



Remarkable Rebuke

The first *pasuk* in *Sefer Devarim* is very curious. It begins, “These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Israel.” (*Devarim 1:1*) But instead of his words, we find a detailed description of his location, listing all the places in the area, “...on the east bank of the Jordan, in the desert and in the Aravah, near Suf, in the vicinity of Paran, Tofel, Lavan, Chatzerot, and Di Zahav.” (*Ibid.*) What is the significance of recording this information?

The *Malbim* explains that these were the various places at which Moshe Rabbeinu “spoke words” to the people. Rashi, however, teaches that the name of each place hints at a different sin that was committed in that location during the Jews’ sojourn in the desert. Unlike the *Malbim*, Rashi understands these names as actually expressing

the words of rebuke that Moshe Rabbeinu spoke, as opposed to describing the places in which he spoke them. Rashi continues to explain that to protect the honor of the Jewish people, Moshe Rabbeinu spoke words that implied or suggested rebuke, rather than chastising the people directly.

This sensitivity that Moshe Rabbeinu displayed is the hallmark of a Jew. Each Jew is created in the image of G-d and has a spark of G-dliness in him. It is therefore most appropriate to treat each person with the dignity that he deserves. The *mishnah* in *Avot* teaches, “The dignity of your student should be as precious to you as your own; the dignity of your colleague, as your awe of your master; and your awe of your master as your awe of Heaven.” (*Avot 4:12*). In *Alei Shur*, Rav Wolbe quotes his rebbe, Rav Yerucham, and asks, why are we exhorted to treat another one notch above our own level? His response is powerful. It is so hard to give others the honor they deserve, therefore, if one aims high, then there is

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hope that the other person will receive his due honor.

Parashat Devarim is always read on *Shabbat Chazon*. In our effort to combat the baseless hatred that consumes us, we must first and foremost integrate this quintessential idea in our relationships. We all must heighten our awareness of how special each person is and treat everyone with the dignity that they deserve. As we hone our sensitivity and realize how hard it is to honor each person, we can increase our efforts to accord others even greater honor and respectability. In this way, we can do our part to rectify the hatred and negativity that led to the *churban*.

The Slonimer Rebbe finds a second lesson from Rashi's understanding that the names of the places mentioned indicated specific *mussar* that Moshe wanted to share. "*Reishit chochma yirat Hashem.*" (*Tehillim 111:10*) Everything begins with awe of Hashem - the ability to humbly recognize Hashem's Omnipresence. To receive the depth and breadth of Torah that Moshe was transmitting at this time, *Am Yisrael* needed to be prepared with feelings of humility and contrition. Similarly, the difficult *galut* experience engenders feelings of brokenness, the precursor to the future grand revelation of goodness. May all we have endured as a people coupled with deep sensitivity for each other, serve to bring the Ultimate Redemption speedily in our days. ■

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