

# SOFT SELL

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

*"These are the words which Moshe spoke to all of Israel beyond the Jordan; in the wilderness, in the Arabah, opposite Suph, between Paran and Tofel, and Laban and Haserot and Di-zahab." [Debarim 1:1]*

This Shabbat Jews all around the globe commence the weekly public reading of Sefer Debarim -- called Mishneh Torah -- which is always read on the Shabbat preceding the Fast of Tisha B'Ab. Moshe Rabenu, in the last 36 days of his life [The numerical value of the word ELLEH (these) that begins the Book of Debarim is 36], speaks to the people of Israel and gives them a review of the Torah, an enumeration of the events of the forty years in the desert, some commandments not previously mentioned and words of rebuke and reproof. The opening verse appears to be a geographically precise marking of the location of the mass gathering. Rashi elucidates that the places mentioned were points in their travels where the people sinned against G-d. Moshe mentioned these places to reprove the people for their wrongdoing -- but he was careful to do it in a cloaked manner so as not to embarrass the members of his flock.

There once was King who had a special orchard. The fruit had ripened and so he put a watchdog on the premises to prevent thieves from stealing his sweet produce. Much to the King's surprise, one day while looking from his palace window out at his beautiful gardens he saw a dear friend sneaking through a break in the orchard fence in order to abscond some of his fruit. The watchdog attacked the intruder and ripped his clothing before he was able to escape.

The King thought: "If I confront my confidant and ask him why he attempted to steal my fruits -- he will be so embarrassed. If I don't confront him he will think I don't know about his failed attempt and he will surely try again."

What did the King do? When his "friend" came to visit he told him, "How fierce my watchdog is -- I am truly sorry that he ripped your clothing." The man of course realized that the king knew of his trespass --but he was not reproached head on for the misdeed.

Moshe Rabenu was sensitive to the feelings of the Jewish people. If he did not reprove them they might return to their wicked ways. If he reproved them harshly they would become embarrassed from his words. He, therefore, cloaked his rebuke in a geographical account of the places where the people committed the transgressions.

This sensitivity to the feelings and the honor of another human being does not apply only to the entire congregation and not only to the good and the respected members of the people. Bilaam was

the wicked prophet hired to curse the Jews. On the way to his evil mission his donkey stopped and stalled 3 times. Each time the donkey halted, Bilaam struck the animal. On the third time Hashem opened the beast's mouth and the animal spoke words of rebuke to his master. Immediately thereafter G-d killed the donkey --so that people would not say "That is the animal that rebuked Bilaam!" Even a wicked enemy of the Jews is one whose status as a human being deserves respect. This coming week we commemorate the destruction of our holy Temple in Yerushalayim. The Gemara relates that the sequence of events that lead to the tragedy was initiated when one Jew did not respect another. Bar Kamsa, who thought he was invited to a party, was commanded to leave by the unfriendly host. The host embarrassed the unwelcome guest in front of all those present. The insulted Bar Kamsa went to the Gentile rulers at the time and fabricated a story that brought the wrath of their armies and the destruction that ensued.

Our Sages teach: "One who does not see the Bet HaMikdash in his day is as one who committed the sins that brought about its demise." We all pray for redemption and for the end of the suffering of our people in Erets Yisrael and all around the globe. If we wish to bring redemption we must correct the sin that brought about the exile. May we all develop a proper sense of Kabod Haberiyot -- respect and sensitivity towards our fellow man and speed the redemption with the coming of Mashiah Sidkenu -- Amen.

Shabbat Shalom

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