'what has Moshe done for us? Has he brought us into the Land? How does he have the right to rebuke us?' Moshe thus waited until the defeat of the last two major enemies before rebuking the nation."

Perhaps Moshe wanted to tell us a bit more.

**Reb Mendel Kaplan (1913-1985) was a Rebbe at the Talmudical Yeshiva of Philadelphia from 1965 until he passed away. In the later years, he would conduct an early morning class with a select group of students. He would study with them *Daas Chachma U'Mussar*, the magnum opus of his Rebbe, Rabbi Yeruchum Levovitz, the Mashgiach of the Mirrer Yeshiva of Europe and later Shanghai. Each day the group would meet before Shacharis (morning prayers) and listen to their elderly Rebbe discuss deep philosophical issues concerning the nature of man and the profound eternal struggle he faces.**

One night a heavy snow covered the streets of Philadelphia. As the boys trudged into the classroom they were dazzled by the view of the dawn breaking over the white blanket that softly covered the frozen ground. But an even more amazing sight beheld then inside the classroom. Rav Mendel was at sitting at his desk wearing his boots, gloves, and an overcoat that was as warm as his expression. "Today we will learn the *real* Mussar (ethics)," he smiled. "Don't take off your boots and coats." He closed the large tome on his desk and pointed to six shovels neatly stacked in the corner of the classroom.

With that, he took a shovel, walked outside, and began to lead the boys in shoveling a path from the dormitories to the Bais Medrash where the entire school would soon conduct their morning prayers.

Moshe knew that for forty years he had admonished his nation on issues of faith, trust in Hashem, and belief in the prophets. He had put his honor on the line, as he constantly defended their misdeeds. He prayed for them as they battled with Amalek and prayed for them when G-d's wrath was upon them. But he had yet to do physical battle.

The call came. Moshe had to fight the most notorious and powerful rulers of the region, Sichon and Og. They were stronger and bigger and surely more aggressive than he was. His faith was on the line. He had to teach real Mussar. Only after conquering those two foes, showing his people that he too can get down in the trenches, did he begin to admonish the nation for forty years of various improprieties.

Sometimes, if you'd like your friend to become as pure as snow, you can't just talk about it. You have to shovel it.

***Dedicated in memory of Henry Hirsch by the Hirsch and Friedman Families  
Good Shabbos!***

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