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## REPRIMANDING IN LOVE (BY RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

**I**t is written, "These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel on this side of the Jordan, in the desert, in the plain opposite Suf, between Paran and Tophel, and Lavan and Hazeroth and Di-Zahav" (Devarim 1:1). Rashi explains: "Since these are words of rebuke, he lists here all the places where they angered the Omnipresent. Hence it makes no explicit mention of the incidents, but instead just alludes to them out of respect for Israel." This is surprising, for not all the parshiot in the book of Devarim consist of reprimands. There are only a minority that do, while the majority simply reiterate what was said in the previous books. Even if some parshiot consist of reprimands, that does not turn the entire book into a reprimand. Furthermore, we need to explain why Moshe deemed it good to reprimand that generation, which did not participate in the sin of the golden calf or in Korach's rebellion. Everyone who participated in those episodes died in the desert during the 40 years of wandering. Therefore what was the purpose of reprimanding a generation for the sins of their fathers?

Normally, when we say farewell to a friend, we host a meal to honor him and give him gifts that he will treasure. Yet Moshe, when he was saying farewell to the Children of Israel before leaving this world, assembled the people to reprimand them for their misdeeds, and he preached to them. Why did he not follow the usual custom, thereby departing from them in joy?

### Our Fathers Did Not Understand Him

When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: "Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites" (Bamidbar 31:2), Moshe and the Children of Israel knew that his death would follow this war. In fact our Sages have said, "See the great love that the shepherds of Israel have for their people, to the point of not hearing that the war with Midian would precipitate the death of Moshe" (Sifrei, Bamidbar 157b). It is written, "What shall I do for this people? A little more and they will stone me" (Shemot 17:4), which means that the war with Midian would precipitate Moshe's death. The Children

of Israel began to hide themselves, but they were still, despite their wishes, called into the army, as it is written: "So there were delivered out of the thousands of Israel...twelve thousand armed for war" (Bamidbar 31:5). From the fact that they did not wish to be called into the army to fight against Midian, Moshe realized how much they loved him.

Moshe knew that the Children of Israel would understand him after 40 years, for it is written: "It may take a person 40 years to know the mind of his teacher" (Avodah Zarah 5b). Since they understood him, they knew just how devoted to them he had been during all these years, how many times he had prayed for them, and how many times he made himself sick over them. Moshe even asked G-d to wipe his name out of the Torah in order to forgive the Children of Israel. They realized that Moshe had acted with them like a father with his children, above and beyond every possible measure. They also realized that their fathers, because they did not understand Moshe, were not aware of this.

### Diminishing Their Love

The Holy One, blessed be He, did not reveal Moshe's burial place because of their great love for him. Otherwise, all the Children of Israel would have gone to pray by his grave, and not a single person would have entered Eretz Israel. He therefore concealed it from them.

This is why Moshe was afraid that the Children of Israel might lose hope upon his passing, since they loved him so much. They also knew that without him, not the slightest trace of Israel would have remained. Who was now going to prevent the Attribute of Justice from accusing them? Perhaps the Satan would drive the Children of Israel mad?

Hence Moshe began to reprimand them in order to diminish their great love for him. In fact when a rabbi reprimands his students, they will reluctantly feel a certain degree of animosity entering their hearts, for no one likes to be reprimanded, as it is written: "If a scholar is loved by the townspeople, it is not due to his superiority, but because he does not rebuke them" (Ketubot 105b). Moshe

wanted to diminish their love for him to a certain degree. Why? To prevent this love from leading them to err after a certain time.

What were the reprimands that Moshe made? He reviewed the entire Torah before the Children of Israel, saying to them: If you fulfill all the mitzvot written here, which I have taught you during all these years, good. Otherwise, if you emulate your fathers, who worshipped the golden calf and bowed before Peor, you will not enter Eretz Israel.

### Even After His Death

This is extraordinary. Despite everything he did, Moshe was unable to diminish their love for him, which we see from how they mourned his passing. In fact when Moshe died, we read: "The Children of Israel wept for Moshe in the plains of Moab for 30 days" (Devarim 34:8). The Midrash states, "They wept for him 30 days before his death, all because of their great love for him despite his reprimands, for 40 years had passed and they understood him and realized that he had been completely devoted to them during all those years" (Sifrei, Devarim 257).

From here we learn that Moshe only reprimanded the Children of Israel because of the great love that he had for them. It was also because he was afraid that after his death, the Satan would come and make them lose hope. This teaches us just how great Moshe's compassion was, for he was worried about what would happen to the people even after his passing, afraid that the Satan would come and lead them astray.

Even after Moshe's passing, he continued to worry about the Children of Israel. In comparing similar expressions that occur in two passages (Devarim 34:5 and Shemot 34:28), the Gemara states: "As in the latter passage [when Moshe was alive] it means standing and ministering, so also in the former [when Moshe died] it means standing and ministering" (Sotah 13b). From here we learn that Moshe had no intention of humiliating the Children of Israel through his reprimands. He did so only because he loved them, for he was afraid that their love for him would eventually lead to problems.

# SOME PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

## Three Things

*It is written, “Alas, she sits in solitude. The city that was great with people has become like a widow. The greatest among nations, the princess among provinces, has become a tributary” (Eicha 1:1).*

Why is Jerusalem first described as a city, but then as a province?

In times of war, a city can avoid capture for three reasons: The first is by having a large population, the second is by having wise men (for even if they are not numerous, by their wisdom they can find a way to defeat the enemy), and the third is by being fortified.

Jerusalem, writes Rabbi Shemuel Di Ozida, possessed all three of these: It had a large population, its inhabitants were wise, and it was fortified.

It is for this reason that the poet expresses his surprise: “Alas, she sits in solitude” – how is it possible that Jerusalem was destroyed, since it was a “city that was great with people”? Furthermore, how could she be “like a widow,” since its inhabitants were sages, “the greatest among nations”? Finally, Jerusalem was “the princess among provinces,” the most fortified among them all. Therefore how could it have “become a tributary”?

– Lechem Dimah

## Between Tammuz 17 and Av 9

It is written, “All her pursuers overtook her in dire straits” (Eicha 1:3).

This verse describes the greatness and strength of the Jewish people, as well as their importance and relationship with Hashem. Even after all their sins and all the times in which they irritated Him, a specific time was required in order to punish and exile them, a time of misfortune during which their enemies could conquer them.

Hence, “All her pursuers overtook her in dire straits” between Tammuz 17 and Av 9, a time designated for misfortune. This is the time given to their enemies to harm them. Yet during the other days of the year, despite their numerous sins, disaster cannot come upon them.

– Lechem Dimah

## Gone

*It is written, “Gone from the daughter of Zion is all her splendor...they are gone without strength before the pursuer” (Eicha 1:6).*

When a person leaves his home to go live elsewhere, a clear sign that he yearns to return is that he only brings essential things with him, leaving behind unnecessary items. However if he takes everything that he has at home, it means that he has no intention on returning to live there. Hence he leaves nothing behind.

This is the comparison being made in the verse: When they saw that the daughter of Zion left without all her splendor – the vessels of the Temple – the suffering of the exiled sons of Zion diminished, for they had lost all hope and could not be consoled. Hence “they are gone without strength before the pursuer,” without any consolation or ray of hope.

– Kol Bochim

## Measure for Measure

*It is written, “They are gone without strength before the pursuer” (Eicha 1:6).*

Rabbi Huna, Rabbi Acha, and Rabbi Shimon said in the name of Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish, and the Sages said it in the name of Rabbi Chanina: “A man would say to his fellow in Jerusalem, ‘Teach me a page of Scripture,’ but he would reply, ‘I do not have the strength.’ [He would say,] ‘Teach me a chapter of Mishnah,’ but he would reply, ‘I do not have the strength.’ The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them, ‘A time will come when I will act so with you,’ [as it is written:] ‘They are gone without strength before the pursuer.’”

– Eicha Rabba 1:33

## Past and Present

*It is written, “See, O Hashem, and behold” (Eicha 1:11).*

This is like the son of a wealthy man, who lost all his money and began to wander from place to place, until he was finally forced to cut wood for a living. His face was filled with shame, for now he was like a day worker who barely earned enough to make a living, despite working very hard.

One day he met a man who had known him when he was wealthy and respected. He reached into his pocket and took out an old picture in which his face was shining. The man took the picture and held it before him, saying: “See how different you look now! One could mistake this picture for another person!” At that point, they both began to cry.

This is what the prophet is saying: “See, O Hashem, and behold” – see what we looked like in the past, and behold what we look like now.

– Kol Bochim

## Twice the Bitterness

*It is written, “He filled me with bitterness, sated me with wormwood” (Eicha 3:15).*

The Sages say that this refers to “the first nights of the Passover festival” (Eicha Rabba 3:5).

As we know, the measure of satisfaction is the kebeitza, the volume of an egg, which is twice that of a kezayit, the volume of an olive. When the Temple stood, people would eat a kezayit of bitter herbs on Passover. After the destruction of the Temple, however, it was ruled that people should eat a kezayit of bitter herbs in the korech with the matza to recall the Passover offering. Yet in order for a rabbinic mitzvah not to annul a Torah mitzvah, it was ruled that people should eat a second kezayit of bitter herbs in order to fully get the taste of bitterness.

Hence Rabbi Yochanan Eibeshutz explained that the prophet said, “He filled me with bitterness” – meaning that after the destruction of the Temple, we must eat a quantity of bitter herbs that is filling, two kezayitim of bitter herbs.

– Alon Bachut

## Like an Animal

*It is written, “What complaints [are made by] a living man? A man for his sins” (Eicha 3:39).*

We may say that this verse refers to what the Sages have said on the expression, “You save both man and animal, O Hashem” (Tehillim 36:7) – a reference to men who act like animals.

The verse therefore states, “What complaints” – the sinner should complain and regret that he once occupied the level of a “man,” meaning a lofty and important position. Yet now he is nothing more than “living” – at the same level as an animal.

What caused this? “His sins” – the sins that lowered him from his lofty position and standing.

– Chomat Anach

## The Recent Generations

It is written, “Our fathers have sinned and are no more, and we bear their iniquities” (Eicha 5:7).

We may say that our fathers, even if they strayed by committing minor sins, immediately repented, before sin could entrench itself in them. “Our fathers have sinned,” and they immediately “are no more” – they instantly repented.

As for ourselves, the recent generations, even when we deliberately commit major sins, we still “bear” our iniquities and do not hasten to repent.

– Kiflayim LeTushia

# AT THE SOURCE

## Kissufim

*It is written, "Choose wise and understanding men" (Devarim 1:13).*

Rashi explains that the term anashim ("men") signifies righteous men and sages – kissufim. In his book Michlal Yoffi, Rabbi David ibn Khalifa cites four meanings for the term kissufim:

1. It evokes desire. This means that we desire them; we yearn for them.
2. It evokes shame, as in "bread of shame" (nehama d'kissufa). This means that they are timid and humble, possessing no pride.
3. It evokes loss, meaning that they forego their own needs for the needs of the community.
4. It evokes money (kessef), meaning that they must be wealthy, but not given to corruption.

## Six Characteristics

*It is written, "I made otam [them] leaders over you" (Devarim 1:15).*

The term otam is written fully vocalized, with a vav. In his book Bnei Reuven, Rabbi Maimon Abu Zatzal states that this alludes to the fact that these leaders possessed the characteristics mentioned by the Sages in regards to those who merit the World to Come: "Modest, humble, who enter discreetly and who leave discreetly, knowers of Torah without taking credit for it."

We may also explain this according to what our Sages said in the Gemara: "None are to be appointed members of the Sanhedrin but men of stature, wisdom, good appearance, mature age, understanding sorcery, and who are conversant with all the 70 languages of mankind" (Sanhedrin 17a). These are the same six characteristics that the Sages listed for the leaders of Israel.

## Only Listen

*It is written, "Listen among your brothers and judge righteously" (Devarim 1:16).*

It is obvious that in order to judge righteously, one must listen to the litigants. Therefore what is the verse telling us by saying, "Listen among your brothers"?

The author of Afikei Yam states that this verse may be telling us that the judge who presides over a case must only listen to the litigants, not look at them, which may interfere with their arguments. Hence the verse underlines that the judge must "listen among your brothers" – listen only – not look.

Thus the Gemara states, "When they who displayed partiality in judgment multiplied, the command: 'You shall not fear' [Devarim 1:17] became void, and 'You shall not respect' [ibid.] ceased to be practiced" (Sotah 47b).

## Not Applicable

*It is written, "Hashem your G-d gave you this land as a possession" (Devarim 3:18).*

In his book Netivot Shalom, Rabbi Shalom Avitsror states that Eretz Israel was given to the Children of Israel only on condition that they fulfill Torah and mitzvot. The Torah warns of a failure to do so by stating, "Let the land not vomit you out when you defile it" (Vayikra 18:28). This is precisely what happened when the Children of Israel sinned, for they were driven into exile.

One might ask, "How could the land vomit up the Children of Israel and exile them, since there is a principle which states: 'We do not descend from a greater degree of holiness to a lesser degree of holiness'?" The answer is that this principle only applies in cases where one does

not transgress a condition imposed by the Holy One, blessed be He, Who gave the land to the Children of Israel in order for them to obey His laws. Since they transgressed this condition, the aforementioned principle does not apply.

## IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE TSADIK RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA

### *Always Be Careful About What You Say*

It is written, "These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel on this side of the Jordan, in the desert, in the plain opposite Suf, between Paran and Tophel, and Lavan and Hazereth and Di-Zahav" (Devarim 1:1). Rashi explains, "Since these are words of rebuke, here he lists all the places where they angered G-d. Hence it makes no explicit mention of the incidents, but instead just alludes to them out of respect for Israel."

Wherever we find the term daber, it signifies harsh speech. Our Sages have said, "Does it mean to say that the use of the term daber always denotes harsh speech? Yes indeed, as it is written: 'He spoke with them harshly' [Bereshith 42:7]" (Makkot 11a). Here too it is written, "These are the words [devarim]," teaching us that Moshe spoke harshly to them and reprimanded them for having irritated G-d. Yet even when he spoke harshly to them, he only did so out of love. Hence he did not reprimand them directly, but by allusion, in order not to humiliate them.

We must always be very careful about what we say, and must not blatantly accuse Jews of wrongdoing. Even when it is necessary to reprimand someone, we must take his dignity into consideration. As the Midrash states, "Whoever serves the Children of Israel must be careful not to incur great loss by offending them, as was the case with Moshe and Eliyahu. Moshe said, 'Listen now, O rebels' [Bamidbar 20:10], and it is said: 'You will not bring this assembly into the land' [v.12]. Eliyahu said, 'The Children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant' [I Kings 19:10], and it is said: 'You shall anoint Elisha ben Shafat...as a prophet in your place' [v.16]" (Pesikta Rabbati 11).

Because Moshe wanted to review the entire Torah, he began with words of affection. At other times he spoke harshly to the Children of Israel, but here he wanted to gently persuade them. As we know, the prophet Isaiah was punished for having said: "I dwell among a people of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). Thus we read, "When Isaiah saw this, he began to justify the Children of Israel and defend them" (Pesikta Rabbati 33). Moshe as well, once he said, "Listen now, O rebels," began to speak in their honor, reprimanding them only through allusion.

From here the Sages have said, "Sages, be careful with your words" (Pirkei Avoth 1:11) – even if you utter harsh words as a reprimand, you must be very careful about what you say.

## GUARD YOUR TONGUE

### *Lighthearted Comments*

We also see the greatness of the prohibition against Lashon Harah from the fact that even when we are not speaking out of hatred and have no intention of ridiculing someone, but we say something lighthearted just for a laugh, this is actually a form of ridicule, and it is forbidden by the Torah.

– Chafetz Chaim

# A TRUE STORY

## SUMMONED ONLY FOR YOUR OWN GOOD

**It is written, "Judge righteously between a man and his brother, and the stranger" (Devarim 1:16).**

A non-Jew from Lodz came to see the gaon Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Meizel Zatzal, the Rav of Lodz, to ask him something. He wanted to speak with the Rav in private, and the Rav asked him inside. The non-Jew then recounted what had happened to him:

"I live in Lodz, in the Balot district. I was involved in the Polish Revolution [which occurred in 1863], during which time I served as the treasurer for the entire province. Once the revolution settled down, I had about 8,000 rubles in my possession. So as not to give people the wrong impression, I couldn't put the money in the bank, and therefore I hid it in my cellar and guarded it like the apple of my eye. No other person was aware of it. From time to time, I would go down to the cellar at midnight and count the money. Days passed, and eventually years, until a few days ago I went down to the cellar as usual, but the money wasn't there! Panic-stricken, I began to scream and pull out my hair. The neighbors came over, but it was no use, for the money had been stolen. It was simply no longer there!"

Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim asked him, "Do you suspect anybody?"

"I don't know for sure," he replied. "But what I do know is that one of my neighbors is a poor Jew who works as a carpenter. He and his wife, along with their children, were always dressed in tatters; it would hurt me to see how those poor people lived. Yet one day, this carpenter began to live quite well, purchasing beautiful cutlery and nice clothes for himself and his family. He seemed to be living very well, while as for me...."

Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim interrupted him, "Did you ask the carpenter how he got all this money?"

"Yes," the man replied. "I asked him, and he told me that his wife's uncle had died in London and left them a great deal of money. But I can't rest easy, and it's driving me mad. That's why I've come to ask you what I should do."

"Return home," the Rav told him, "and come back tomorrow."

When he had left, Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim summoned the carpenter, who arrived quickly.

"I've heard," Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim said to him, "that you suddenly came into some money. In that case, why haven't you brought some money for tzeddakah?"

"You're right," replied the carpenter. "I just never thought of it. I certainly won't be stingy. On the contrary!"

"Your uncle was very rich?" asked the Rav.

"Yes," replied the carpenter. "Extremely rich."

The Rav again asked, "Did he leave any inheritance other than to you?"

"Ahhh...no," the carpenter stammered.

Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim then realized that the story of the inheritance was far from clear.

He whispered into the ear of the carpenter: "You should know that I summoned you here for your own good, to save you from a grave misfortune. Several of my friends have come to me and said that you are circulating counterfeit bills. Now you know how the state punishes this kind of offense!"

The face of the carpenter became green, and then he turned pale. He realized that his non-Jewish neighbor had been making counterfeit money, which explained why he would regularly descend into his cellar and stay there.

Trembling, the carpenter said: "Rabbi, I want to tell you the whole truth. I found this money hidden away in the cellar of the building where I live. After a certain time, I realized that the money belonged to my non-Jewish neighbor. How could I know that he was making counterfeit money?"

"Return home quickly," Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim said, "and bring me all the money that you have." The carpenter ran back and brought all the money to Rabbi Eliyahu.

The Rav took the money and said to him, "Be very careful not to touch any money that doesn't belong to you. The money is real, but it's not yours."

By the following day, the money had already been returned to the non-Jew, who was beside himself with joy at the Rav's great wisdom, thanks to which he had recovered all his money.

## BY ALLUSION

### *All Are Guilty*

**It is written, "Eleh [These] are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel" (Devarim 1:1).**

The term eleh is an acronym for Avak Lashon Harah ("the dust of Lashon Harah"), a sin that everyone commits. Thus it is written: "Most [people are guilty] of stealing, a minority of lewdness, and all of...the dust of Lashon Harah" (Bava Batra 165a). Hence Moshe warned the entire Jewish people about it.

– Chomat Anach

### *Mourning*

**It is written, "Eleven days from Horev" (Devarim 1:2).**

This alludes to the eleven days of the year during which we mourn the destruction of the Temple, namely the first nine days of Av, Tammuz 17, and Tevet 10.

– Kli Yakar

### *Elul*

**It is written, "[Hashem] made his heart obstinate in order to deliver him into your hand" (Devarim 2:30).**

The initials of the expression ve'imetz et-levavo lema'an ("made his heart obstinate in order") form the term Elul.

This alludes to what the Midrash states about the war against Sihon, namely that it occurred in Elul, with the war against Og taking place in Tishri, after the holidays.

It may also allude to the fact that during the month of Elul, every Jew should strive to repent with all his heart.

– Sha'arei Aharon