

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon, F.R.G.S.

KITAVO

After the horrific details of the curses and suffering facing Israel for non-compliance with the teachings of the Torah, Moshe adds a new dimension to his final address to the Israelites before he died:

G-d did not give you a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear until today. I led you in the wilderness for 40 years... you did not eat bread nor did you take in strong drink, so that you may know that I am your G-d... You shall observe the words of this covenant, in order that you will succeed in all that you do (29:1-8).

Rashi explains that it took 40 years for the Israelites to get themselves fully on Moshe's wavelength with the "heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear" that they needed to understand him properly. Henceforth they would be fully expected to follow the teachings of the Torah so that, in the Land that they were about to enter, they would succeed in whatever they do.

This point, Rashi explains, indicates more generally that it can take 40 years(!) for a person to fully understand his teacher. Until then, the teacher has to be patient: the disciple may misapply his teachings, and may

not always grasp the subtleties and nuances of what he is trying to communicate. But if the student doesn't 'get it' by the 40-year mark, the teacher can be assured that he is not going to 'get it' afterwards.

The Meshech Chochma adds another dimension that teaches a fundamental message in leadership. That is that in a sense, no person however great is entirely irreplaceable. He explains that until Moshe's final speech to be followed by his death, the people tended to see Moshe as unique. Not exactly as an angel of G-d, but more than being "of flesh and blood", more than being just human. As he was getting towards the end of his final addresses, people were beginning to grasp the idea that Moshe was human as well, that he was mortal, and like everyone else lived only for so long: that is what their "heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear" perceived "today", that day. And it was this that paradoxically gave people confidence in the future. For if they thrived under Moshe who was flesh and blood like them, they would thrive under Yehoshua who was also flesh and blood like them. There would be a future. The world of Torah and G-d's supervision would not finish with Moshe. Yehoshua, who like Moshe was flesh and blood, would continue his work. And as they were with Moshe, so they would be with Yehoshua. And as G-d guided

Moshe, so He would guide his successors.

However, the Meshech Chochma emphasizes with reference to the p'sukim, there would be one great change. For the past 40 years, they lived super-naturally, with G-d openly and demonstratively taking care for them, suspending nature in the process. Their clothes had not worn out, they had not needed bread as Manna sustained them all, and they had already defeated armies and settled the lands of nations much more powerful than themselves. But the openly supernatural would cease on their entry to the Promised Land. There, G-d would not suspend the laws of nature, but the people would live within nature's boundaries, under spiritual leaders who had contact with G-d but who were still human. That was the way forward, Moshe told them. And the people's part to make that work, so that nature would favor them, was: "You shall observe the words of this covenant, in order that you will succeed in all that you do." As long as people live according to Torah teachings and Torah ideals, G-d will see to nature that all their needs continue to be satisfied and fully gratified.

This can give a powerful message to take away. When a highly worthy and productive organization or cause loses its founder, a magnificent personality, there can often be a

feeling of despondency and despair. He or she is irreplaceable. As a result, the enterprise may continue to run on the steam of the previous era, but less and less effectively. It is that leading light's duty when still alive to take care about finding the best successor possible and train him for the position, and at the same time prepare the people that it is on them to fulfil their roles so that the outstanding work will continue.

These Divrei Torah are written in loving memory of my dearest Mother, Harabanit Devora Solomon ztl, who ascended to the Yeshiva Shel Ma'ala on Shabbat Ki-Tavo, 27 years ago. May her memory be blessed, and be a source of blessings. 📖