

THE SECRET TO REBUKE

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Devarim

The Secret to Rebuke

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Sponsored by Nathan and Rikki Lewin on the yahrzeit of his mother Peppy Sternheim Lewin (Pessel bat Naftali a"h)

Our parashah begins with what appears to be a review of Bnei Yisrael's travels in the desert. Rashi z"l observes, however, that there is no other mention in the Torah of some of the place names that Moshe Rabbeinu lists here. Rather, Rashi explains, these terms should be understood as veiled allusions to some of the sins that Bnei Yisrael committed in the desert.

R' Shmuel Shmelke Güntzler z"l (1838-1911; rabbi of Oyber-Visheve, Hungary for 45 years) writes: We read (Mishlei 28:23), "One who reproves a person will later find favor, more than one with a flattering tongue." The Midrash Rabbah notes that the verse can be read, "One who reproves a person after Me will find favor, more than one with a flattering tongue," and it explains: "One who reproves"--this is Moshe; "a person"--this is Bnei Yisrael; "after Me"--this is G-d, i.e., to cause them to follow Me; "will find favor"--as it is written (Shmot 33:12), "You [Moshe] have found favor in My Eyes"; "more than one with a flattering tongue"--this is Bilam. The midrash further comments that Moshe reproved Bnei Yisrael "after Me," i.e., he reproved Bnei Yisrael regarding their relationship with Hashem (see Shmot 32:30), but also reproved Hashem regarding His relationship with Bnei Yisrael (ibid, verse 11).

R' Güntzler continues: How is it that Moshe Rabbeinu, who devoted his life to defending Bnei Yisrael, would now castigate them? Indeed, like any father, Hashem does not like when people speak harshly about His children. That is why Moshe Rabbeinu rebuked Bnei Yisrael using subtle hints that they would understand, but which a casual reader would not, as Rashi explains. At the same time, his words contain a subtle rebuke of Hashem himself.

For example, the words (Devarim 1:1) "Di Zahav" can mean "enough gold," and they subtly hint to Bnei Yisrael that their excessive wealth caused them to make the golden calf. At the same time, they say

to Hashem, "You gave them that gold, so how can You complain?" Moshe Rabbeinu's words contained veiled criticism of Bnei Yisrael, as Rashi explains, but in his heart he was defending them. In this way, Moshe reproved Bnei Yisrael regarding their relationship with Hashem, but also reproved Hashem regarding His relationship with Bnei Yisrael. In contrast, says the midrash, Bilam openly blessed Bnei Yisrael--he spoke "with a flattering tongue"--but in his heart he was cursing them. (Meisiv Nefesh: Parashat Pinchas)

"After he had defeated Sichon, king of the Emorites, who dwelt in Cheshbon, and Og, king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtarot, in Edrei." (1:4)

We read in Tehilim (136:17-22), "To Him Who defeated great kings, for His kindness endures forever; and slew mighty kings, for His kindness endures forever; Sichon, king of the Emorites, for His kindness endures forever; and Og, king of Bashan, for His kindness endures forever; and He presented their land as a heritage, for His kindness endures forever; a heritage for Yisrael His servant, for His kindness endures forever."

Why, asks R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver z"l (1789-1852; rabbi of Suvalk, Lithuania), do the verses seemingly repeat themselves: "And presented their land as a heritage . . .; a heritage for Yisrael"? He explains: We read in our parashah (2:9), "You shall not distress Moav and you shall not provoke war with them." Likewise, Bnei Yisrael were commanded not to disturb Ammon. Yet, the lands of Ammon and Moav were meant to belong to Bnei Yisrael. Therefore, says King David in Tehilim, Hashem "slew mighty kings"--i.e., the kings of Ammon and Moav were slain by Sichon and Og--and "He presented their land as a heritage" to Sichon and Og, in order that it could later become "a heritage for Yisrael." (Haggadah Shel Pesach Yad Mitzrayim)

Tisha B'Av

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (Yerushalayim; 1910-1995) would bemoan the fact that the general populace does not feel the loss of the Temple. Throughout history, especially during the Three Weeks, this feeling was the heritage of the Jewish People, he would say. The somberness and heavy heart associated with the Three Weeks could be seen on people's faces, especially in Yerushalayim. Many would wear lesser quality clothes during the entire Three Weeks as an expression of mourning.

In our generation, when the Holy Land continues to be resettled and to grow, this feeling has been lost. R' Auerbach commented that the words of the kinnah / lamentation, "Over the destruction of the Temple, that was torn down and trampled upon, I shall lament with a new elegy every year," can

mean that it is the Destruction itself, rather than the Temple, which has been torn down and trampled upon- i.e., it is no longer appreciated--and for that we must compose a new elegy every year.

R' Auerbach likewise bemoaned the lack of attention paid to the Holocaust. He acknowledged that it is difficult to grasp the murder of six million people, and he recommended focusing on the suffering of one family, especially a family of Torah scholars and G-d-fearing people, and gradually extrapolating from there to the suffering of the entire nation. (Quoted in Halichot Shlomo: Moa'adim)

The Daf Ha'yomi

As many readers are aware, this coming week marks the completion of the twelfth cycle of the "Daf Ha'yomi" study. The following essay pays tribute to this historic event.

One could describe the Daf Ha'yomi (commonly called "Daf Yomi") as a program in which participants worldwide study the same page of Talmud Bavli (Gemara) on any given day and complete it every seven-and-a-half years. R' Meir Shapiro z"l, the tzaddik who first promoted this concept, saw it much differently:

Daf Yomi is a bridge--though fashioned of paper--which lifts the Jew above the stormy confusion of the waters below, and he walks with more assurance and confidence than on the firmest steel structure.

The great allure of the Daf Yomi concept lies in the realization that the daf / page of Gemara which I learn here and now is being poured over by countless Jews scattered over the face of the earth. While each one has his own particular mode of learning and is influenced by the intellectual climate of his environment, nevertheless, Abaye and Rava [two great sages of the Talmud] remain Abaye and Rava. [From R' Meir Shapiro's remarks on the occasion of the first completion of the Daf Yomi cycle on Tu B'shvat 5691/1931, reprinted in the Jewish Observer, Vol. XXII No. 1]

The two-fold purpose of Daf Yomi, first begun on Rosh Hashanah 5684/1924, was to encourage Jews to increase their Torah study through the implementation of a regimented program or quota, and to provide a vehicle for uniting Jews worldwide. R' Meir Shapiro himself observed on the occasion mentioned above:

It was on my first trip abroad on behalf of the yeshiva of Lublin [in 1927, to the U.S., England, and Western Europe], when I found groups and individuals learning the daf in every Jewish

community I visited, that I saw at first hand the impact that Daf Yomi has made in the Jewish world. Whether it was in Strasbourg, London or Baltimore [here he mentioned by name people whom he had met], while their styles of learning differed, there was the same motivating force which is inherent in Daf Yomi.

In every generation since Daf Yomi was introduced, many Torah giants have endorsed it. The Gerrer Rebbe studied the daf and encouraged his chassidim to do so. The Chafetz Chaim reportedly told R' Meir Shapiro, "In Heaven, they love you dearly." R' Aharon Kotler z"l, one of the leading sages in America in the 1950's, reportedly studied Daf Yomi as well.

In addition to the advantages of Daf Yomi which R' Meir Shapiro himself described, R' Moshe Feinstein z"l notes that it gives a person the opportunity to complete the entire Torah. R' Feinstein proves from various sources that every person is obligated to do this during his lifetime (Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah II No. 110). R' Feinstein notes that centuries ago it was common practice to study a page of Talmud each day, and many towns had a chevrah shas / Talmud society which did just that (Igrot Moshe, Y.D. IV No. 36). R' Yaakov Lorberbaum z"l (the "Nesivos") wrote in his famous ethical will approximately 200 years ago that his sons should study a page of Gemara every day.

Letters from Our Sages

Below is an excerpt from a letter by R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935), later the first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael, but at the time, the 24-year old rabbi of Zemel, Russia, to R' Chaim Berlin z"l (1832-1912), then Chief Rabbi of Moscow, and later Chief Rabbi of Yerushalayim. The letter is dated in the week of "I have found favor in your eyes" [i.e., Parashat Ki Tissa] 5649 [1889]. We reprint this letter in honor of beginning the new Daf Yomi cycle next Friday, 15 Av / August 3.

... Something else new, which due to G-d's kindness to us, we are not far from putting into action -- I thought I would lay it out before the rabbi, sir [i.e., R' Berlin], to find out his opinion regarding this activity. I recently had the idea to call an assembly of many of the great rabbis of our generation to do something together for the aid of Torah study, namely, to print a small format Shas [i.e., Talmud] similar to the small Tanach [Bible] books that are published in Berlin and Leipzig, with letters that are not too large, like those in the Mishnah with the commentary Zera Yisrael, so that the entire Shas would fit in one volume no larger than three Tanach books, maybe smaller. This will have great benefit, increasing the number of people who are fluent in Talmud. Many sages of the past, such as the Maharal of Prague and others, complained about this [i.e., the lack of fluency in the Talmud among the masses]. A major reason for this is that the printed format of the Shas is so large. [Perhaps R' Kook meant that its size makes it expensive to buy or impractical to use]. There are other things to say about this, but one should not elaborate too much for a wise man such as yourself. If we would

print 10,000 copies, we could sell the entire Shas for one silver ruble; even that would be profitable, although that's not the point. The profit could be used for a fund to increase the honor of Torah. One other detail is necessary, and that is to print at the bottom of each page an abridgment of Rashi's commentary--only what is essential, so that those who are reviewing their studies can quickly scan it to remember what they have forgotten. I am sending his honor, sir, one page as a sample so that he can express his opinion regarding it. . . (Igrot Ha'Reiyah No.3)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the Hamaayan page.

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