

# The final month...

Devarim 5782/2022

The final book of the Torah represents the final month of Moses' life. Standing on the banks of the Jordan, Moses begins a monologue directed at the Jewish people<sup>1</sup>.

Moses knows he is going to die, he has been forewarned that he was not going into the land of Israel with his flock, his successor has been appointed. Yet, even with this knowledge, Moses decides that the best use of his time continued devotion and service to the Jewish people.

Rashi, commenting on these opening verses, tells us that the point of this speech was as much to give an oral history of the Jewish people, as it was to give rebuke to them. The people are standing at the precipice, now is the time to concretise their understanding that when you do things wrongs there are consequences<sup>2</sup>. One might wonder whether this is the best use of a person's final month.

The Or HaChaim explains that this rebuke had to come in this last moment, because if the Jewish people could understand how close they were, and see that the goal is nearly achieved, they will internalise the rebuke rather than flee from the overall goal<sup>3</sup>. The greatness of Moshe's leadership is that he knew what needed to be done and understood that his final month could only be spent like this. In fact, Rashi continues that there are many examples whereby the truly righteous utilise the moments before their death to speak truth and deliver what may be uncomfortable messages in the hope that their descendants take heed and change their ways<sup>4</sup>.

Heschel notes that the Prophets are generally involved in speaking uncomfortable truths because they care about the moral predicament of society<sup>5</sup>. Are these the ways of prophets generally, or is this a learnt behaviour from Moshe?

I would argue that it is the latter. Moshe is consistently found to be the leader that the Jewish people need, precisely because of his long-term and unfaltering affection towards them. This is seen time and time again but none as clearly than two examples. The first is when Moses requests a new leader be appointed when he dies. In this request Moses outlines the characteristics that he realises the Jewish people need for success. The second example, is the devotion he shows in this last month.

But this love and affection is not one that can blind Moshe to his people's failings. Moshe is at the forefront of ensuring a level of moral discipline permeates through the nation. Again, in both examples we see this.

Moshe requests a successor with a strong moral compass, who leads by example, and in his final oration, chooses not to adulate or congratulate, but rather caution and affect change, done so not in the shrieks of tyranny, but rather in the embrace of empathy.

When Rav Kook writes about Ahavat Chinam, baseless love, as a remedy for the destruction of Jerusalem, it is not in reference to some hippie expression of empathy and admiration, but rather a relationship of deep love and trust, one where even in the last month there can be rebuke for the sake of growth and transformation. Imagine a world where that became the reality.

All citations can be found in **A New Page of Talmud**