

*D'vorim August 13, 2016*

Years ago, I was watching Ed Sullivan on TV (or as my Bubbie used to call him, Ed Solomon), and George Burns was the featured guest. He gave his monologue and said while he was giving it - "The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending, and to have the two as close together as possible". That sounds great except when you consider what the Hebrew title for the last book of the Torah, Deuteronomy, means. It means words or "rhetoric". The entire book consists of sermons and poems which were given by 120 year old Moses for 40 days, as the Israelites stood poised to take possession of the land of Israel, beginning on the first of Shevat and ending on the seventh of Adar, (in the year of 1273 BCE). The wise leader gets personal with the flock, many of whom were not yet alive at the Exodus and speaks of the journey from his own prospective. Moshe Rabbeinu waited until the end of his life to deliver his anger at the community - but it is along with sincere love and a desire for the happiness and success of each and every Jew. He spoke as a parent, with love, and a desire for happiness and success to guide his child.

For a person who describes himself to G-d at the Burning Bush as "slow of speech and slow of tongue" It seems now that Moses has a lot to say. But can you blame him? He'd spent 40 years with a bunch of kevetchers who constantly complained.

There has been a lot of talk of failure within this book. But even though Moshe and Israel may have failed at various points, Ha-Shem is merciful and His mercies are renewed daily. Just as he showed us mercy when Harvey and I were in an accident on the way to Shul about two months ago, we had 2 passengers in the car with us when the hood on the car we were traveling in opened all the way and hit the front window. Ha-Shem showed us mercy by not letting anyone get hurt.

Moses does teach us that the first thing we learn from criticism is that it is necessary and important. Without criticism and expressions of disapproval, people don't grow or improve. The other thing we learn from Moses is that criticism comes out of love and caring because of love and well being.

32 years ago Harvey said he wanted to leave Detroit because he was going back in the military. He had decided to take his oath again as it was hard for him to adjust to civilian life. I had doubts about it; I would be losing all my friends, and all that I held dear; and our daughters, Laura & Alicia, were not very happy about the move because they would not see their grandparents very often or their friends. I thought about his decision and I did love Harvey and when the decision was made by Harv I said to

Harvey "...for whither thou goest, I will go" and our family would make a new life in another city and state. We left the state and moved to Virginia Beach, VA. to live with friends where he enlisted in the U.S. Navy; in the following 8 years, Harv was stationed in VA. Beach, VA. where we received many phone calls from my father; he reminded me that my Mom was sick with Parkinsons and I should call home. I complained about all the calls because Harvey, as usual, was on Deployment, and I wished to keep the phone line clear in case he called. But then I thought about it for awhile and remembered what Moses taught the Jews, my parents did the criticizing because they loved us.

Perhaps Moses remembers that things happened in a certain way because he needs to remember that things happened in a certain way. And he needs to remember that things happened this way because he believes his legacy depends on it. People often remember best what they remember last. And Moses clearly wants his last words to leave an imprint.

People today understand a lot more now about how the mind and memory work. Senior living facilities increasingly incorporate "memory units" for those suffering from various forms of dementia including Alzheimer's. Staff members take particular care to teach the family members patience as their loved ones confuse Friday with Tuesday, forgot they ate oatmeal and not eggs for breakfast, or insist they can't find the sweater they are wearing.

At the same time, as family members prepare to say farewell to a loved one, their own memories often adjust as well, often shuffling the deck so that stories of love take precedence over stories of sorrow. So sometimes we do misremember. But sometimes we adjust our memories - without even realizing it - to fit what we need them to. This may well be Moses' emotional need as he nears the end of his life. The last lines in the book tell us of Moses' passing and how G-d took him to Mt. Nebo and buried him himself in an unknown place.

The question has been asked by many - who wrote those last lines in the book? According to the Talmud Joshua wrote them after Moses' death. Others, like my grandfather, my "Pa," z"l, say that G-d dictated the lines to Moses before his death, and he transcribed them in tears.