

פרשת דברים, which each and every year is שבת חזון and is associated with תשעה באב, is classically referred to as a Shabbos of תוכחה. Hashem has משה רבינו delivering his eulogy, his final speech which lasted for many days, and starts off with the תוכחה which lists all the places at the beginning of דברים, as רש"י points out. The fundamental lesson in פרשת דברים is if you pay attention to מצות הקדוש ברוך הוא, you will be receiving the appropriate שכר, and חס ושלום the opposite, if we don't listen, we will have to face the consequences. A deeper understanding of this concept is found in the מדרש, which emphasizes צדיק גוזר צדקות and קדושה, that if משה רבינו says something, it's because of his level of קדושה and צדקות that will be מקיים that, and that lesson carries down through all ages.

One of the פסוקים in the parsha which I would like to discuss for just a moment is (1:13): הָבוּ לָכֶם אֲנָשִׁים. Moshe complained to הקדוש ברוך הוא, "I can't carry the burden of this nation". Hashem answers by saying that others will be appointed to lead ישראל. Now that seems to be a compromise or a defeat, because משה רבינו should have been able to withstand their טרחה to lead כלל ישראל on his own. And yet, we learn a tremendously פשוט געוואלדיג from this designation of others as רָאשֵׁיכֶם, as leaders of ישראל. כלל ישראל is really telling us is that we work on ourselves, and I'm talking about each and every member of ישראל, in exactly the same way as משה רבינו was going to speak to the שכינה, therefore he couldn't nurse from a goyish woman, so too, each and every Jewish child has the opportunity to rise up to the level of משה רבינו. Through the קדושה that he receives both in his mother's milk as well as his mother's תורה, he can become a משה רבינו. Each and every Yid has the opportunity to rise up to fulfill his potential and to be the greatest person he can be.

A very beautiful cute little story to emphasize this point is brought down in the sefer of חיים שיש בהם in the name of R' Leib Chasman, who was the משיגה in ישיבה, a very בכבודיק'ע position and person, author of the famous ספר אור יהאל. If I'm not mistaken, I hope I'm not wrong, he was the teacher of R' Sholom Schwadron. R' Leib relates that he had the זכות one Friday night to come to visit the Chafetz Chaim and to have Shabbos meal him. The Chafetz Chaim was extraordinarily sensitive to all those around him, he knew what was going on around him. They came home from shul after davening, and the Chafetz Chaim did not sing שלום עליכם. Instead, he immediately made קידוש, washed, had המוציא, the fish was served, and only after they finished the first course of the meal did he begin to sing שלום עליכם. R' Leib didn't question it in the moment, he knew the Chafetz Chaim had a reason. But after the seudah, he said, למדנו - "Please tell me, רבי, why did you change the מנהג?" The Chafetz Chaim smiled and answered, "I knew you were hungry, and I knew you were tired. I wanted you to feel satisfied, to be a little bit full. The מלאכים are not hungry, they can wait a little."

This brings us to a very interesting question. How far can we go to change our מנהגים and yet not be called "a reformer"? The reform Jews and all the Hellenists and all the people throughout history wanted to change everything to make it better for us. They were wrong. The Chafetz Chaim on the other hand was right. How do you know the difference? That's what makes a גדול. He knows what he can do to make changes which are consistent with הלכה. What the Chafetz Chaim did was consistent with הלכה, singing שלום עליכם at the beginning of the meal is only a מנהג, but being מנהג another Yid is a tremendous מצוה. He knew what to do and what not to do. Can we aspire to that level? Yes, we can aspire to that. Can we what the Chafetz Chaim did? I wouldn't do it. I'm not going to change the מנהג. If somebody's tired and hungry, I'll give him a nosh before the meal, but I'm not going to change when we sing שלום עליכם. But this little cute story shows us that we have the ability to use our שכל to do what is right. And if we keep on working on doing what's right לפי הלכה, we'll make the right decisions and we can all become גדולים. בישראל. When משה רבינו said רָאשֵׁיכֶם, he was saying: I'm not the only leader here. Hashem gave me permission to make leaders from among you. Whoever is willing to aspire to leadership, and who is ראוי, who is capable and works for it, can become a leader. Moshe was saying, "It's not just me - I don't have a monopoly on leadership."

