

## Devarim - The moral testament

Moses' transformation in the Torah is amazing. He starts in Exodus presenting himself saying: "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." (Ex. 4:10) but more than 40 years after that he finished his life with a farewell speech that lasted 36 days... we have his complete speech recorded in the last book of the Torah: Deuteronomy (Devarim).

Rashi, commenting on our Torah portion, picks up something very special. The Torah says that Moses started this long speech the first day of the eleventh month of the 40th year since they departed from Egypt (Deut. 1:3) and according to the rabbinic tradition, Moses dies at the exact age of 120 years old, the seventh day of the twelfth month (b. Megillah 13b). First this teaches us that this speech lasted 36 full days but also because at the beginning of this book Moses starts rebuking and reproofing the people of Israel about all the mistakes they made. Rashi says as follows: " This tells us that he reproved them only shortly before his death". In more than 40 years of leading the Jewish people Moses almost never rebuked the people of Israel, he only does it just before he passes away. But not only this, Rashi adds that many other biblical characters do the same. Also Yaakov, Yoshua, Shmuel and David reproved their own children just shortly before their death.

The question for me is why? Why did Moses and all these other leaders of the Jewish people wait until almost their last moment to reprimand their children? Why didn't they do it during all the other years of their life? I asked myself this question this year while reading Rashi's commentary and I decided to ask this question to my followers on twitter. And they shared with me beautiful insights that I will like now to share with you too.

1. Maybe because only when we are about to die we don't care what other people say about us. During our day to day, many times we decide not to say something because we don't want to be embarrassed or we don't want people to hate us for what we think or say. But when we realize that death is coming upon us we feel free to say exactly what we think...
2. Maybe because we don't want to push away people that we love and care about by marking their own mistakes during our lifetime. Many times we think that if we reprove some of their actions they will stop loving us and are so afraid that we abstain from doing so during our lifetime until we know that our end is near.
3. To give them the possibility to do Teshuva, to repent themselves. If you reprimand or rebuke someone immediately after they have done something wrong you don't give them the possibility to amend their ways by themselves acknowledging their own mistakes and trying to improve. By marking their mistakes only at the end of our lives we give time for people to do Teshuvah.
4. Another clever insight could be that in order not to reprove someone in something that we could fail at too. If we lift our finger and mark other people's mistakes during our lifetime many times what will happen is that we are going to commit the exact same mistakes and we will be seen as hypocritical.

There are many reasons why Moses and other leaders of the Jewish people decide to reprove their children only at the end of their lives... but mainly to show as a way. To teach to all of us what a true will or testament ought to be. In the world that we live in today all of the family gathers together after someone dies to hear the will, how much money, properties or stock we inherited. But the true testaments, tzva'ot in Hebrew, are the moral and ethical testaments. And we read it before we depart from this world. It is not enough to leave our children with money but we need to leave them with words of wisdom, with counsels, with a moral legacy, with the things we learned in life. And this is Moses' testament, teaching their ways by showing them their own mistakes, their own history and the laws they ought to fulfill.

The book of Devarim/Deuteronomy is Moses' testament to the Jewish people. Is his legacy. Other biblical characters do the same, before they die they gather their children around their bed and they share with them blessings and words of wisdom and advice. There are many stories of rabbis in the Talmud doing the same with their students. In the medieval time we found many testaments of great scholars that decided to write down their main advice for future generations... and this is my question for us today. What would our testament look like? May we all have the merit to live until 120 years old but if the moment of departing from this earth would come sooner than that: what would our will look like? What would our moral testament and legacy look like? What words of wisdom and advice will we lend our future generations?

The entire book of Deuteronomy that we are starting this Shabbat is an invitation to look inwards, to think about what we would say at that moment we need to start saying goodbye.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi Uri