

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 11 #44, August 9-10, 2024; 5-6 Av 5784; Devarim; Shabbat Chazon

Note: Tisha B'Av Mon-Tues, Aug. 12-13

NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

Hamas continues to manipulate the media while pretending to negotiate with Israel. Hersh Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours and a U.S. citizen, remains a captive. Concerns are increasing that fewer than half of the hostages may still be alive. We continue our prayers for the hostages and all our people stuck in Gaza. May Hashem enable us and our people in Israel to wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by Hezbollah and other anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully.

All Jews and people who stand for proper values express our relief at the long overdue release of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, a Jewish Russian born American whom Putin had enslaved in prison in Russia for approximately 17 months.

We always read parshat Devarim on the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av. Moshe reviews significant lessons from Jewish history for the new generation and gives them a pep talk as they stand where their parents did thirty-eight years earlier – by Jericho, a distance of only a walk of eleven days from Egypt, at the entry point to Israel.

The name of this Shabbat is Shabbat Chazon, the Shabbat of the Vision, based on the opening verse of Isaiah, his vision of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and Judah. The vision comes true, and we read the result on Tisha B'Av, with Jeremiah's Eicha (Lamentations), the horribly graphic and bitter central reading on this most unhappy day in the calendar.

In retrospect, after considering the entire period in the Midbar, Moshe realizes his error and the reason why he cannot enter the land with the new generation. There is no mention of hitting a rock. In Moshe's story, we see references back to Gan Eden and realize that the generation of the Exodus does not learn from man's errors. Adam and Chava Rishon disobey God's one rule – that they must not eat from Hashem's one special tree, the tree of knowledge of good and evil. As Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alephbeta.org explain, only God has the right to determine what is good and what is evil in the world that He creates for humans. The punishment for disobeying God's commandment is death and exile. Death – once eating from that tree, humans lose immortality – some day they will all die. Also, God bans humans from Gan Eden – exile. Isaiah warns that by disobeying Hashem's mitzvot, especially in mistreating fellow humans, Jerusalem and Judah are on a path that will bring them to death and exile (to Babylon).

The generation of the Exodus has an opportunity to enter the land thirty-eight years earlier, but they sin rather than accepting God's gift. The first generation sees Hashem bring a series of plagues to Egypt and save B'Nai Yisrael from

the effects. They see God free them from slavery to Paro, split the Sea of Reeds for them, and then destroy the Egyptian horses, chariots, and army. The people understand God's power. When Hashem brings manna from the sky six nights a week and quail when they want meat, the people should understand that Hashem loves them and takes care of them, even when they cannot not see Him in action.

Standing by Jericho thirty-eight years earlier, after sending ten of the greatest men of their generation to visit the land, the Meraglim have a majority and a minority report. Calev and Yehoshua both say that Hashem will fight for us and enable us to defeat the Canaanite tribes, as He defeats other nations during their years in the Midbar. However, the other eight meraglim exaggerate the dangers and scare the people. Rather than accepting Hashem's loving gift of a very special land, the people choose to go back to Egypt, where they had loved the variety of food and felt safe, even as slaves. The adults at the time of the Exodus all die in the desert, and only their children "who do not know good and evil" (accept that Hashem sets the rules) will enter the land. Near the end of his life, Moshe realizes that he did not adequately prepare the first generation to realize Hashem's love – and that failing is why he could not enter the land.

With Tisha B'Av, Rabbi Yehoshua Singer reminds us that we do not mourn the past. Rather, we mourn that we still do not have a Temple Mount and a Beit HaMikdash, and we still cannot bring back the system of korbanot. Hashem shows His mercy by limiting the destruction to inanimate items (the Temple and vessels) and keeping alive enough of our people for them to do teshuvah so later B'Nai Yisrael can return to Israel and Jerusalem. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, observes that Judaism is a religion of both love and justice. Tzedek is a combination of justice and compassion. To merit the most from Hashem, we must focus on justice and compassion. Tisha B'Av reminds us that sinat chinam, senseless hatred, is the primary reason for the destruction of the Temple. The more we can focus our lives on justice, compassion, and active works to make the world a better place for widows, orphans, and immigrants – the most disadvantaged members of our society – the sooner we shall be worthy of rebuilding the Temple. May this time come speedily, hopefully in our lifetimes.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, lived a life focused on helping the disadvantaged in society, especially in the Jewish society, and he taught this lesson repeatedly in his sermons and Devrei Torah. We have tried to teach this message to our children and now to our grandchildren. One need not read Jane Marple to realize that there is much evil in the world – but hopefully we can do our small part to move the world a bit in a better direction. As we approach and go through Tisha B'Av, may the message of the Three Weeks help us all work for a better world.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Chai Frumel bat Leah, Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Parshat Devarim: Making Judaism Our Own – Partnering with the Divine

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5784 (2024)

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

Sefer Devarim stands apart from the other four books of the Torah, bearing the intriguing label or alternate title “Mishneh Torah.” But what makes this final book so unique, and why does it carry this enigmatic name?

The term “Mishneh Torah” – the reiteration of the Torah, or the second Torah – referring to Sefer Devarim, appears in over a dozen sources throughout the Talmud and early Rabbinic literature. While its origin seems to stem from Devarim 17:18, its true meaning remains a subject of interest and debate among scholars.

To unravel this mystery, we must delve into the Talmudic discussions that highlight the distinctive nature of Sefer Devarim:

R. Levi said: Come and see the difference between the ways of the Holy One and the ways of humans, for the Holy Blessed One blessed the Jewish people twenty-four times and cursed them only eight times [in Sefer Vayikra] ... while Moshe Rabeinu blessed them eight times and cursed them twenty two times [in Sefer Devarim].)Bava Batra 88b(

Abaye said: [the prohibition of splitting the section of the curses into multiple aliyot] was only stated regarding the curses in Sefer Vayikra, but one may do so for the curses in Sefer Devarim. Why is this so? The former ... were stated by Moshe in the name of God, while the latter ... were stated by Moshe of his own accord.)Megillah 31b(

Furthermore, the Zohar states, “*The reason [Devarim] it is called Mishneh Torah [is due to the fact that] Moshe stated it on his own*)Va’etchanan 22(.”

What emerges from these Talmudic conversations and from the Zohar is that there are two models of “God-speak.” The first four books of the Torah are spoken entirely by God and recorded by Moshe. This is why the first four books of the Torah are formulated in the third person. However, Sefer Devarim is formulated and written by Moshe, with God’s complete approval and veto power.

Thus, while Sefer Devarim is still choreographed by God, Moshe plays a central role in its composition. This is why Devarim is known as a Mishneh Torah – for it is a different form of Torah of God-speak)See also Ohr haChayim Devarim 1:1 and the Maharal Tiferet Yisrael ch. 43(.

This makes it clear that both participants – God and the Jewish people – must play an active role if the Torah is to be the eternal book that celebrates our covenantal relationship. Without the participation of both parties, that relationship flounders – as we see multiple times in our history. We see this when Adam and Chava are passive in Gan Eden, and their relationship with God fails. The same occurs when the Jewish people are passive in the presentation of the first luchot. They are shattered and fail to secure a covenantal bond between God and the Jewish people)see Sheilot u’Teshuvot Beit haLevi Drasha #18(. For any relationship to succeed and thrive, both participants must play active roles. Through Mishneh Torah, Moshe and God are modeling for us what a true, ongoing relationship must look like – one in

which we take initiative in our Avodat Hashem and in spreading God's light, while rooted within the expansive parameters of Jewish law.

The idea of a Mishneh Torah – spoken by Moshe, approved and edited by God, and written by Moshe – is a recognition that within the parameters of Avodat Hashem there needs to be “human elbow grease,” which guarantees the immortality of the covenantal commitment. That is why every Jewish king must write his own Torah, highlighting that a person's role is to partner with God, to create out of the darkness a luminous Beit Elokim.

While none of us is on the level of Moshe Rabeinu, whose words were accepted by God and incorporated into the divine Torah, the invitation and responsibility to take part in creating Torah is open to all of us, even today. We all must be ready to scribe our own type of Mishneh Torah. The new challenges of our era – interaction with Western culture, the birth of the state, shifts in the place of women in society – call for a new and renewed Mishneh Torah – deeply grounded, like Sefer Devarim, in the divine word, yet courageously focused on applying the divine message to where the Jewish people finds itself today.

The events of the past year have only intensified this need. The swirl of emotions that has accompanied the Jewish people over these past ten months, in the face of calamity and heroism, tragedy and resilience, has pushed all of us to reassess and reimagine what God seeks of us, and we of God. The way Sefer Devarim is vividly written, with the central role of Moshe Rabeinu in its composition, is a timeless invitation to us to move beyond passive reception of divine wisdom and become active partners in continually applying and rescribing Torah for our own times.

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Devarim & Tisha B'Av: What to Cry About

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5764

Remember please, and lament, O all of Israel, let your voices be heard on high. For Germany has destroyed our people, during the stormy days of the World War; with killings, horrible and cruel, with starvation and thirst. For all generations, do not forget, until you will merit witnessing the)ultimate(consolation.

)Remember(Their screams and their weeping as they were tightly packed and locked into the train's)cattle(cars. Like sheep to the slaughter they were led to be incinerated in the crematorium ovens. May the sound of their pleading cries be eternally remembered by the One Who dwells in the Heavens. When they proclaimed, "Shema Yisrael" they offered up their lives to the Lord of lords.)Excerpt from the Kinnah in memory of the Martyrs of Churban Europe by Rabbi Shlomo Halberstam, the Bobover Rebbe(

The following is found in a footnote of the Artscroll Tisha B'Av Siddur: The Bobover Rebbe was a scion of Sanz, one of the most illustrative Rabbinic and Chassidic dynasties. The Rav lost everything in the Holocaust – family, friends, followers, disciples, and students in the thousands. The Rebbe arrived in America after the war with nothing but the clothes on his back and a burning determination to rebuild what the Nazis had destroyed. With the help of HASHEM the glory of the House of Bobov has been restored and one can find dozens of Bobover institutions and thousands of Bobover Chassidim in every corner of the globe.

In 1984, the Bobover Rebbe composed a special Kinnah to bemoan the tragedy of Churban Europe and it is recited in many congregations. When the Rav was asked to for permission to include his Kinnah and its translation in this edition of Kinnos, he graciously conceded. Then he explained why he had written it:

"For years I had wanted to express my grief over my personal loss and Klal Yisrael's loss, in a special Kinnah, but I hesitated. I felt that in order to compose a Kinnah one must be on the exalted level of R' Elazar HaKalir, who wrote with Ruach HaKodesh, Divine Inspiration. Moreover, he was a master of Kabbalistic secrets and knew the mystical incantations of the ministering angels. Still many Chassidim requested a vehicle to express their personal sorrow on this bitter day, but I held back because I felt genuinely unworthy.

Then one day I was studying the laws of Tisha B'Av in the book Seder HaYom)By Moshe Ben Yehuda Makir, Rosh HaYeshiva in Sefad, and a colleague of the Arizal and the R'Yosef Karo(He writes as follows: "Whoever can wail on this day should wail, and whoever can recite Kinnos should recite Kinnos-either those already recorded in the holy books or the Kinnos he himself composed with the intellect that G-d has granted him. It is a Mitzvah for each and every individual to compose Kinnos for weeping and moaning and to recite them on this bitter day. Whoever does this is considered most righteous and is worthy of being described as one of Jerusalem's mourners and one of her holy men. But one who is not capable of composing his personal Kinnos, should recite the Kinnos written by others."

"When I read these words", the Rav concluded, "I saw a clear sign from heaven that time had come to compose a Kinnah over the last Churban. For doesn't the Seder HaYom say clearly that any person, even the smallest, should express his feelings in his original Kinnah?"

For those of us who have grown up in the era of the American exile, a Kinnah awaits to be written and wailed about on the bitter day of Tisha B' Av... Woe for all the heads without Tefillin...after 3700 years from Avraham Avinu and after surviving Holocausts and Inquisitions Jewish boys and girls blunder in the darkness that plagues our generation and go lost by the millions, with visions of isms and pleasure in an instant, rapt in utter ignorance, bathed in a blue light that captivates their souls, they may never escape, and generations and giant families whole have disappeared and their names only grace lonely stones in forgotten cemeteries bearing words their children, those that had, could never read. Woe to us...on this bitter day we too have what to cry about.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5769-devarim/>

Devarim: Fasting on Tisha B'Av When Breaking The Fast Will Cause Extreme Nausea *

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah **

QUESTION — Houston, TX

A woman from my shul has the following issue with fasting:

Although she is fine while fasting, experiencing only headaches, she becomes extremely nauseous when she eats after the fast, and can't keep any food down for a few hours. What should I tell her regarding fasting on Tisha BeAv?

ANSWER

This is a tricky one, since it is not the fasting that makes her nauseous, but the eating afterward.

One way to approach this would be to say that she is a cholah (sick person), since was this nausea to happen on Tisha BeAv as a result of the fasting, she would qualify as a cholah. At least that's the way it sounds from your description (see SA OH 554:6, MB 554:11). The argument is that the cause of the nausea is ultimately the fasting, not the eating, since the eating is a necessity and will happen regardless.

Consider the following analogy — fasting on Tisha BeAv will cause a person to have fainting spells the entire next day whenever he takes a deep breath of air. I think in such a case we would agree that this is a choleh who can eat on Tisha BeAv, although nothing will happen on Tisha BeAv itself. This is the approach that I would adopt, and certainly so in a year when Tisha BeAv is a nidcheh (pushed off to Sunday). (MB 554:14)

Understandably, some may be hesitant to define her as a cholah, since no symptoms are present on Tisha BeAv (what would they say to the fainting example, above?) and that the proximate cause of the nausea is the eating. According to this, one can always take the shiurim approach. We normally don't do shiurim on Tisha BeAv — if there is a reason to eat or drink, then do it (see Arukh HaShulchan OH 554:7, Nishmat Avraham 1:554:6) — but here it might be different. Here the person is not, according to this approach, a choleh (which would allow eating without shiurim). Still, she will become a mitztaeret (suffering person) as a result of the fast. The argument could be made that given that mitzta'eir is a matir (reason for lenience) in many derabanan cases (see Ketubot 60a, MB 328:90, etc.), here too we can allow eating/drinking less than a shiur (sort of like a trei derabanan) to prevent mitzta'eir (also acknowledging that the matir is usually to alleviate mitzta'eir now, not to prevent it in the future).

Bottom line: my pesak would be that although the symptoms won't show themselves until after the fast, the woman is a cholah now — in the sense that she has a condition that will bring about severe nausea if she fasts — and thus should not fast.

* Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

** This question is taken from a WhatsApp group in which Rabbi Linzer responds to halakhic questions from rabbis and community members.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2024/08/ryrdevarim/>

Seeing in the Dark: Finding your vision on Shabbat Chazon

By Rabbi David Chaim Wallach *

This week, we read Parashat Devarim, which coincides with the third haftarah of the three "*Haftarot D'Puranuta*" — the Haftarah of Calamity. Our Sages (Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 428:8, based on the Pesikta) instituted that on each of the Shabbatot during the three weeks between the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av (known as *Bein HaMetzarim* or "The Three Weeks"), we read a haftarah that speaks of rebuke and the impending calamity of the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. This Shabbat, Shabbat Chazon, always falls on the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av, setting the tone for the solemn day of mourning.

The name Shabbat Chazon comes from the opening words of the haftarah, in which Yeshayahu (Isaiah) relays the vision he received from Hashem, harshly rebuking the Jews of his time in Judah and Jerusalem for turning away from Hashem. Yeshayahu speaks in very harsh terms, comparing the Jewish people to a harlot, who has become unfaithful to Hashem. The vision is bleak and fittingly read right before Tisha B'Av, when the tragic vision of destruction and exile became reality due to the Jews not changing their ways. This haftarah leaves its reader rightly despondent, reminded of the great loss of the Beit HaMikdash and the grim realities of exile.

However, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev (see Likutei Sichot vol. 29 pg. 18) offers a different reading of this week's haftarah. He suggests that Shabbat Chazon — the Shabbat of Vision — is not named because of Yeshayahu's vision of calamity, but because it is on this Shabbat, right before Tisha B'Av, that every person is granted a vision of the Third Beit HaMikdash.

How can we understand this perspective?

Three weeks ago, on Parashat Pinchas, we read the first Haftarah D'Puranuta. The haftarah, taken from Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah) chapter 1, describes how Hashem shows Yirmiyahu an almond branch and asks him what he sees. When he correctly identifies it, Hashem tells him "*you have seen well.*" The Radak (Yirmiyahu 1:11), troubled by the nature of this

question, and Hashem's response, explains that Hashem actually showed Yirmiyahu a bare branch. What was remarkable about Yirmiyahu's response that was worthy of praise was his ability to see what had not yet sprouted.

One could suggest that although all three haftarot explicitly speak of the impending destruction and exile, this haftarah sets the tone for us and challenges us to find the vision amidst the absence in the weeks to come.

The Netivot Shalom (Ma'amarim al Bein HaMetzarim — Mashmait Ha'Aveilut 3, pg. 293) writes beautifully regarding the period of the Three Weeks. Basing himself on the process of planting, he states:

A well-known rule of planting is that in order to grow, the seed of the plant must completely rot until not even the smallest remnant of life remains, and only then can the plant begin to sprout anew.... That is to say, that the purpose of this darkness (the destruction of the Temple and the 3 weeks in general) is not darkness, but rather, it is the nothingness whose purpose is sprouting, from which building may begin.

It is not incongruous to have the vision of the Third Beit HaMikdash come specifically at the culmination of the Shabbatot where we read of the vision of its destruction. Rather, it is through the destruction that we are able to begin looking toward rebuilding. Amidst the greatest loss, the greatest void, lies the potential for the greatest growth, the greatest rebirth. Perhaps these three haftarot were selected not solely because they speak of destruction, and to mourn for that which was and is no more, but rather to challenge and encourage us to reveal the redemption within that destruction. We are now in dark times, not only as we recall the destruction of the Temple during these Three Weeks but also because, as we are all well aware, it has been a challenging year for the Jewish people in Israel and abroad.

Perhaps we can learn from this week's haftarah and the two that preceded it to remind and challenge ourselves to see the vision within the absence, to find the light amidst the darkness.

The Talmud (Yerushalmi Yoma 1:1) states that in every generation that the Beit Hamikdash is not rebuilt, it is as if it was destroyed in that generation. While we cannot yet begin to construct the new Beit HaMikdash, we each can create and commit to a vision and bring that vision to a reality, that can lead to our redemption. There's no one magical formula to get us there, but we must all at least have a vision of where we could be.

Let us all work to develop a vision of what could be – a vision of peace, a vision of rebuilding. May we all commit to making our vision a reality, and may we all merit to see that vision come to be speedily in our days. May this Shabbat be a Shabbat not of a vision of destruction and darkness, but one that ushers in the great light of redemption.

* Assistant Director of Jewish Studies and a tenured Jewish Studies teacher at Herzliya High School in Montreal. He also teaches at the Kollel Torah MiTzion and various other educational institutions in Montreal.

<https://library.yctarah.org/2024/08/devarim5784/>

Redemption and Exile...and Redemption: Thoughts for Tisha B'Av and Parashat Devarim

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Elias Canetti, a Sephardic Jew who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1981, offers some interesting observations about Jews in his book, *Crowds and Power*:

"Fools may tell stories of their sameness everywhere, but anyone who knows them well will be inclined to think that there are more varied types among them than among any other people...Jews are different from other people, but, in reality, they are most different from each other."

Given the tremendous diversity among Jews, what is the unifying factor that makes us consider ourselves to be one people? Canetti writes: *"One is driven to ask in what respect these people remain Jews; what makes them into Jews; what is the ultimate nature of the bond they feel when they say 'I am a Jew'....This bond...is the Exodus from Egypt."* Canetti suggests that the Israelites' formative experience as a vast crowd leaving Egypt is the key to understanding the nature of Jewish peoplehood. As long as Jews — however different they are from each other — share historical memories of the Exodus from Egypt, they continue to identify as members of one people. We are bound together by the shared experience of redemption.

While Canetti touches on a vital point in Jewish identity, his explanation is incomplete.

In his magnificent Haggadah, the artist David Moss has provided another vital ingredient in the mystery of Jewish peoplehood. The Passover seder is, of course, the classic recounting of the Exodus experience. Yet, early in his Haggadah, Moss incorporates a dirge chanted on Tisha B'Av, the quintessential day of Exile and tragedy for the Jewish people. The dirge contrasts the feelings of elation at the Exodus with the sense of despair at the Exile.

Thus, the Jewish people are unified by two great national experiences: Redemption and Exile.

These experiences are not merely singular historical events, but are prototypes that imbue the entire span of Jewish history — past, present and future. We are supposed to experience the Passover seder as though we ourselves were redeemed from Egypt. We are supposed to experience Tisha B'Av as though we ourselves witnessed the razing of our Temples in Jerusalem and were forced into a long and distressing Exile. Our thousands of years of history are marked by periods of elation and mourning, redemptions and exiles. It is the personal connection with both of these themes that serves to unite us as one people. If one ceases to feel connected to the shared experiences and ramifications of Exodus and Exile, he/she ceases to identify as a Jew.

Just as we recall Tisha B'Av on Passover, so we remember Passover on Tisha B'Av. Even as we mourn the sufferings of Exile, we maintain perfect faith in our ultimate Redemption.

If Exodus and Exile are unifying factors in defining our Jewishness, the Torah itself is the ultimate source of our peoplehood.

In Parashat Devarim, read on the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av, we are told that Moses took it upon himself to expound the Torah to the Israelites (Devarim 1:5). A Midrash suggests that Moses explained the Torah to them in seventy languages. But why would Moses need to explain the Torah in seventy languages, since the Israelites could not possibly have known all these tongues?

The Midrash is obviously alluding to something of deeper significance. Perhaps it is suggesting that the Israelites would ultimately find themselves scattered throughout the world, and would learn many new languages. The scattered communities would become very different from each other, unable even to communicate clearly with each other. Moses explained the Torah in seventy languages so that the Israelites would know that they had a unifying foundation in the Torah. No matter what language they would speak, the Torah would be accessible to them in that language. No matter how separate they seemed to be from other communities of Jews, the Torah bound them together as one people.

As we prepare for the observance of Tisha B'Av, let us take time to ponder the mystery and the wonder of Jewish peoplehood. The Exodus was the formative experience that propelled our people into history, with the principles of freedom and human dignity. The Exile was the experience that underscored our national courage, resilience, compassion and determination. The Torah was — and is — the foundation of our spiritual teachings, our ideas and our ideals.

Those who shed the mournful tears of Exile will ultimately shed the joyful tears of Redemption. And the Torah is, and will be, our light.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during and since the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](http://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its current fund raising period. Thank you.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/redemption-and-exileand-redemption-thoughts-tisha-bav-and-parashat-devarim>

Communicating: Thoughts for Parashat Devarim

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

“These are the words which Moses spoke unto all Israel...” (Devarim 1:1).

This simple introduction to the book of Devarim is not so simple to understand. How could Moses speak to “all Israel” — a group of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children? There were no microphones, loudspeakers, radio, internet, cell phones, or any other technical way of reaching such a vast assemblage.

Aside from the problem of getting his words to reach the people, Moses’s last remarks are quite extensive...the entire book of Devarim. How could Moses speak for so long; how could people be expected to listen attentively for such a protracted message?

Yet, in spite of these questions, the Torah reports that Moses did indeed communicate with all the people and the people apparently received his words.

Moses was very wise. He knew he had an important role to play before his death. He needed to prepare the people as they were about to enter the Promised Land. He wanted to remind them of God’s providence and promises; and he also wanted them to recall their various sins and feel penitent. He felt it was important to review many of the laws of the Torah and to highlight how vital it was for them to live according to God’s instructions in the future.

Moses knew that his intended audience was vast, with people of different intellects, interests, sensitivities. He knew that in order to communicate effectively he would need to choose his words carefully; he would need to be sure that his audience would receive his message.

How did he do this? Here is a suggestion.

He first spoke to a small group of devoted leaders. He then empowered them to bring his words to the entire people, one group at a time. To be sure that his words didn’t get lost in this network of communication, Moses wrote his words: the book of Devarim. The written text must have been copied many times so that each communicator had the same material to present.

But Moses was far more successful than just reaching “all Israel” of his time. His words became part of the Torah which has reached “all Israel” for all generations. Indeed, his words also have reached billions of non-Jews through the Hebrew Bible.

Although we can’t hope to achieve the Divinely inspired success of Moses, we can learn much from him about how to communicate. First, we need to formulate our message carefully. Then we need to find suitable channels through which to reach our audience. In order to avoid misunderstandings, it is vital to write the text as a permanent record.

When communicators think carefully and plan intelligently, it is more likely that their words will reach their audiences.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

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Parshas Devorim – The Shabbos of Vision: Don’t shoot, until they can see the whites of your eyes

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2014

The Parsha begins by telling us that Moshe, at the end of his life, gathered the people to deliver rebuke. He listed their shortcomings one after another. He included the incident of the golden calf, the spies, Korach’s rebellion and more. Amazingly, the people took his words to heart and didn’t have hard feelings. What was Moshe’s secret in connecting with the people?

The commentaries explain that the key was in the timing and tone of the rebuke. Moshe had already proven himself as the trustworthy shepherd who truly cared for the people. Also, given at the end of his life, his comments were not for self-serving convenience. The people sensed that Moshe’s comments were constructive and for their benefit. They were attentive to his message.

Jewish tradition teaches that if rebuke is administered correctly, it brings peace and harmony. Often, the key is in knowing how to help another person grow. Interestingly, the Talmud quotes Rabbi Tarfon as saying, *“I wonder if there is anyone in our generation who can receive rebuke.”* To which the Talmud responds, *“I wonder if there is anyone in our generation who knows how to administer rebuke.”*

The lesson of Moshe is that if a leader, parent, or teacher gives rebuke, he should do so very carefully and out of love. The recipient should sense the constructive nature of the rebuke, and be thankful for its message.

The art of giving constructive criticism, is a talent that must be developed. The person giving the rebuke must truly love the recipient of the rebuke. Yet, for rebuke to bring peace and harmony, the person listening to the rebuke must also be a growing person. He or she must have a degree of maturity and self-confidence.

The Talmud relates that some great people did achieve this level. Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri said, *“Rabbi Akivah got into trouble many times because of my rebuke, but he just loved me all the more because of it.”* How did the criticism result in a peaceful, loving relationship? What was Rabbi Akivah’s secret that enabled him to accept rebuke with joy?

Rabbi Akivah was able to love the person that rebuked him because he developed an attitude of wanting to improve. He knew his friend was rebuking him out of love. Rabbi Akivah lived his life with a quest for spiritual growth. In his mind, if you pointed out an area for improvement, you deserved a “Thank you.”

Once we understand Rabbi Akivah’s quest for spiritual growth, we can appreciate an amazing story about Rabbi Akivah. This story is most appropriate for this time of year as it deals with the Temple’s destruction.

The Talmud relates that a number of sages were walking in Jerusalem, and they beheld the ruins of the Temple. All the sages began to cry, with the exception of Rabbi Akivah. Rabbi Akivah began to laugh. What did the great Rabbi Akivah see in the Temple’s destruction that could cause him to laugh?

Let us take a moment to appreciate the Temple's destruction. Commentaries illustrate the concept by comparing it to the scene of an elder statesman at a party gone out of control. He screams, he yells, but no one pays any attention. Finally, he grabs hold of an expensive vase and smashes it to bits. The sound of the impact gets people's attention.

This is how Rabbi Akivah viewed the destruction of the Temple. G-d needed to get our attention. He tried with prophets, but we didn't pay attention. He gave us warnings, but we didn't heed them. It was like a party gone out of control. So He smashed the Temple. Boy, did He get our attention. We certainly cry at the loss. But Rabbi Akivah taught us that there is also room to smile. Because if the loss, and the implied rebuke, is the end, then there is indeed nothing more to do than cry. But if the loss is the beginning of cure and rejuvenation then the devastating blow is the start of something precious. One can look at the Temple ruins and say to G-d with a bit of a smile, *"You screamed well. You got my attention."*

This Shabbos is called Shabbos Chazon -- The Shabbos of Vision. As visionaries we don't just see the loss that is before our eyes; we also see its implications. The Temple's destruction represents G-d's love for us. He needed to get our attention. Tishah B'Av, if observed properly as G-d's meaningful rebuke to us, is the start of something special. What starts on Tishah B'Av with the destruction of the Temple continues into Elul and the High Holidays as we try to get ourselves back on course. The season will culminate with Simchas Torah, when we dance joyously to many meaningful tunes. One of my favorites has only three words which we simply repeat over and over. It is a song that acknowledges the difficult times in which we live since the Temple was destroyed. But it is also a song of hope, a song of yearning for salvation. It goes *"Tzavey Yeshuos Yakov – Command the salvation of the Jewish people."* So may it be, speedily and in our time.

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Parshas Devarim – Shabbos Chazon

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2020

Perhaps one of the most difficult elements of the Nine Days is appreciating what we are mourning. In Torah Judaism we do not mourn and focus on the past. Rather, we are mourning the present, that we still do not have the Temple and that we are still in exile. Yet after two thousand years the Temple, the Messiah, and the end of the exile are foreign to our minds. It is hard to imagine how it could come to pass and what such a time would look like. While we make an honest effort, it can be a great struggle to truly believe with conviction that such a time will come. If we struggle to understand how and when it would come to be, it is even harder to understand that we are already missing that part of ourselves and that we currently have what to mourn.

At the end of the Parsha, Moshe relates the recent wars with Sichon and Og and the division of their lands to the tribes of Reuven, Gad and half of Menashe. The Parsha concludes with Moshe recounting his charge to Yehoshua at that time: *"Your eyes have seen all that Hashem, your G-d, has done to these two kings, so Hashem will do to all of the kingdoms that you are crossing over there."*)Devarim 3:21(

Rabbeinu Bechaya notes that Moshe's remarks are being directed to the nation as a whole. Moshe felt it was important for everyone else to hear the charge he had given Yehoshua. Moshe wanted to strengthen the belief and courage of the nation. He therefore referenced the battles with Sichon and Og and how he had encouraged Yehoshua with those

battles. This encouragement would enable them to recognize that Hashem would continue to fight for them in the same manner as they battled the thirty one kings of Canaan.

It is hard to understand why Moshe felt this would help. All those who were older than forty had experienced the year of the plagues in Egypt and the Splitting of the Sea. Everyone standing here had been living in the desert literally eating bread from Heaven and drinking the waters flowing out of a rock. They had comfortably traveled through the desert, surrounded by clouds. They had experienced the wars with Sichon and Og themselves, and the Medrash Tehillim 136 tells us were even more powerful than the Egyptians. If after all this, they still did not understand that Hashem was taking care of them and would watch over them in every way, then how would it help for Moshe to remind them of the battles? Trust and faith, though based on logic, have an emotional component. The more we trust and recognize that someone is there for us, the more tranquility we feel. It is from within this tranquility, this feeling that it will be okay, that we find the strength and courage to face our challenges. Moshe was encouraging them to focus on and consider the import of what they had recently experienced. For in order to reach that deeper level of trust, they needed to bring that awareness from their minds into their hearts.

Jewish history is replete with the miraculous continuity of our nation, a miracle itself on par with the miracle of a nation surviving in the desert. Now, as we find ourselves in the times before Moshiach, we again have seen miraculous Jewish battles. As is well known, the Israeli wars defy all military science. Anyone who has studied the prophecies regarding the time before Moshiach comes sees these prophecies coming true before our eyes. The barren wasteland of Israel, which stayed desolate throughout our exile, has begun to flourish and thrive upon our return as prophesied by Yechezkel thousands of years ago)Yechezkel 36:8-12(.

Perhaps, if we follow Moshe's advice to our ancestors, we can understand why we are mourning. If we consider the import of the miracles and wonders we have witnessed in recent times, if we consider the import of ancient prophecies coming true before our eyes, perhaps we can begin to understand the truth of swords turned into plowshares and lions laying with lambs. We can begin to bring these concepts from our minds into our hearts and find that faith. Then, perhaps, we can begin to understand what it is that we are mourning.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Devarim by Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

[Rabbi Hefter did not send in a Dvar Torah for Devarim. Watch this space for his future Devrei Torah]

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Devarim: Learn Well, Seek Justice! By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

At some obscure turning-point in the history of Jewish observance, three religious practices were chosen to become the yardstick by which one's religiosity is measured. Beside the external appearance and Shul attendance, you can bet that when someone is defined as "very religious," "somewhat religious," or "not religious at all," the speaker thinks of Shabbat, Kosher, and family purity. Synagogues, schools, and communities divide along these lines, as well as the whole State of

Israel. It is very rare to hear nowadays a sane voice such as that of my late grandfather, Hakham Shaul Fetaya, who refused to use the terms religious and secular. We are all observant, he used to say, only that each one chooses different Mitzvot to observe.

Reading this week's Haftarah, it becomes obvious that the prophet Isaiah would not have given anyone a pass of religiosity based on Shabbat observance. God, speaking through him, rebukes those who observe Shabbat and holidays, rejects their sacrifices, and asks them to stop frequenting the Temple:

What will I do with your many sacrifices? I have had enough of your burnt rams and the fat of sheep, and I do not want to see the blood of oxen, sheep, and goats. You come to see My face, but who asked you to do that, to trespass my property? Bring no more false offerings and abominable incense! I do not wish to attend your profane gatherings on Shabbat and the New Month. I detest your months and holidays, they have become a burden I cannot tolerate. Even if you [drop the sacrifices and simply] raise your hands in prayer, I will look away. I will not hear your many prayers since your hands are soiled with blood and stolen money!

Isaiah's audience was probably shocked by his words. Looking at each other, they would probably ask what he is talking about. We are good Jews, they'd say, we come to Temple every Shabbat, we do our prayers, we only eat kosher animals. But the prophet goes on to remind them that they failed the religiosity test on civics and business ethics. They do not take care of the widow and the orphan. They do not pay attention to the needs of the weaker strata of society. They embezzle and deceive each other. This is not what God wants. First, Isaiah says, clean your act, return what you have stolen, establish justice and act with loving kindness, then you will be redeemed.

I used to say in my classes, based on this and other biblical passages, mainly from the prophets, that if grades were given on religiosity, and we had to grade one who only keeps the mitzvot between us and God, and one who only keeps the mitzvot between us and other humans, the latter will have a better grade. Some of my listeners, however, argued that we cannot grade observance and that we do not know God's calculation system. I have therefore decided to present the question differently:

Assuming that to be an "Observant Jew," one must observe the whole package, who of the following two has a better chance of doing so?]the characters have been intensified for dramatization, as no such people exist[:

- A. The shulgoer, who keeps Shabbat, Kosher, and family purity, but is lax when it comes to business ethics, civility, respect for the law, and contribution for his country, or
- B. The "non-observant," who serves his country, takes good care of family, is honest and polite in all his dealings, and has great respect for other humans and the planet.

Most]honest[people will admit, albeit after some deliberations, that the second person is much closer to achieving the coveted title of "Observant Jew," whether because of the intuitive understanding that the whole purpose of the Torah is to educate us to be better people and to create a better human society, or the acknowledgement that it is much more difficult to change the behavior of the first person than the religious beliefs of the second.

Let us heed the call of Isaiah and put aside religious yardsticks, measuring tapes, and labels. Let us start obsessing over the exact amounts, measures, times, formulas, and actions needed to fulfill the Mitzvot between us and other human beings, just as we obsess over them when needed to fulfil our obligations towards God.

God would be much happier if we did that, and more importantly, the world would be a much better place for all mankind.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

Devarim: Love that Endures

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

An expression I have learnt while living in New Zealand is "having words." Usually we say this expression to express conflict. If you "have words" with someone, we understand that you have just been having words of an argumentative nature, not compliments.

Most likely this expression came about because it is so unspecific and vague, and we'd rather say that than say what we were really doing. We don't want to express that we argued and had conflict with this other person. So we hide it under an expression where although everyone knows what we mean, it saves us from explicitly saying it.

In the same spirit, our parsha this week is called "*Devarim*," which in English means "words." Our portion is full of Moshe "having words" with the Jewish people. He goes through every mistake they made. Every slip up, blunder, and error is laid bare for all to see. Moshe chides them for all of it and how they caused all the national tragedies that befell them in the desert. At one point, Moses exclaims how confident he is that the Jews will keep rebelling long after he is gone.

And yet, despite all of these words, Moses tells them that they will go into Israel and they will possess the Holy Land. With all the words that Moshe has with them, it does not stop the forward progress of the Jewish nation.

Moshe knows this and implores the Jews to remember that it is God's love for them, not necessarily their perfection, that has given them this privilege. In fact, this is the very reason for the Jews' resilience. No human being or nation, no matter how righteous, will get everything perfect and thus experience ideal outcomes in every endeavour. But no matter how much we fall, we always know and have confidence that God will support us as we get back up and try again. Let's keep this lesson in mind as we head to Tisha B'Av this Monday night: a day where we commemorate all the tragedies the Jewish people have faced. But at the end of Tisha B'Av, let us rise with confidence that no matter what happens, we will always get up and keep going towards a brighter future.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Kneseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah Devarim: Di Zahav - Too Much Gold

What is Di Zahav?

Deuteronomy opens with a detailed description of the location where Moses delivered his final speeches:

"These are the words that Moses spoke to all of Israel on the east bank of the Jordan River... near Paran, Tofel, Lavan, Chazeroth, and Di Zahav.")Deut. 1:1(

Why do we need to know the precise location of Moses' orations? The Sages explained that each of these names held a special meaning — and a veiled rebuke — for those listening. 'Di Zahav,' for example, was a reminder of the Sin of the Golden Calf (zahav meaning 'gold').

According to one opinion, however, the name Di Zahav also indicated a justification for the behavior of the Jewish people:

"What is Di Zahav? This is what Moses told God: 'Master of the World! It is because of all the silver and gold that You showered upon the Israelites — until they said, Dai!]Enough![— that is what caused them to make the Golden Calf.'¹)Berachot 32a(

Do you know anyone who had enough money and refused to accept more?

The Human Drive For More

The basis of serving God is our natural drive to continually advance and achieve. The goal of life is to be close to God, Whose perfection is boundless. Thus we must continually perfect ourselves in order to draw near to God. Of course, this aspiration can never be fully attained. We are never able to say, *"Enough! I have achieved everything."* Each accomplishment makes us aware of even greater challenges and goals.

In order to lead us on this path of constant growth, God planted within the human soul the incessant drive to always seek more. As Solomon noted: *"The soul will never be sated"*)Ecc. 6:7(. *This drive also compels us regarding material acquisitions: "One who loves silver never has his fill of silver"*)Ecc. 5:9(. Our drive for more is an indication that we can only attain our true goals through continual spiritual growth.

Limited Aspirations

When the Israelites sojourned in the wilderness, all of their physical needs were taken care of. They drew water from the well of Miriam, manna rained down from the sky, and their clothes never wore out. In this situation, they had little to gain by seeking additional possessions and wealth. It would just be more to carry. The soul's natural drive was artificially suppressed, so that when the Israelites were showered with more silver and gold than they could ever need, their response was, *'Enough!'*

This was Moses' defense for the Jewish people. Their unique existence in the wilderness, where all their needs were miraculously provided, stifled their soul's natural desire for more. Dependent upon gifts from Heaven, lacking challenges and goals, they became satisfied and indolent. And this impacted their spiritual aspirations. Since their natural drive to advance was weakened, the Israelites turned to more easily attainable spiritual goals. And this is what led them to the Sin of the Golden Calf.

What is the root of idolatry? It is the psychological desire to cleave to something closer to us, something tangible and finite. It is the choice not to seek out the infinite and boundless, but to take the easier route, to be content worshipping a force which is easy to identify and relate to.

This aberrant form of spirituality suited a people with limited aspirations. This is what Moses told God: *"Di Zahav — it is because of all the silver and gold that You showered upon the Israelites, until they said, 'Enough!' - that is what caused them to lower their sights and worship the Golden Calf."*

)Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. I, pp. 140-141(

¹The Midrash interprets the name Di Zahav as "dai zahav" — "enough gold."

Devarim: Tzedek: Justice and Compassion (5469, 5473)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

As Moses begins his great closing addresses to the next generation, he turns to a subject that dominates the last of the Mosaic books, namely justice:

I instructed your judges at that time as follows: "Listen to your fellow men, and decide justly [tzedek] between each man and his brother or a stranger. You shall not be partial in judgment. Listen to great and small alike. Fear no one, for judgment belongs to God. Any matter that is too difficult for you, bring to me and I will hear it."

Tzedek, "justice," is a key word in the book of Devarim – most famously in the verse:

Justice, justice you shall pursue, so that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you. Deut. 16:20

The distribution of the word tzedek and its derivate tzedakah in the Five Books of Moses is anything but random. It is overwhelmingly concentrated on the first and last books, Genesis (where it appears 16 times) and Deuteronomy (18 times). In Exodus it occurs only four times and in Leviticus five. All but one of these are concentrated in two chapters: Exodus 23 (where 3 of the 4 occurrences are in two verses, 23: 7-8) and Leviticus 19 (where all 5 incidences are in chapter 19). In Numbers, the word does not appear at all.

This distribution is one of many indications that the Chumash (the Five Books of Moses) is constructed as a chiasmus – a literary unit of the form ABCBA. The structure is this:

- A: Genesis – the prehistory of Israel (the distant past)
- B: Exodus – the journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai
- C: Leviticus – the code of holiness
- B: Numbers – the journey from Mount Sinai to the banks of the Jordan
- A: Deuteronomy – the post-history of Israel (the distant future)

The leitmotiv of tzedek/tzedakah appears at the key points of this structure – the two outer books of Genesis and Deuteronomy, and the central chapter of the work as a whole, Leviticus 19. Clearly the word is a dominant theme of the Mosaic books as a whole.]emphasis added[

What does it mean? Tzedek/tzedakah is almost impossible to translate, because of its many shadings of meaning: justice, charity, righteousness, integrity, equity, fairness and innocence. It certainly means more than strictly legal justice, for which the Bible uses words like mishpat and din. One example illustrates the point:

If a man is poor, you may not go to sleep holding his security. Return it to him at sun-down, so that he will be able to sleep in his garment and bless you. To you it will be reckoned as tzedakah before the Lord your God. Deut. 24:12-13

Tzedakah cannot mean legal justice in this verse. It speaks of a situation in which a poor person has only a single cloak or covering, which he has handed over to the lender as security against a loan. The lender has a legal right to keep the cloak until the loan has been repaid. However, acting on the basis of this right is simply not the right thing to do. It ignores the

human situation of the poor person, who has nothing else with which to keep warm on a cold night. The point becomes even clearer when we examine the parallel passage in Exodus 22, which states:

If you take your neighbour's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to Me, I will hear, for I am compassionate. Ex. 22:25-26

The same situation which in Deuteronomy is described as tzedakah, in Exodus is termed compassion or grace)chanun(. The late Aryeh Kaplan translated tzedakah in Deut. 24 as "charitable merit." It is best rendered as "the right and decent thing to do" or "justice tempered by compassion."

In Judaism, justice – tzedek as opposed to mishpat – must be tempered by compassion. Hence the terrible, tragic irony of Portia's speech in *The Merchant of Venice*:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That, in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much
To mitigate the justice of thy plea ...

Shakespeare is here expressing the medieval stereotype of Christian mercy)Portia(as against Jewish justice)Shylock(. He entirely fails to realize – how could he, given the prevailing culture – that "justice" and "mercy" are not opposites in Hebrew but are bonded together in a single word, *tzedek ortzedakah*. To add to the irony, the very language and imagery of Portia's speech)"It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven"(is taken from Deuteronomy:

*May my teaching drop as the rain,
my speech distill as the dew,
like gentle rain upon the tender grass,
and like showers upon the herb ...
The Rock, his work is perfect,
for all his ways are justice.
A God of faithfulness and without iniquity,
just and upright is he. Deut. 32:2-4*

The false contrast between Jew and Christian in *The Merchant of Venice* is eloquent testimony to the cruel misrepresentation of Judaism in Christian theology until recent times.

Why then is justice so central to Judaism? Because it is impartial. Law as envisaged by the Torah makes no distinction between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, home born or stranger. Equality before the law is the translation into human terms of equality before God. Time and again the Torah insists that justice is not a human artefact: *“Fear no one, for judgment belongs to God.”* Because it belongs to God, it must never be compromised – by fear, bribery, or favouritism. It is an inescapable duty, an inalienable right.

Judaism is a religion of love: You shall love the Lord your God; you shall love your neighbour as yourself; you shall love the stranger. But it is also a religion of justice, for without justice, love corrupts)who would not bend the rules, if he could, to favour those he loves?(. It is also a religion of compassion, for without compassion law itself can generate inequity. Justice plus compassion equals tzedek, the first precondition of a decent society.
[emphasis added]

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. Footnotes are not available for this Dvar Torah.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/devarim/tzedek-justice-and-compassion/>

Can You Travel Back in Time? Kind Of...

By Aharon Loschak * © Chabad 2024

Time travel has always fascinated humans. “What if I could go back in time and rewrite history?” and “What if I could see how things were back then and experience a totally different life?” are just some of the questions that capture our collective imagination. Full entertainment franchises are devoted to this fixation.

What if I told you that, in some ways, you really can travel back in time? OK, you won’t be able to transport yourself onto 1776 American soil and help the Revolution)if that’s what you want(, but you most definitely can go back into the annals of your own life and rewrite the script.

The key to your time machine is right here, in your own mind.

Name That Location

Parshat Devarim begins with Moses’s farewell speech to the people:

*These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on that side of the Jordan in the desert.*¹

Why does the Torah name the location so vaguely, “on that side of the Jordan?” Just one verse earlier, at the conclusion of the book of Numbers, the Torah describes the same spot as, “. . . in the plains of Moab, by the Jordan at Jericho.”² Why omit the name now?

Two Different Stories

The different names for the same location stem from a fundamental difference between the two books: Numbers and Deuteronomy. Numbers, or as it’s titled in Hebrew, Bamidbar, meaning “in the desert,” is the story of the Jews’ 40-year sojourn — their trials and tribulations, the lows and the highs. In that context, the final encampment within the desert deserves a unique name, as it is part of the desert story.

In contrast, Deuteronomy pivots away from the desert and towards the Land of Israel. It is the story of how Moses gathered the people and delivered his farewell speech just before bowing out. The entire thrust of the book is future-

oriented, with eyes on the land.

For this reason, the location is no longer associated with the desert, but explicitly Israel-oriented — “on that side of the Jordan.”

Sublimating the Desert

There's a deeper layer here.

According to the Kabbalists, the journey into the desert was far more than just a punishment for misbehavior or due to the lack of a working GPS. Rather, it was a program for spiritual transformation.

You see, a desert is a desolate place — dry, arid, lifeless, home to harmful creatures, and too hot for human habitation.

In a spiritual sense, a desert represents an ungodly space, for G d is the source of all life and vitality. The death and danger lurking in the desert are thus symbolic of the negative forces in this world that conceal G d's expression and run counter to His will.

Dispatching the Jews to wander around the desert for 40 years was an effort to alleviate some of this negativity and introduce a bit more G dliness into the world, specifically in the places where His presence is least comfortable.

In that context, the final location represents the final struggle, the last and most difficult layer of evil that had resisted all efforts up to that point. And so, it's named in Numbers, because that particular strand of evil and the tremendous effort expended to sublimate it is an integral part of the desert story.

But in the book of Deuteronomy, our eyes are no longer focused on past efforts to combat evil. The perspective shifts towards the Promised Land, where evil no longer exists and there's only light, positivity, and purity. As such, the name of the specific brand of negativity disappears, forgotten forever. It is simply “on that side of the Jordan” — a slice of land on one side of Israel.

Jump Into the Time Machine of Your Own Life

This “rebrand” of one location that occurs over the span of two books brings us back to our time-travel discussion.

One of the most powerful tools we humans possess is the ability to rewrite our own past by reframing the story.

It could very well be that you suffered traumatic experiences throughout your life. Or perhaps you made egregious mistakes with long-lasting ramifications. Even if your life hasn't been that dramatic, there's always one event, something that happened to you, or by you, that you wish had never happened.

It could be a moral mistake, a religious mistake, a crushing life event, or all of the above. There's hardly anyone on the planet who has a perfect, painless, and mistake-free life.

But it happened already; it's part of history. What happens now is your choice. The story you tell yourself, the baggage you carry forward throughout your life, is yours to choose. You can remember the terrible parts, the pain, the loss, the hurt, and the feelings of remorse and regret. Or you can hyper analyze it and pick out the parts that don't hurt as much. If you look hard enough, there are surely some positive elements you can whittle away from the experience, something you learned or gained that became part of the foundation of your strong and meaningful life.

There's always something, some way to jump into the time machine and reconstruct. And when you do, you are ready to forge forward with a positive, hopeful bounce instead of sad, baggage-laden drudgery.

And the amazing thing is that it's not self-delusional or untrue at all. Memory is not an exact science. Try asking 10 people who attended the same wedding, "How was it?" and you're bound to get 10 different answers; 10 different versions of ostensibly the same event. That's how it works: everyone is just going back in time and picking and choosing what best fits their own self-narrative.

So, go ahead and make the choice for yourself. You can call your past traumas and failures a yucky, desert-name, "The Plains of Moab" or you can call it, "Right Next to Israel."

I trust you'll make the right choice.³

FOOTNOTES:

1. Deuteronomy 1:1.
2. Numbers 36:13.
3. This essay is based on Sefer Hasichot 5748 vol. 2, p. 566-571.

* Writer, editor, and rabbi; also editor of JLI's popular Torah Studies program,

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5587714/jewish/Can-You-Travel-Back-in-Time-Kind-Of.htm

Devarim: Pray and Get Others to Pray

by Rabbi Moshe Wisniewsky *

Encouraging Prayer

On 1 Shevat 2488, Moses began the first of his three farewell addresses to the people. He began his first address by reminding the people how good G-d had been to them during the previous 40 years since the Exodus from Egypt.

May G-d, G-d of your forefathers add to you a thousand times over. May He bless you as He spoke concerning you.)Deut. 1:11(

G-d had promised Abraham that He would multiply his offspring without limit. Why, then, did Moses seemingly impose a thousand- fold limit to G-d's blessing?

The answer is that Moses knew that G-d desires our prayers and that our prayers and fervent desire are what elicits Divine beneficence. Moses therefore spoke this way in order to spur the people to ask for what they knew they had been promised, teaching them the power of prayer.

Similarly, we should never underestimate the power of our prayers. Moreover, like Moses, we should remind others of the power of their prayers, encouraging them to request G-d's blessings whenever they are needed.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3 *

May G-d grant resounding victory and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* A Chasidic insight by the Rebbe on parshat Ma'sei, selected from our *Daily Wisdom*, by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

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Shabbat Shalom

Volume 30, Issue 43

Shabbat Parashat Devarim

5784 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

To 120: Growing Old, Staying Young

On 27 March 2012, to celebrate the diamond jubilee of the Queen, an ancient ceremony took place at Buckingham Palace. A number of institutions presented Loyal Addresses to the Queen, thanking her for her service to the nation. Among them was the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Its then President, Vivian Wineman, included in his speech the traditional Jewish blessing on such occasions. He wished her well "until a hundred and twenty."

The Queen was amused and looked quizzically at Prince Philip. Neither of them had heard the expression before. Later the Prince asked what it meant, and we explained. A hundred and twenty is stated as the outer limit of a normal human lifetime in Genesis 6:3. The number is especially associated with Moses, about whom the Torah says: "Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were undimmed and his strength undiminished." Deut. 34:7

Together with Abraham, a man of very different personality and circumstance, Moses is a model of how to age well. With the growth of human longevity, this has become a significant and challenging issue for many of us. How do you grow old yet stay young?

The most sustained research into this topic is the Grant Study, begun in 1938, which has tracked the lives of 268 Harvard students for almost eighty years, seeking to understand what characteristics – from personality type to intelligence to health, habits, and relationships – contribute to human flourishing. For more than thirty years, the project was directed by George Vaillant, whose books *Aging Well* and *Triumphs of Experience* have explored this fascinating territory.[1]

Among the many dimensions of successful aging, Vaillant identifies two that are particularly relevant in the case of Moses. The first is what he calls generativity,[2] namely taking care of the next generation. He quotes John Kotre who defines it as "to invest one's substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self." [3] In middle or later life, when we have established a career, a

reputation, and a set of relationships, we can either stagnate or decide to give back to others: to community, society, and the next generation. Generativity is often marked by undertaking new projects, often voluntary ones, or by learning new skills. Its marks are openness and care.

The other relevant dimension is what Vaillant calls keeper of the meaning. By this he means the wisdom that comes with age, something that is often more valued by traditional societies than modern or postmodern ones. The "elders" mentioned in Tanach are people valued for their experience. "Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you," says the Torah (Deut. 32:7). "Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?" says the book of Job (12:12).

Being a keeper of the meaning means handing on the values of the past to the future. Age brings the reflection and detachment that allows us to stand back and not be swept along by the mood of the moment or passing fashion or the madness of the crowd. We need that wisdom, especially in an age as fast-paced as ours where huge success can come to people still quite young. Examine the careers of recent iconic figures like Bill Gates, Larry Page, Sergey Brin, and Mark Zuckerberg, and you will discover that at a certain point they turned to older mentors who helped steer them through the white-water rapids of their success. Asseh lecha rav, "Acquire for yourself a teacher" (Avot 1:6, 16) remains essential advice.

What is striking about the book of Devarim, set entirely in the last month of Moses' life, is how it shows the aged but still passionate and driven leader, turning to the twin tasks of generativity and keeper of the meaning.

It would have been easy for him to retire into an inner world of reminiscence, recalling the achievements of an extraordinary life, chosen by God to be the person who led an entire people from slavery to freedom and to the brink of the Promised Land. Alternatively he could have brooded on his failures, above all the fact that he would never physically enter the land to which he had spent forty years leading the nation. There are people – we have all surely met them – who are haunted by the sense that they have not won the recognition

they deserved or achieved the success of which they dreamed when they were young.

Moses did neither of those things. Instead in his last days he turned his attention to the next generation and embarked on a new role. No longer Moses the liberator and lawgiver, he took on the task for which he has become known to tradition: Moshe Rabbeinu, "Moses our teacher." It was, in some ways, his greatest achievement.

He told the young Israelites who they were, where they had come from and what their destiny was. He gave them laws, and did so in a new way. No longer was the emphasis on the Divine encounter, as it had been in Shemot, or on sacrifices as it was in Vayikra, but rather on the laws in their social context. He spoke about justice, and care for the poor, and consideration for employees, and love for the stranger. He set out the fundamentals of Jewish faith in a more systematic way than in any other book of Tanach. He told them of God's love for their ancestors, and urged them to reciprocate that love with all their heart, soul, and might. He renewed the covenant, reminding the people of the blessings they would enjoy if they kept faith with God, and the curses that would befall them if they did not. He taught them the great song in Ha'azinu, and gave the tribes his death-bed blessing.

He showed them the meaning of generativity, leaving behind a legacy that would outlive him, and what it is to be a keeper of meaning, summoning all his wisdom to reflect on past and future, giving the young the gift of his long experience. By way of personal example, he showed them what it is to grow old while staying young.

At the very end of the book, we read that at the age of 120, Moses' eye was undimmed and his natural energy was unabated" (Deut. 34:7). I used to think that these were simply two descriptions until I realised that the first was the explanation of the second. Moses' energy was unabated because his eye was undimmed, meaning that he never lost the idealism of his youth, his passion for justice and for the

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responsibilities of freedom.

It is all too easy to abandon your ideals when you see how hard it is to change even the smallest part of the world, but when you do you become cynical, disillusioned, disheartened. That is a kind of spiritual death. The people who don't, who never give up, who "do not go gentle into that good night,"[4] who still see a world of possibilities around them and encourage and empower those who come after them, keep their spiritual energy intact.

There are people who do their best work young. Felix Mendelssohn wrote the Octet at the age of 16, and the Overture to a Midsummer Night's Dream a year later, the greatest pieces of music ever written by one so young. Orson Welles had already achieved greatness in theatre and radio when he made Citizen Kane, one of the most transformative films in the history of cinema, at the age of 26.

But there were many others who kept getting better the older they became. Mozart and Beethoven were both child prodigies, yet they wrote their greatest music in the last years of their life. Claude Monet painted his shimmering landscapes of water lilies in his garden in Giverny in his eighties. Verdi wrote Falstaff at the age of 85. Benjamin Franklin invented the bifocal lens at age 78. The architect Frank Lloyd Wright completed designs for the Guggenheim Museum at 92. Michelangelo, Titian, Matisse, and Picasso all remained creative into their ninth decade. Judith Kerr who came to Britain when Hitler came to power in 1933 and wrote the children's classic *The Tiger who came to Tea*, recently won her first literary award at the age of 93. David Galenson in his *Old Masters and Young Geniuses* argues that those who are conceptual innovators do their best work young, while experimental innovators, who learn by trial and error, get better with age.[5]

There is something moving about seeing Moses, at almost 120, looking forward as well as back, sharing his wisdom with the young, teaching us that while the body may age, the spirit can stay young *ad me'ah ve'esrim*, until 120, if we keep our ideals, give back to the community, and share our wisdom with those who will come after us, inspiring them to continue what we could not complete.

[1] George Vaillant, *Aging Well*, Little, Brown, 2003; *Triumphs of Experience*, Harvard University Press, 2012.

[2] The concept of generativity is drawn from the work of Erik Erikson, who saw it – and its opposite, stagnation – as one of the eight developmental stages of life.

[3] John Kotre, *Outliving the Self: Generativity and the Interpretation of Lives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 10.

[4] The first line of Dylan Thomas' poem of that title.

[5] David Galenson, *Old Masters and Young Geniuses*, Princeton University Press, 2007.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Whose Book is This?

"These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel, on the other side of the Jordan.... And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spoke unto the children of Israel, according unto all that Hashem had given him in commandment unto them; after he had smitten Sihon the king of the Emorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, who dwelt in Ashtaroth, at Edrei; beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, took Moses upon him to expound this law, saying..."

(Deuteronomy 1:1-5)

There are two important issues which must be studied when approaching this week's Torah portion, the first theological and the second textual.

The theological question strikes us from the moment we open this fifth book of the Bible: Moses is speaking with his voice to the people of Israel. Each of the other four biblical books is written in the third person, in God's voice, as it were, recording the history, narrating the drama and commanding the laws. This fifth book is written in the first person. Does this mean that the first four books are God's Bible and the fifth Moses' Bible?

The fifteenth-century Spanish biblical interpreter and faithful disciple of Maimonides, Don Isaac Abarbanel, queries "whether Deuteronomy was given by God from heaven, containing words from the mouth of the Divine as the rest of the Torah, or whether Moses spoke this book by himself... what he himself understood to be the intent of the Divine in his elucidation of the commandments, as the biblical text states, 'And Moses began to elucidate this Torah'" (Deut. 1:5).

The Abarbanel concludes that whereas the first four books of the Bible are God's words written down by Moses, this fifth book of the Bible contains Moses' words, which God commanded the prophet to write down. In this manner, Deuteronomy has equal sanctity with the rest of the five books, (Abarbanel, *Introduction to Deuteronomy*).

Perhaps the Abarbanel is agreeing with a provocative interpretation of the verse, "Moses will speak, and the Lord will answer him with a voice" (Ex. 19:19), which I once heard in the name of the Kotzker Rebbe, who asked: "What is the difference whether God speaks and Moses answers Amen, or Moses speaks and God answers Amen!?"

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The second issue is textual in nature. The book of Deuteronomy is Moses' long farewell speech. Moses feels compelled to provide personal reflections on the significance of the commandments as well as his personal spin on many of the most tragic desert events.

From the very beginning of Moses' monologue, he cites God's invitation to the Israelites to conquer the Land of Israel. This would be the perfect introduction to a retelling of the Sin of the Scouts whose evil report dissuaded the Israelites from attempting the conquest. Indeed, he does begin to recount, "But you all drew near to me and said, 'Let us send out men before us, and let them scout out the land and report to us on the matter...'" (Deut. 1:22). But this retelling comes fourteen verses after God's initial invitation and these intervening fourteen verses are filled with what appears to be recriminations against a nation which Moses "is not able to carry [bear] alone" (1:9). Only after this excursus from the topic at hand does Moses discuss the failed reconnaissance mission. Why the excursus? How does it explain the failed mission?

From God's initial approach to Moses at the burning bush, Moses was a reluctant leader. The reason was clear: Moses called himself "heavy of speech." I have previously explained this on the basis of an interpretation of the *Ralbag*, to mean that Moses was not given to "light banter"; he was so immersed in the "heavy" issues, that he had neither the patience nor the interest to convince an ungrateful and stiff-necked people to trust in God and conquer the Promised Land. Moses spent so much time in the companionship of the Divine that he lost the will – and ability – to consort with regular humanity.

Moses knew himself. The verses leading up to the Sin of the Scouts are hardly an excuse. They explain his failure to give proper direction to the delegation of tribal princes, his inability to censure their report, his unwillingness to convince them of the critical significance of the conquest of the land. He could not bear the burden, the grumblings, of a nation which was too removed from God to be able to follow Him blindly.

Back to theology. Maimonides explains that even at Mount Sinai, the entire nation only heard a sound emanating from the Divine, a *kol*; each individual understood that sound in accordance with his specific and individual spiritual standing, while Moses was the only one able to "divine" the precise will of God within that sound – the words of the Ten Commandments (Guide to the Perplexed, II:32–33). Moses internalized the will of God and thereby produced the words of the four books of the Bible. God's words were internalized and written by Moses, the greatest

prophet of all. Moses communicated with God. Moses may not always have spoken successfully to his own generation; but he did write, for us and for Jewish eternity.

But Moses also had a legacy to leave and an interpretation to give. In the book of Deuteronomy, he spoke to his people, telling them not God's words but his own, and God commanded him to write down the words of this book as well for all eternity. God was granting the divine imprimatur of Torah to Moses' book of Deuteronomy – and making it His (God's) book as well. Moses spoke and God answered Amen.

The Person in the Parsha **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersch Weinreb**

A Sublime Autobiography

There is a biography. And then there is an autobiography. Our biography is the way others see us. Our autobiography is the way we see ourselves.

Typically, there are sharp differences between the two. Others see us from their own perspectives. Some biographers can be boldly objective, confronting us with facts about ourselves which we did not see, and perhaps do not want to see. Other biographers have their own agendas and interpret our lives to fit their perceptions, frequently distorting the facts and the meaning of our lives in the process.

Similarly, in the accounts of our lives that we ourselves write, there are two broad possibilities. We can disclose all of our lives' details accurately, hiding nothing. Or our autobiographies can be gross distortions of our life stories, intentionally falsified or unconsciously mistaken.

Whomever we think we are, we are well-advised to be aware of how others see us. This week in the synagogue, we read the Torah portion of Devarim and thus begin an entirely new book, the fifth of the five chumashim: the Book of Devarim, or Deuteronomy. The book we begin this Shabbat differs fundamentally from the preceding four, so much so that the rabbis call it Mishneh Torah, a "Second" Torah, a review of much that came before.

For me, there has always been something else that distinguished Devarim and made it astoundingly different, not only from the other Books of Moses, but from every other book in the entire Bible. It is an autobiography!

Whereas the other biblical books are invariably written in the third person, Deuteronomy is written, or more correctly spoken, by Moses in the first person. Moses speaks to us in his own voice.

Repetitively, until this week, we have read, "And the Lord spoke to Moses saying..." This week, we will read again and again, "And the Lord spoke to me..."

We will read not, "And the Lord commanded...", but, "And I commanded..." The attentive reader of these texts cannot help but be astonished by this remarkable shift.

This transition into the first person gives us the opportunity to relate to Moses directly, to hear his personal take on all that we have been reading about until this point.

This week, we will hear Moses complain about the pressures of leadership in his own voice. We will overhear him exclaim, "How can I alone bear your bothersome, burdensome, and petty squabbles?" And we will eavesdrop upon him as he transcends his resentments and profusely blesses the people.

And next week, again in his very own words, he will tell us of his enthusiasm for the Land of Israel, and of how desperately he petitions the Almighty to allow him entrance into the Land. And he will intimately disclose to us his disappointment when his prayers are rebuffed.

As we proceed through the parade of self-disclosures of this book, we will learn more and more about Moses the person. He will not hide his faults from us, he will tell us his versions of events, and he will select the mitzvot which he deems important to introduce or to review.

Devarim is the window into the mind and heart of Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses our teacher, the single most important personality in Jewish history.

This week's Torah portion contains the opening chapter of what may very well be the world's oldest autobiography. Like every good autobiography should, it instructs the student, interests the reader, and inspires us all.

It is instructive, for it teaches us how to be honest with ourselves. Moses is humble, but he knows who he is. His self-image does not change in response to the hostility of his detractors, nor does his head swell because of the flattery of those who adulate him. He never loses sight of his mission and task, no matter what is going on in his psyche.

Reading it is a privilege because it is a rare example of a leader who allows us to peek into his inner life and who shares with us his doubts, fears, and hopes.

But more than a privilege, Devarim is a challenge and an inspiration. We are challenged by the awareness that, in many

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ways, we are no different from Moses. We too have our frustrations, limitations, and unanswered prayers, and we too have the ability to cope, to overcome, and to graciously accept failure and disappointment.

Finally, it is an inspiration to read of a leader who candidly and openly shares his innermost thoughts and emotions for all to know, and for all time. An inspiration surely for all who wish to learn, to strive, to hope, and to persevere.

Have I convinced you that I was correct in the title I selected for this essay, "Devarim: A Sublime Autobiography?"

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's **Derashot Ledorot**

The Veil of God*

Tish'ah be-Av is more than the commemoration of the five specific historical events mentioned in the Talmud, foremost among them the destruction of the two Temples in Jerusalem six centuries apart. It is even more than the national threnody for a string of tragedies, beginning from the earliest times and extending through the ninth of Av, 1492—the expulsion of Jews from Spain—and the same date in 1942, the signing of the extermination order against Polish Jewry by the unmentionable leader of Nazi Germany. More than these alone, Tish'ah be-Av is a condition of the divine-human dialogue; it is a quality of the relations of God and the people of Israel.

Man does not always perceive God uniformly. Sometimes, He appears close to us, nearby, concerned, sympathetic, involved in our destiny, a loving and forgiving Father. "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him" (Ps. 145:18). It is a source of joy and comfort to man when he perceives God in this fashion. But sometimes God appears infinitely remote, distant, faraway. It seems almost as if He has vanished from the world, without leaving a trace. God appears aloof, unapproachable, forbidding, uninterested, and ready to abandon man to eternal solitude. There is no greater agony for man than when God thus veils His presence, when He performs hester panim, the "hiding of His face" from mankind. When God, as it were, withdraws from the world and leaves man to his own resources, forsaken and at the mercy of the impersonal and brutal forces of nature and history, man's life is worse than meaningless. It is this latter condition that is described in Tish'ah be-Av.

That black day was the beginning of the long, ages-old epoch in which God and Israel disengaged from each other, when a seemingly impenetrable veil cruelly separated them. The culmination of Jeremiah's Lamentations sound this very note: Lammah la-netzah tishkahenu, ta'azvenu le-orekh yamim (Lam. 5:20), "Why

do You forget us for an eternity, forsake us for so long a time?"

But if so many generations were born and died under the heavy cloud of this veil, this hester panim, since that disaster 1,895 years ago initiated this agonizingly long separation, then we are faced with two questions: First, how is it that we have not disappeared as a people? According to all the laws of historical determinism, we should have disappeared long ago. If there is no longer any relation between God and Israel, how can we account for the mystery and miracle of Israel's persistence? And second, how can we pray? Is it not futile to try to arouse One who in advance resists any communication? Moreover, how can we speak of such matters as ahavah rabbah ahavtanu, of God's great love for Israel?

For an answer to these questions and a solution to the whole problem of hester panim and Tish'ah be-Av, we may turn to a remarkable insight offered by two of the earliest giants of the Hasidic movement. The Hasidic classic, the Benei Yissaskhar, records two questions asked of R. Pinhas of Koretz, the disciple-colleague of the Ba'al Shem Tov, and the one answer that both gave to the two questions. (See Ma'amarei Tammuz-Av, #3.)

The first question concerns the well-known tradition that the Messiah is born on Tish'ah be-Av (Midrash Eikhah Zuta [Buber ed., version 2] 1:2). Is it not unreasonable to assert that the purest of all souls, the exalted agent of the Almighty in the long-awaited redemption of Israel, would come into this world on the very day distinguished for infamy and grief? Is not this the single most inappropriate day for such an historic event? Second, the Talmud records a most marvelous tale. It relates that when the enemy broke into the sacred precincts of the Temple and laid low its walls, they entered the inner sanctum wherein there stood the two Cherubim, the statuettes resembling the faces of young, innocent children, and from between which the voice of God would issue forth. When the enemy beheld these Cherubim, the Talmud relates, they found that the two figurines were facing each other (Yoma 54b). Now this is most unexpected, because according to Jewish tradition, the Cherubim faced each other only when Israel was obedient to God (osin retzono shel Makom); when Jews did not perform the will of God, the Cherubim turned away from each other. The destruction of the Temple was certainly the result of Israel's disobedience and rebellion. One would expect, therefore, that they would turn their faces away from each other. Why, then, were they facing one another, the sign of mutual love between God and His people?

The answer is a profound insight into the nature of love and friendship. The attachment between two people is always strongest just before they part from each other. Two friends may continue their friendship with each other on an even keel for many years. Their loyalty requires of them no outward expression, even if they do not take each other for granted. Then one of the two prepares to leave on a long, long journey. How poignant does their friendship suddenly become! With what longing do they view each other! Similarly, husband and wife are involved in the daily struggles and trivialities that cloud their true feelings for each other. But when one is about to leave for a protracted vacation or sick leave or business trip, and they know they will not be near and with each other for a painfully long period, then they suddenly rise to the very heights of mutual love and dedication, and they behold each other with new warmth and yearning and sweet sorrow. Indeed, the Halakhah declares this to be a mandatory expression of the right relationship between husband and wife: Hayyav adam lifkod et ishto be-sha'ah she-hu yotzei la-derekh (Yevamot 62b), when one is about to take leave for a long journey, he must be especially tender and loving toward his wife.

Now the love between God and Israel follows the same pattern as genuine human love. Tish'ah be-Av was the beginning of the hester panim, the parting of the lovers. God and Israel turned away from each other, and the great, exciting, and immensely complicated relationship between the two companions, begun in the days of Abraham, was coming to an end. But before this tragic and heartbreaking moment, there took place a last, long, lingering look, the fervent embrace of the two lovers as they were about to part. At the threshold of separation, they both experienced a great outpouring of mutual love, an intense ahavah, as they suddenly realized the long absence from each other that lay ahead of them; in so brief a time, they tried to crowd all the affection the opportunities for which they had ignored in the past, and all the love which would remain unrequited in the course of the future absence. That is why the Cherubim were facing each other. Certainly the Israelites were rebellious and in contempt of the will of God. But they were facing each other; God and Israel looked toward each other longingly and in lingering affection before they were pulled apart. And from this high spiritual union of God and Israel was created the soul of the Messiah! Mashiah was conceived in intense and rapturous love!

From this exquisitely intensified relationship before the long separation, we may gain a new insight into the relationship of God and Israel during this prolonged period of hester panim initiated by the destruction of the Temple. True

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and devoted friends never forget each other even if anger and offense have caused them to separate from one another. Of genuine friends it may never be said that "out of sight, out of mind." Where there was once deep and profound love between husband and wife, some spark of it will always remain, no matter how sorely their marriage has been tried. Absence, indeed, may make the heart grow fonder, and the old love may well be reawakened. Those who deal with marital problems have observed that often a couple will undergo legal separation, and that very absence from each other will make them realize how they need and yearn for each other—and thus lead to reunion. A father may be angry with his son, so angry that they no longer speak with each other. But the father's heart aches, his sleep is disturbed, and his heart lies awake at night waiting for his son to call, to write, to make some small gesture toward reconciliation. All these are instances of separation tense with love striving for reunion.

Such indeed is the hester panim that separates us from our Father in heaven. We are exiled from Him—but not alienated. We are so far—yet so close. We are separated—but not divorced. God's face is hidden, but His heart is awake. Of course, the divine love for Israel has not expired. It is that and that alone that accounts for our continued existence to this day. Certainly "with a great love hast Thou loved us"—for though we are banished, we need but call to Him and He will answer. Like a wise parent, the Almighty may punish, even expel, but never ceases to love His child!

Have we any evidence of this phenomenon in the history of Israel in our own times? I believe we do, but I approach the subject bi-dehila u-rehimu, with trepidation. If one were to ask: was it worth experiencing a Holocaust which decimated one-third of our people in order to attain a State of Israel?, then not only an affirmative answer but even the very question is a blasphemy. Only a cruel, heartless jingoist could ever allow such thoughts to poison his mind. Yet the past is done and cannot be undone. History is irrevocable. We may protest it and bemoan it and regret it, but it is there despite us. A tremendous paradox emerged from the paroxysms of our times, and we must strive to understand it: during one lifetime, we have witnessed the nadir of Jewish history, the descent into the very pit, and the rebirth of Jewish independence in pride and glory.

The Holocaust was the most intense, the most dismal hester panim we have ever experienced. God abandoned us to the vilest scorpions that ever assumed the shape of man. From our agony and our dishonor we cried to heaven, but our cries could not pierce the metal veil, which only reflected our shrieking back upon

us to mock us in our terrible loneliness and torment. Auschwitz was the device of human genius as God turned aside. Buchenwald was built by human toil and intellect as God closed His eyes.

Yet we survived the experience: crippled, maimed, decimated, disgraced, we yet trudged back from the death camps and displaced-persons camps, from the fury and the wrath, and from the shameful silence of the onlookers, to a land promised us 3,500 years ago. Providence did not allow us to be utterly destroyed. The veil of God enfolded us in misery; but through it, mysteriously, there shone a vision of love. In retrospect, right before the hurban of European Jewry, the State of Israel was being providentially prepared so that the survivors might emerge into new dignity. God too followed the Halakhah: Hayyav adam lifkod et ishto be-sha'ah she-hu yotzei la-derekh. Before He “walked out on us,” before He forsook us and turned away from us, He provided for our perpetuation, for a new generation and a new life and a new spirit.

Job taught us a long time ago that there are no easy answers to the mystery of suffering. Certainly the unspeakable agonies of a whole people cannot be easily explained, much less explained away. But from the hints left to us by our Sages in the folios of the Talmud about the birth of Messiah and the position of the Cherubim, we may begin to search for direction and understanding and meaning of the history of our times and the mysterious relationship between God and Israel.

Even while intoning the sorrowful lament of Jeremiah, Lammah la-netzah tishkahenu, ta'azvenu le-orekh yamim, bemoaning God's aloofness and our forlornness, we recite the same prophet's words in the same Book of Lamentations as he senses intuitively that hasdei Hashem ki lo tamnu, ki lo khalu rahamav (Lam. 3:22), “the love of the Lord has not come to an end, His compassion has not ceased.” **Shabbat Hazon 5725 (1965) Excerpted from Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Festivals of Faith: Reflections on the Jewish Holidays*

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Parshat Devarim is always read on the shabbat prior to Tisha B'Av, and in this parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu, who is just about to pass away, gives reproof to the nation as he recalls the 40 years of their travels in the wilderness.

Moshe commences his words of criticism with the term 'eicha' – the same word with which we commence the book of lamentations ('Eicha') that we read on Tisha b'Av. Moshe declares (Devarim 1:12), “Eicha esa levadi tarchachem umasaachem verivchem.” – “How impossible it has been for me alone to endure

your troubles, the burdens you've placed upon me and your arguments.”

Moshe here acknowledges the deep weaknesses of the people and the dangers they face as a result. But prior to his 'eicha', he had declared (Devarim 1:11), “Hashem, Elokei avoteichem, yosif aleichem kachem eilef pe'amim, viyvarech etchem k'asher diber lachem.” – “The Lord your God will increase your number a thousandfold and will bless you as he has promised you.”

Although the nation is facing numerous challenges, Moshe here gives them hope, and what a wonderful message that is for all of us. Regardless of our circumstances, there is always room for hope.

Furthermore, the great thing about the destiny of the Jewish people is that we're guaranteed a positive outcome because of the blessings of Hashem in the Torah. That's why, against all odds, we continue to exist to this day.

This is the tone that is set for the fast of Tisha B'Av, the saddest day of the year, which is also called a 'moed' or festival by our prophets.

Just as Moshe realised that we have to be true to the challenges that face us, and we have to recognise the dangers that we experience, nonetheless we must be filled with hope. So too, on Tisha B'Av we mourn the suffering of the past with much pain and grief, but we also pray that this day of sadness will ultimately become the greatest yom tov of the year. No wonder therefore that our sages predicted that Moshiach will be born on Tisha B'Av. Let's hope it will be Tisha B'Av this year and, please God, may we only face a happy and wonderful future.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Moshe's Final Speech: A Reprimand

Rabbi Avi Farkash Bar

Parshat Devarim, which opens the Book of Devarim – also known as the Mishneh Torah – begins with Moshe's final address to the People of Israel. At this point in time, the well-known words of the prophet Amos are perfectly apt in describing Moshe and the People of Israel: “Can two persons walk together except they be agreed?” (Amos 3, 3)

Moshe Rabeinu led the people of Israel through the hardships of the great desert: long hours of hunger and thirst under the scorching sun and, more importantly – day after day of acute uncertainty.

This was not only a walking expedition; rather, it was a formative journey which made it possible for a nation to be born ahead of the entrance to the Promised Land. However, to our great astonishment, instead of pushing onwards and leading the People into the Land for which all have been yearning for so long,

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Moshe stops and speaks at length to the People.

Perhaps this is the time to recall that initially Moshe had no desire to take on the mission with which God had charged him, and had replied that he was “heavy of tongue” and could not lead the People, not having the oral skills required for the job. But, lo and behold, 40 years later, Moshe is seen to deliver an extraordinary speech, which would become a formative moment in the history of the People of Israel, as if no impediment of speech had ever existed.

Moshe's address to the People is not an appeasing or soothing one. On the contrary, Moshe wants to make sure the People understand full well that he will not be entering the Land with them – but without saying so explicitly. He wants them to grasp the fact that an era was coming to an end, and that from now on they would be fending for themselves and taking on the responsibility of establishing themselves as a nation in the Land.

If until this point in time the People of Israel had a sort of “wondrous patron” who could solve any problem and take care of all their wants and whims, once they enter the Land there will no longer be a Moshe-figure to guide them or protect them. The nation will have to inhabit the Land on its own and assume control over itself.

A closer examination of the events described will reveal that they are strikingly similar to the developmental stages of most individuals. As children, we are dependent on our parents for just about everything, but as we grow older, we become more independent until we learn to stand on our own two feet.

Moshe does not assume a gentle tone when addressing the people. Rather, he reprimands them for their improper behavior throughout the journey and cautions them lest they be tempted into worshipping the gods of the nations of Canaan. If we fast forward for a moment, we will, unfortunately, discover that the People of Israel did not heed Moshe's words, at least not entirely. During the years of conquest and later as well, in the period of the Judges, the People of Israel stumble and fall many a time, until they are ultimately exiled from the Land. However, a broader historical view will show that the People of Israel did, in actual fact, embrace Moshe's words in his final speech to them.

There is no other example in world history of a nation that survived outside the borders of its homeland for 2000 years, all the while adhering to its faith and willingly sacrificing

its life for the sake of its beliefs and the observance of God's commandments.

Following the horrific Holocaust, we were fortunate to return to the Land of Israel and establish the State of Israel. The People of Israel – those living in Israel and those in the Diaspora – all joined forces to vouchsafe the prosperity of the young modern state, recognizing the crucial need for mutual responsibility.

We, as shlichim, stand at the forefront of this national accountability – both for the State as well as for Diaspora Jewry. May we merit to fulfill our shlichut in the best possible way.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Yakov Haber

Human Initiative and (Sometimes) Divine Consent

I. In the opening passages of Moshe's farewell message to Klal Yisrael, Chumash Devarim, he relates that Hashem had commanded the Jewish people after their having received the Torah at Sinai to start their march toward the Promised Land (1:6-8). Curiously, Moshe seemingly interrupts this narrative to describe how judges had been appointed then to share the task of adjudicating between the people (ibid. 9-17). A further difficulty is that, as described in Parshas Yisro, it was Moshe's father-in-law, Yisro, who suggested this job-sharing proposal (Shemos 18:17-23). But yet, Yisro is not mentioned at all in the retelling of this episode.

Ramban (Devarim 1:9) explains that the purpose of mentioning the past appointment of the judges was to complement the picture that Am Yisrael was totally ready to enter into the Holy Land not only having received the Torah, their spiritual blueprint for life in Eretz Yisrael, but also having had judges appointed to apply its dictates to their lives. Since in any case, Moshe received Divine approval for the appointment - Yisro himself having insisted on that (Shemos 18:23) - it was not crucial for the purpose of the retelling of the narrative in Devarim to mention Yisro's involvement (Ramban to Devarim 1:18). In short, the human element in proposing this innovation was omitted; only the Divine directive was mentioned.

We find the exact opposite with respect to the tragic episode of the meraglim, the spies sent to scout out the Land of Israel. In Devarim (1:22-23), Moshe only speaks of the fact that the Jewish people approached him requesting that he authorize a mission to scout out the Land of Israel and that he approved of it. The fact that in Parshas Shelach (13:2) the Torah relates that Hashem commanded the scouting mission is omitted. Here, the Divine element in

commanding (or allowing) this mission is omitted; only the human request is mentioned.

On a simple level, the reason for these opposite omissions is straightforward. Whether we accept the Ramban's view - that the purpose of Moshe's review of the appointment of judges was to demonstrate Am Yisrael's readiness to enter the land or whether we accept Rashi's approach from Chazal - that inherent in the description of the appointment is a rebuke of aspects of the Jewish people's behavior (see Rashi to 1:12), either way, Yisro's input was not directly relevant to the purpose of this episode's retelling. By contrast, according to at least Rashi's approach, the retelling of the tumultuous and disrespectful request for a spy mission (see Rashi to 1:22) which reflected a lack of faith in the Divine promise concerning both the beauty and opportunity of Eretz Yisrael and the ability to conquer it (ibid. 23 and to Shelach 13:2) was part of Moshe's rebuke to Klal Yisrael for their past behavior. Hence, it was the inappropriate human request which was one of the focal points of Moshe's words, not the hesitant Divine approval related in parshas Shelach.[1]

On a different plane, these episodes are also reminiscent of three additional instances in the Torah where Divine commandments were revealed through the requests of individuals: The first concerned Pesach Sheini requested by those who were impure and hence were not able to bring the regular korban Pesach (Bemidbar 9:6-7); the second was the law of daughters inheriting when there are no brothers submitted by the daughters of Tzelafchad (ibid. 27:1-4); the third was the temporary injunction against inheriting daughters marrying husbands outside their tribe. This last one was asked by members of Tzelafchad's broader family (ibid. 36:1-4). In the last two instances Hashem tells Moshe "כן בנות צלפחד" and "כן משה בני יוסף דוברים" and "והברית", respectively. On the former instance, Rashi quotes from Chazal (ibid. 27:7), that Hashem stated, "Precisely so is this Torah section written up on high" followed by "They demanded well! Fortunate is the one who the Holy One blessed be He agrees with his words!" In all these instances, similar to that of Yisro's suggestion, the idea was met with resounding Divine consent. To be sure, not all human requests were met with such favor. According to Rashi (Bemidbar 13:2), in response to the request to send spies, Hashem responded unfavorably, "I have told them it is a beautiful land; by their lives, I shall give them room to err through the words of the spies and not inherit it!" Nonetheless, Hashem still allowed but did not command the mission. A similar reluctant Divine response was given to Moshe concerning his request to allow the eirev rav, the mixed convert group from Egypt, to join the Jewish people (see Rashi to Shemos

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32:7) and to save a baby from the walls of Egypt (see Rashi ibid. 32:4 and Sifsei Chachamim there). The Korach rebellion, an initiative to make Judaism more egalitarian, and the episode of the ma'apilim fighting their way into Eretz Yisrael after the Sin of Spies, both without any Divine approval whatsoever, met with utter disaster.

What emerges from all of the above is that human initiative in partnering with the Almighty in the enactment of His plan for the world is, as a rule, welcome. In the midbar these requests sometimes even served as the conduit for the revelation of parts of Torah itself. Additionally, through the methodology of Torah Sheb'al Peh, the Oral Law, the conclusions of Torah scholars based on analyses premised on Divinely revealed principles also become part of the corpus of Torah. In a very real sense, our Sages partner with the Revelation of Sinai to reveal additional laws of the Torah. But the common denominator between all of these initiatives is the need for Divine approval. In the words of one of the first initiators, Yisro, "וצו אלוקים" ויכלת עמוד - "And if G-d will command you, then you will be able to stand" (Shemos 18:23). Absent direct Divine communication one needs to assure that the initiative is consistent with Hashem's will by consulting great Torah scholars who, through their mastery of both the written Torah and the Oral tradition and the values contained within them, determine its conformity with Divine will. Many examples exist in Jewish history of initiatives which originated from requests from even common Jews which were accepted by the Torah leaders of the generation and greatly enhanced or preserved Torah observance. One example concerned formal education for women pleaded for by Sarah Schenirer. In effect, the Torah giants of her era pronounced to her after considerable debate, paraphrasing Hashem's words to the daughters of Tzelafchad, "תלמד תורה לבנות, כן שרה דוברת". The Chachmei Hador, after appropriate and significant deliberation, decided that this innovation indeed represented the Divine Will for that era. However, examples of other initiatives proposed and enacted without the approval of Torah giants continue to cause significant problems within the Torah community.[2]

II. This week ushers in the period of the Nine Days which, coupled with Shabbos Chazon, begins the heightened period of mourning culminated by the solemn fast of Tisha B'av over the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and the long exile of the Jewish people begun almost a millennium ago. How long will this exile last and in whose hands are the keys to its conclusion? Here our Sages enlighten us that there are two tracks to redemption which directly parallel the two types of Torah

revelation: a humanly initiated one and a Divinely orchestrated one. The Gemara in Sanhedrin (98a) and Megila (17b) speaks of a more natural, on time track for redemption brought about largely by human action but also another supernatural, rushed option for redemption brought about directly by the Master of History. To be sure, this last track also entails significant human action, that of teshuva or other significant strides in avodas Hashem in whose merit Hashem will act (see Shemos Rabba 25:12), but nonetheless, in this track, as opposed to the first one, the Jewish people are more spectators than actors.

Much has been written about the confusing era in which we find ourselves. On the one hand, many prophecies about the redemptive process have begun to be fulfilled before our eyes in the Land of Israel brought about my much heroic human effort blessed with Divine success. But on the other hand, the ultimate climax of redemption: the ingathering of the entire Jewish people to the Land of Israel, the building of the mikdash, the reestablishment of the Davidic dynasty under the messianic king, and the return of the Jewish people to Hashem and His Torah seem both far and near at the same time. There is no clear consensus among Rabbinic scholars as to the "call of the hour," the specific points of focus toward which our era calls upon us to invest our energies. But one common thread I believe is clear according to all. The taste of some of the lights of redemption which we have merited should propel us ever further in following in the footsteps of Yisro, the daughters of Tzelafchad and of Sara Schenirer. Let us not just be passive, but active in partnering with Hakadosh Baruch Hu in bringing about a more perfect world by redoubling our efforts not only to remain loyal to and enthusiastic about His commandments but also, with the guidance of our Torah leadership, sometimes even to initiate, where appropriate, additional enhancements in serving Him properly. Among these efforts might be reinvestigating the feasibility of aliyah to the Holy Land,[3] additional Torah study projects concerning which our era has already been significantly blessed, additional chessed initiatives[4] and shemiras halashon[5] and middos programs. The sky is the limit depending on the creativity of each individual Jew. In the merit of our proper initiatives together with our loyalty to the dictates of our holy Torah, may we merit the final redemption speedily our days!

[1] Interestingly, according to one approach given by Ramban in parshas Shelach, their request was met with unreserved Divine approval; it was only their subsequent acceptance of the spies' slanderous report which was worthy of harsh rebuke in Devarim.

[2] See also, As G-d Commanded Moshe".

[3] See also, Longing for the Coveted Land - Past and Present.

[4] See also, Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg, Kindness: The Catalyst for Salvation.

[5] The Chafetz Chaim often wrote how the first exile was brought about through the sin of lashon hara about the Land of Israel. Consequently, the final redemption can come about through being extra vigilant concerning this crucial mitzvah.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

We Can Be Closer

For these things I weep; my eye, yea my eye, sheds tears, for the comforter to restore my soul is removed from me; my children are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed. (Eicha 1:16)

I was giving a very great Rabbi a ride to the airport during "the 9 days" and he shared with me a fascinating question that was presented to the Chazon Ish. We know from the Rambam that prophecy is only possible when the Navi is in a joyous mood. How then can the Navi Yirmiah have written Megillas Eicha with Nevuah when he was visualizing and warning about and emoting over the impending doom of the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash?! The moment he would become overwhelmed with sadness, his prophetic experience should be interrupted. How can he be both B'Simcha and terribly sad? The Rabbi told me that the Chazon Ish said, "It's not a contradiction". I had always understood that answer to mean that a person can have two opposite emotions at the same time and they do not cancel each other out, like, "rejoice in trembling". Now, recently, I have discovered a different approach.

We sing on Friday Night in the Zemer "Kol MeKadesh" the following curious words, "Lovers of HASHEM who are longing for and anticipating the building of the Mikdash, (SISU v SIMCHU) have on Shabbos Kodesh an extra and deep measure of joy like someone who has received an endless inheritance." What is the connection between longing for the Bais HaMikdash and having an experience of intense joy on Shabbos Kodesh?

We don't have to be great scholars to recognize that there is an intimate relationship between Shabbos and the Bais HaMikdash. All of the actions that went into the construction of the Mishkan are exactly those activities that we refrain from on Shabbos. They are like two sides of the same coin. One is HASHEM's place in the dimension of space and the other is HASHEM's place in time. In a certain way there is a supremacy of Shabbos over the Bais HaMikdash. We cease from the construction of HASHEM's place when HASHEM's time – Shabbos arrives. The Bais HaMikdash yields to Shabbos Kodesh!

I remember having heard from Rabbi Shimshon Pinchus ztl. that the Bais HaMikdash corresponds to the sense of sight. That is the place where the Einei HaAm, the

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eyes of the nation, the Sanhedrin sat and it is the place where the entire nation came three times a year for R'eias Panim to see or to be seen by HASHEM. It was a continuation of Mt. Sinai where "the entire nation saw the sounds". They experienced visually what could normally only be perceived through sound. There, cracks in Emunah were healed. Shabbos is comparable to the other 4 senses.

Long ago when our three oldest boys were 2,4, and 6 years old we went to Israel for six weeks. We stopped off to visit a blind woman that my wife had read and written letters for while she was in seminary. Before going up to her apartment my wife warned them not to be weirded out because she cannot see. When we sat before her she knew exactly who was in the room.

My wife and I exchanged glances of amazement as she described each child's nature with precision. When we left her apartment my four-year old, Eli said, "That lady can't see with her eyes but she sure can see with her heart!"

Sometimes when someone is stricken blind the other four senses are able to compensate in such a way that they can actually perceive beyond what a sighted person can. And so now that we lack the Bais HaMikdash we are stricken blind spiritually. We cannot see HASHEM but because we want to see so badly, we are able, with the other senses, to see HASHEM with our hearts.

B'Yam Derachecha describes that Aveilos – mourning is not about being sad. That's forbidden! Rather it's about longing! They are both actually coming from the same deep feeling of love and attachment. He gives an analogy of parents who need to send their child away. To the extent that they have this child in their lives they are thrilled and that is the reason they cry longingly about his absence. It's not a contradiction. To the extent that we have Shabbos and we have HASHEM in our lives we are overjoyed but we still hope and long and pine for a time when we can be closer.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez

Why Jerusalem Was Destroyed

In the book of Flavius Josephus – the well-known Jewish commander, who was part of the rebellion against the Romans, was captured and became a Roman slave, chronicler and historian – he writes about a conversation between Vespasian, his son Titus and the Roman generals.

The Roman generals came to Vespasian, at the time the head of the army in Judea, and asked him what was he waiting for? They had the

city of Jerusalem under siege and surrounded, it was time to destroy the city. He said: no, the Jewish people, the sects, will destroy themselves. How so? He answered that G-d is like a Roman general and that He is fighting for them more than anyone else – the Jews are so divided, they are fighting among themselves. If we fight them, that will unite them and fight against us. United, they will have a chance. Disunited, they don't have a chance. Leave them to their own devices, and they will destroy themselves from within.

Shockingly, that is what happened. As the Roman army came, all the other Jewish commanders came to the city, each one carrying their own views. All the Jewish sects were so disunited that Vespasian said that they should be left – and as the Temple was being destroyed, the Jews were still fighting about who was right and who was wrong. This was exactly the meaning of the *sinat chinam*, the baseless hatred, that our Sages explained destroyed the Temple. If we want to rebuild Jerusalem today, there has to be a rectification. The political discourse has to change. When we argue with the other, delegitimize them, fight them to the death, when there is no reasonable discourse, when we are unable to hear the other person, we perpetuate the sin of the destruction.

May we come together as a people, not just in times of war, but also in times of peace. As we forge our way forward, may we be able to respect each other, engage in accepting discourse, disagree vehemently but validate the person, and through *ahavat chinam* we will build a common destiny together and rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple speedily in our days.



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Tisha B'Av 5784: The Root And Message Of Jewish Suffering

By Rabbi Reuven Taragin - 5 Av 5784 – August 8, 2024

This year's Tisha B'Av will be different from past years. Our mourning usually begins slowly with the Three Weeks and culminates with Tisha B'Av. This year, it began with full intensity ten months ago and has continued unabated. Our mourning is also of a different type. We generally associate the mourning of Tisha B'Av with the *Churban* (destruction) of the *Beit HaMikdash*. This year, we have been mourning the terrible loss of life and crying for Jews suffering both in Israel and around the world. We have been mourning for the over 1,000 victims of the brutal and dehumanizing massacre of October 7 and the hundreds of soldiers killed since then. We have been crying for the over 100 still held hostage, for the hundreds wounded, for the families torn apart in so many ways by the war, and for the Jews attacked, harassed, and demonized around the world.

How should we transition from the mourning of the past ten months to the mourning of Tisha B'Av? What relationship, if any, exists between our suffering and the *Churban HaMikdash*?

The Duality of Tisha B'Av The answer lies in appreciating the full breadth of our Tisha B'Av mourning and reflection. Though Tisha B'Av commemorates the *Churban*, our mourning extends beyond it. Most of Tisha B'Av's *kinot* are not about the *Beit HaMikdash*. They are about Jewish suffering – at the time of the *Churban* and throughout the centuries since. For example, the *kinot* relate to the ten martyrs who were killed almost a century after the *Churban*, as well as the victims of the Crusades and the Holocaust millennia later. This year, many of us will add a *kinah* for those killed on and since October 7. (One such *kinah* was written by Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon at the behest of World Mizrahi.) The *kinot* express anguish not only over death but for other types of suffering as well. For example, we cry for the son and daughter of Rabbi Yishmael, who were sold as slaves, as well as the *sefarim* burned in France.

Eicha Sets the Tone The *perakim* of *Megillat Eicha*, the first *kinot* written after the *Churban*, provide the answer. Though Yirmiyahu HaNavi wrote *Eicha* in response to the *Churban HaMikdash*, the theme of his lamentations is Jewish suffering. *Eicha* seeks to understand Yerushalayim's suffering and isolation. It begins by asking how a city once full of people

became so empty and lonely. How was a people once respected among the nations abandoned by her friends to the point that no one consoled her or even cared about her suffering? Though inspired by the *Churban HaMikdash*, *Megillat Eicha* focuses on the terrible suffering and abandonment that accompanied it. The continued historical development of the Tisha B'Av *kinot* builds off this model, reflecting not just upon the *Churban* but on all types of Jewish suffering. *Eicha* describes Jewish suffering at the time of the *Churban*; later *kinot* detail similar suffering throughout the ages. With this new understanding of the focus of Tisha B'Av mourning, we must ask: Why was the date of the *Churban HaMikdash* chosen as the time to mourn and cry for all types of suffering?

The Connection Between Suffering and the Churban All of our nation's suffering is rooted in the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*. More precisely, our suffering is rooted in what the destruction reflects – distance between us and Hashem. Our sins distance us from Hashem, and Hashem from us. Because the *Beit HaMikdash* symbolizes our relationship with Hashem when our sins fracture this relationship, the *Beit HaMikdash* becomes a meaningless shell that no longer represents a meaningful relationship and is destroyed. The *Churban HaMikdash* reflects the distance between us and Hashem. This distance is also why we suffer. Not only does Hashem not intervene to protect us, but He also *causes* us to suffer. Our suffering at the hands of other nations is punishment for our sins and, on a deeper level, reflective of the problems between us and Hashem. Hashem causes others to reject us in order to keep us from “moving on” through assimilation. We have no choice but to return to and improve our relationship with Him.

Peace Depends on Peace The connection between our suffering and the *Churban* is made by Rashi and other commentaries on the Gemara in *Rosh Hashana* (18b). The Gemara, based on the *pesukim* in *Zechariah* (8:19), explains that our fast days will turn into days of celebration when there will be “*shalom*.” The *mefarshim* debate whether *shalom* refers to peace with other nations or peace with Hashem (represented by the rebuilding of the *Beit HaMikdash*). Rashi and the Ritva mention *both* factors as significant. This is because they saw *both* types of peace as linked. We will enjoy peace with other nations *only once* we achieve peace with Hashem, as symbolized by the rebuilding of the *Beit HaMikdash*. Until the *Beit HaMikdash* is rebuilt, Hashem ensures that we continue suffering and are continuously attacked, vilified, and hated. If we were not, we would not appreciate how problematic our distance from Hashem is. This is why even our best efforts have not solved the problem of antisemitism. When Jews lived in ghettos, many assumed that we were hated because we lived separately. When Western European countries allowed us entry into general society at the end of the eighteenth century, many Jews hoped that assimilation would gain them acceptance. Sadly, the scourge of antisemitism continued and reared its ugly head in the form of the Dreyfus Affair in Western Europe and riots in Odessa and Kishinev (and over 100 cities) in Eastern Europe. Theodore Hertzl and others realized that assimilation into secular society was not the solution. They hoped that removing the Jewish people from other countries and founding a Jewish state in desolate Palestine would solve the problem. Though they successfully established a state, the state did not solve the problem. Since founding the State of Israel, we have tried to gain acceptance by showing that we are strong enough to defend ourselves and our land and that we will not be driven out. We hoped others would eventually recognize and accept our presence in the Middle East. Five bloody wars showed us that this approach would not work, and we turned to a peace process that included giving away precious land and allowing our enemies to return and occupy it. Sadly, this attempt was also unsuccessful, as the peace process was met with continued hostility and violence. The fast of Tisha B'Av reminds us why this is so. We choose the date of the *Churban Beit HaMikdash* as the day to mourn for all our people's suffering throughout the ages because our suffering is rooted in that *Churban*. Until we repair our relationship with Hashem, we will continue to find peace elusive. We should continue seeking it, but we must

remember that ultimate peace hinges on earning peace between us and Hashem.

Transitioning to Tisha B'Av 5784 Sadly, we come to Tisha B'Av 5784 feeling the acute pain of renewed Jewish suffering. Like other difficult periods since the *Churban*, the past year has reminded us of the dysfunctionality of Jewish life in a world without a *Beit HaMikdash*. Tisha B'Av is the day we are meant to remind ourselves of the real reason for our suffering. The October 7 attack and subsequent struggles are about more than just Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, and antisemitism. They are rooted in the *Churban HaMikdash*. May realizing this inspire us to work on repairing our relationship with Hashem in a way that merits the rebuilding of the *Beit HaMikdash* and, through that, peace for the Jewish people and the world.

<https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/parsha/the-nechama-of-three-and-seven/2013/07/11/>

The *Nechama* of Three And Seven

By [Rabbi Eli Baruch Shulman](#)

5 Av 5773 – July 11, 2013

באב תשעה באב always falls between the *parshiyot* of *Devarim* and *V'etchanan*. This is very appropriate, because in the *parsha* of *Devarim* we read of **חטא** the **המרגלים**, and the gratuitous crying which prompted the Almighty to say that He would one day give us good reason to cry; while the *parsha* of *V'etchanan* which contains within it the passage of **כי תוליד בנים ובני בנים**, which we read on **תשעה באב** – speaks of exile, *teshuvah*, and redemption. And so **באב תשעה באב** falls between these two *parshiyot* which span the whole cycle of **גאולה** and **חורבן** – beginning with the very root of **חורבן**, at the **חטא המרגלים**, through **גלות** and finally reconciliation and redemption. **באב תשעה באב** is also situated between two sets of **הפטירות**: the **פרעניות והפטירות**, which tell of the threatening calamity, culminating in the **חורבן**; followed by the **הפטירות** of consolation, beginning with **נחמו נחמו עמי**.

These numbers – 3 and 7 – are very opposite. They are numbers, of course, that constantly come up in Judaism: The seven days of the week immediately come to mind, and the three festivals.

Generally it may be said that seven represents a full cycle. Thus seven days complete the cycle of the week, and the full course of a *Yom Tov*; seven days complete a cycle of **טהרה**, as in the **שבעה נקיים** and the **זבחה וזבחה**; and seven times seven completes the cycle of the **עומר**. And there are many other examples.

The number three, on the other hand, represents rootedness. There are three **אבות**, who are the foundation of the Jewish People. A tree is deemed to take root in three days, as reflected in many *halachot*. And the *Mishnah* tells us that the world rests on the three pillars of Torah, *Avodah* and *Gmilit Chasadim*.

Likewise, the *mekubalim* teach that there are seven attributes which define how Hashem created and relates to the world; these seven, in turn, being rooted in the three attributes of Divine wisdom: **חכמה בינה ודעת**.

R' Moshe Shapiro *shlita*, once pointed out a striking template for this pattern of three and seven in the Torah itself. The Torah describes the land of Israel as: **ארץ נחלי מים עינות ותהומות יוצאים בבקעה ובהר, ארץ חיתה ושעורה וגפן תאנה** (Note that there are three sources of water (**נחלי מים**, עינות ותהומות; streams, wells and aquifers), which, in turn, produce seven kinds of fruit. And this is a paradigm: Three sources, out of which comes a fullness of seven.

Perhaps we are used to thinking that first we have 3 sad weeks, and then the sad part's over, and we move on to the happy part. But if we understand the significance of the pattern of three and seven, we can gain a clearer perspective: The fullness of the comfort of the **שבועה דנחמתא** is rooted in the **אבילות** of the three weeks that precede it. And, more generally – that the completeness of the **נחמה** which we ultimately look forward, grows out of our **אבילות** today. As Chazal say – “**זוכה ורואה**” – **כל המתאבל על ירושלים, זוכה ורואה**.”

The three weeks of mourning are the font and origin of the subsequent consolation, because by participating in that mourning and sharing in our

people's collective suffering, we root ourselves in its history and join ourselves to its ultimately glorious destiny.

There is a very profound truth here, which needs to be amplified: *Chazal* speak with disdain of someone who is **פורש מדרכי ציבור**, a person who separates himself from the Jewish people. As the Rambam writes in **הלכות תשובה**:

הפורש מדרכי ציבור ואף על פי שלא עבר עבירות אלא נבדל מעדת ישראל ואינו עושה מצות בכללן ולא נכנס בצרתן ולא מתענה בתעניתן אלא הולך בדרכו כאחד מגויי הארץ וכאילו אינו מהן אין לו חלק לעולם הבא

One who separates himself from the community, even if he does not sin at all, but simply segregates himself from the community of Israel, and does not do *mitzvos* with them, participate in their troubles, or fast in their fast days, but goes his own way like one of the nations of the world, it is as if he is not one of them, and has no share in the world to come.”

Tidbits for Parashas Devarim •

Shabbos Chazon

Ira Zlotowitz <iraz@klalgovoah.org> Thu, Aug 8, 7:03 PM (6 hours ago)

Parashas Devarim • Shabbos Chazon • August 10th • 6 Av 5784

The Nine Days began at shekiya on the evening of Rosh Chodesh Av, Sunday, August 4th. The restrictions of the Three Weeks of course remain in effect (see the recent editions of Tidbits for more information). There is a dispute among the Poskim if one may take a regular hot shower this Friday, August 9th, Erev Shabbos Chazon. Regardless, the shower should be taken as quickly as possible.

As meat may not be consumed during the Nine Days, one may not taste meat foods on Erev Shabbos. In the context of food preparation one may taste the food, but may not swallow it (no berachah is recited in this case).

The haftarah of Chazon Yeshayahu is leined. It describes the nation's sins and the resulting tragic *Churban* and *Galus*. Many read it to the tune of *Eichah*. The *Sefer Eretz Tzvi* explains that this Shabbos is called Shabbos Chazon, Shabbos of Vision, as Hashem always keeps us in His line of vision. Although suffering may be meted out, we are never abandoned. Rather, divine retribution will ultimately be followed by our redemption. One who customarily uses wine for Havdalah may drink the wine. However, many have the minhag to give it to a boy who is a minor of chinuch age - 6 or 7 years old (it would be preferable if that child does not understand the concept of mourning). Some use beer for havdalah instead.

The first opportunity for Kiddush Levana is Wednesday night, August 7th at 9:59 PM EDT. Still, the prevalent minhag is to wait until Motza'ei Tisha B'av (Tuesday night, August 13th) to recite Kiddush Levana. The final opportunity is Sunday night, August 18th.

As the precarious situation in Eretz Yisrael unfortunately continues, each person should increase reciting *tehillim* and performing other *mitzvos* as a *zechus* for the many *Acheinu Beis Yisrael* in travail and captivity as well as for the soldiers in battle.

Pirkei Avos: Perek 3

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Bava Basra 46 • Yerushalmi: Challah 9 •

Mishnah Yomis: Bava Kama 2:1-2 • Oraysa: Next week is Succah 40a-42a. Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbe to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

Tisha B'av begins this Monday evening, August 12th.

Shabbos Nachamu is next Shabbos Parashas Va'eschanan, August 17th.

Devarim: Moshe begins the final month of his life speaking to the Bnei Yisrael • A review - which included a veiled rebuke - of the events of the past forty years includes: Klal Yisrael leaves Sinai • Judges were appointed to assist Moshe • Klal Yisrael reaches Kadesh Barnea • The incident of the Meraglim • The decree that this generation, including Moshe, would not enter the land • Klal Yisrael travels for 40 years • The history of the lands of Ammon and Moav • Sichon and Og are defeated • Reuven and Gad receive their portion East of the Yarden • Moshe encourages Yehoshua Haftarah: The haftarah of Chazon Yeshayahu is leined (Yeshayah 1:1-27); this is the third and final haftarah of the series of the shalosh d'puranusa. The

Navi bemoans the sins and the resulting downfall of the Jewish nation that led to the tragic destruction, all which occurred primarily during The Three Weeks. The haftarah ends with the promise that we will be redeemed through righteous acts.

Parashas Devarim: 105 Pesukim • 2 Prohibitions

1) Do not appoint a judge who is unqualified. 2) Do not deviate from delivering true justice.

Mitzvah Highlight: A judge may not refrain from serving justice even if he fears for his safety. Additionally, one who has relevant information must share it with the judge and not be fearful of an angered litigant.

"נתקרבנו אליך כלכם" "All of you approached me" (Devarim 1:22)

Rashi quotes the Midrash that relates that Moshe in his rebuke noted that Klal Yisrael approached Moshe with the idea of sending the Meraglim in a disorganized manner, the youth pushing the elders and the elders shoving the leaders. As the magnitude of the sin of the Meraglim was exceptionally great, why was it important to note this small detail regarding the lack of *derech ertz*?

Rav Yitzchok M'Volozhin zt"l explains that Moshe was adjuring Klal Yisrael not to excuse themselves by saying that their original motivation for sending the Meraglim was noble and virtuous, and only went sour at a later stage. The lack of *derech ertz* from the onset proves that their intentions were less than virtuous from the very beginning. At times it can be difficult to discern the nobility of an action or cause. Often the proof lies in the minor details of how the initiative is being carried out. Similarly, the Baalei Mussar advise that one can confirm that he is being motivated by his *yetzer hara* if he finds himself acting impulsively and immediately without proper consideration. The lack of decorum should have signaled to the nation to reassess the true lowly motivation behind their actions.

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It Could Have Been Different

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Yirmiyahu begins his dirge about the fall of Yerushalayim with an iconic word. The term "Eichah" had already been employed by both Moshe Rabeinu and Yeshayahu HaNavi. As the Midrash comments, Moshe witnessed the rapid growth of a nation of former slaves and expressed his wonder with the term "Eichah": Eichah Esa Livadi Tarchachem Viribchem Umaasechem.

Similarly, Yeshayahu observed our moral freefall during the era of the First Mikdash and also wondered "Eichah": Eichah Haita Lizona Kirya Neemana. How could a nation chosen by Hashem, awarded His land, and living near His Mikdash, so blatantly betray His will? Against this backdrop Yirmiyahu also begins his *sefer* with the symbolic word of "Eichah" conveying his own disbelief: Eichah Yashva Badad Ha'ir Rabati Am.

How was it possible that the ominous prophecies had now arrived? The word "Eichah" symbolizes the enigma of Jewish history. As Hashem's people, our national trajectory isn't normal or proportionate to other nations. When we succeed, we rise meteorically and when we fail, we fall precipitously. Three prophets, at three different stages of history all acknowledged that Jewish history can't be neatly graphed. It is jagged and asymmetrical and can best be described as "Eichah".

Ayeka – Where Are You However, the term "Eichah" doesn't only recall Moshe and Yeshayahu but also evokes Hashem's message to Adam and Chava in Gan Eden. Hashem calls out to Adam and Chava, who had quickly gone into hiding after committing their grievous sin Vayikra Hashem Elokim El Haadam Vayomer Lo Ayeka.

Of course, the question of "Ayeka" isn't interrogative, as Hashem clearly knows their whereabouts. The term "Ayeka" poses an existential question: Where are you and who are you after violating your only divine command? What type of life can you possibly envision without Hashem living outside Gan Eden?

By launching his own *sefer* with the term "Eichah" – which contains the identical letters to "Ayeka" – Yirmiyahu poses the same existential question to us: How can we possibly live without a Mikdash, expelled from

Yerushalayim and distant from Hashem? Yirmiyahu's "Eichah" echoes with Hashem's "Ayeka". international tragedy. When Jews inhabit Yerushalayim the world below is properly aligned with the world above. Under these ideal conditions the entire world is in a better state, enjoying heightened spiritual consciousness and broad material prosperity.

When we left Yerushalayim the world was thrown into chaos. We were selected to study Hashem's Torah, fulfill His mitzvot and educate an entire planet about Him. When we compromised that mission, the world lost its interface with Hashem and His will. To capture the international scope of the Tisha b'av tragedy Yirmiyahu conjures the expulsion of Adam from Gan Eden. The first fall of Man occurred when Adam and Chava were banished from Gan Eden. The second fall of Man occurred when the chosen people were dispossessed of the land of G-d.

The Garden

Likewise, to highlight the universal scope of the tragedy, Yirmiyahu directly depicts Yerushalayim as a garden: שיכח יהיה בציון מועד ושבת, וינאץ בזעם אפו מלך וכוהן

which literally means that Hashem stripped His shelter like a garden. When we left Yerushalayim we didn't just leave our city. We forfeited our opportunity to regain a perfect, Gan Eden-like state and to spread this condition to Mankind. The destruction of Yerushalayim was a universal disaster, not just a national tragedy. Yirmiyahu wasn't the only prophet to comprehend the broader impact of the destruction of the Mikdash. Hoshei'a comments on our moral hypocrisy: ודעת אלקים מעלות כי חסד הפצתי ולא זבח, ודעת אלקים מעלות כי חסד הפצתי ולא זבח. By masking our moral failures through empty sacrifices, we violated our covenant with Hashem just like "Adam". Just as the first man, who was named "Adam" betrayed His covenant with Hashem, we betrayed ours. Our betrayal damaged the world's fortunes in the same manner that Adam's failure did.

Yirmiyahu's usage of the term "Eichah", his comparison of Yerushalayim to a garden, and Hoshei'a's referring to us as "Adam, all emphasize the universal scope of the Tisha b'av tragedy. The day we left Yerushalayim the lights went out on humanity.

The Fall Of Rome

Humanity paid a steep price for its crime of destroying Yerushalayim. In the short-term aftermath of the churban, the superpower responsible for this crime, itself collapsed.

The Day The Lights Went Out

Yirmiyahu inserts his version of "Ayeka" or "Eichah" for an additional reason. The impact of our eviction from Yerushalayim was similar to the fallout of Adam's expulsion from Gan Eden. Adam's sentence was announced with the term Ayeka, and, likewise, our own exile was introduced with the term "Eichah".

The destruction of the Mikdash and the ransacking of Yerushalayim were national calamities. After centuries of religious malfunction Hashem no longer tolerated us in His land. We have spent two millennia recovering from the great fall of Jewish history and it has taken us thousands of years to repair the rupture in our relationship with Hashem.

However, the destruction of the Mikdash was also an A Roman empire, which was built to last a thousand years, crumbled soon after its attack on Yerushalayim. The decline of the Roman empire began in the 3rd century, about a hundred years after its brutal suppression of the Bar Kochba rebellion and, by the year 476, Rome had been conquered by German barbarian. Throughout history the city of Rome was sacked seven times, a small punishment for assaulting the city of G-d and for wrecking the fortunes of an entire planet.

The Dark Ages

In a broader sense, when Yerushalayim was destroyed, humanity sank into a period of close to 1000 years of darkness. During the Dark Ages (which many view as lasting until the 14th century) the world stagnated culturally, scientifically and politically. Suffering the aftershocks of the fall of Yerushalayim, humanity was marred by frequent invasions, political fragmentation, and social upheaval. Humanity only began to recover in the 14th century, experiencing a "Renaissance" of spirit which stimulated close

to 600 years of scientific progress, human freedom and economic improvement. Just when history began veering toward Jewish redemption the curse of Tisha B'av slowly lifted.

Plan "B"

Though galus compromised our historical mission it didn't entirely cancel it. On the day we left Yerushalayim our national mission became transformed. Jewish history shifted into "Plan B".

Originally, we were meant to enter Israel, empty it of pagan culture, and establish a kingdom of Hashem. As a sovereign nation living in our homeland, we would educate and inspire the world by modeling a life of commitment and covenant. Having failed at this model, we entered a different stage of history and were now assigned a very different version of Jewish mission. This new version would exact a heavy price from our people.

Under the terms of "Plan B" we would now wander through this planet, hosted by a collection of host countries. Our people, however, would never be typical guests. As a people of the book, we would always be far more literate than our surrounding culture. This literacy gap was especially conspicuous in periods when literacy rates barely exceeded 20 % of the population.

Additionally, we lived temperate and financially responsible lifestyles, avoiding overindulgence while investing in family, community, and social welfare. This contributed to our financial stability, even under trying conditions.

Jewish loyalty to one another assured a tight-knit web of Jews around the world. Networks are crucial for business and commercial success.

Unlike other non-indigenous people, we never fully blended in with our host culture. We maintained our own customs, religious ceremonies, dietary laws, and social interactions, all the while marrying within our own people. To our hosts, we always felt very different. We were an intelligent, literate people, living economically sound and prosperous lives, preserving our own identity through cultural insularity.

And, on top of everything else, we also claimed to have a message for humanity. Even in exile we viewed ourselves as a nation sent to inspire the world to moral monotheism. This new "arrangement" of Jewish history or Plan B was combustible. A guest is not expected to succeed more than his host. A guest is expected to blend in with the host. A guest is not expected to provide moral challenges for a host. We were never typical guests. These elements of Plan B of Jewish history sparked vicious and violent antisemitism. It is morally corrupt to blame a victim for violence. Over the past 10 months our people have suffered this hypocritical moral algebra, being blamed for the horrific pogrom of October 7th. We certainly don't blame ourselves for antisemitism. Every individual has full freedom to decide whether to resort to violence. However, Plan B of history certainly enflamed hatred which, in turn, incited antisemitism. In a broad sense, and without exempting antisemites of their hateful crimes, we are responsible for Plan B which incited tensions and hatred. Had Plan A remained intact we would have inspired the world from our own sovereign land of Israel. We are slowly crawling our way back to Plan A. It is a long and difficult journey. On Tisha b'av we mourn the shift to Plan B. We also mourn the world which shattered on that day and is still so terribly broken.

from: Rabbi YY Jacobson <rabbiyy-theyeshiva.net reply-to: info@theyeshiva.net date: Aug 8, 2024, 4:17 PM subject: The Arab-Israeli Conflict Is Not Territorial - Essay by Rabbi YY
The Arab-Israeli Conflict Is Not Territorial
Why Are We Afraid to Speak Truth?
By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

On a Hike

Four Europeans go hiking together, and get frightfully lost. First they run out of food, and then they run out of water.

"I'm so thirsty," says the Englishman, "I must have tea." "I'm so thirsty," says the Frenchman, "I must have wine." "I'm so thirsty," says the German, "I must have beer."

"I'm so thirsty," says the Jew, "I must have diabetes."

Israel Today

Israel today is facing a complex reality, with more varied and serious threats than we've seen before. There is the threat from Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, the PA, and the other enemies of Israel waiting for their moment.

During such times, it is vital that we, the Jewish people, stand firm and united. First and foremost, we must articulate to ourselves—and to the world—the truth about Israel.

Not Even a Foot

In this week's Torah portion (Devarim), Moses, bidding farewell to his nation just weeks before his passing, narrates the experiences of the young nation during their forty years of wandering in the Sinai wilderness, en route to the Holy Land. Their long trek, from Egypt through the Sinai Peninsula, to the Eastern bank of the Jordan, forced them to pass neighboring countries, all of them antagonistic toward the Israelites. Moses records his instructions to the Israelites on how to treat these neighboring nations. His words are both shocking and stunning; their moral power resonates to this very day.

"G-d said to me," Moses recalls (1), "Give the people the following instructions: 'You are passing through the borders of your brothers, the descendants of Esau, who dwell in Saeir [Southeast of Israel]. Although they fear you, you must be very careful. You shall not provoke them, for I will not give you even one foot of their land. As an inheritance to Esau I have given Mount Saeir.'"

Moses continues the instruction: "You shall purchase food from them for money so that you may eat; also water shall you buy from them for money so that you may drink." From Saeir, also known as Edom, the Hebrews continue their journey northward toward the territory of Moab, located at the East of the Dead Sea. This is Moses' message to the Jews once again:

"G-d said to me, 'You shall not distress Moab and you shall not provoke war with them. I will not give you their land as an inheritance, since I have already given Ar [the capital of Moab] to Lot's descendants as their heritage.'"

As the Jews continue their voyage up north toward the country of Ammon, today's Jordan, Moses has this to say to his people: "G-d spoke to me saying... 'You will be coming close to the Ammonites. You shall not distress them and you shall not provoke them, for I shall not give any of the land of the descendants of Ammon to you as an inheritance; to the descendants of Lot have I given it as an inheritance (2)."

These words, uttered three millennia ago (in the year 1273 BCE), one month before Moses dies, are startling. When the world was still a moral desolate desert, a barbaric pagan society, Jews were barred from taking even a single inch from the territories of Saeir, Moab and Ammon. "I will not give you even one foot of their land," G-d declares to Israel. Not only can you not build homes on their territory, you mustn't even stand on their soil without permission. You can't enjoy a falafel without their consent. Why? Because their land does not belong to you, the Israelites; it belongs to another nation. Do not lay a finger on that which is not yours.

The Eternal Lesson

Why does the Torah record these apparently insignificant instructions of Moses concerning the Jewish encounter with the three countries of Saeir, Moab and Ammon (and Moses is sharing this with them long after the actual events happened)? What historical relevance is there in this lengthy and detailed account? Especially considering that the Torah is far more a book of moral instruction than a work of historical data. What moral message does this tale convey?

The answer is clear. The Torah is communicating to us the circumstances surrounding the ultimate Israelite conquest and settlement of their homeland, Eretz Israel, so that when the United Nations, the White House, the International Court of Justice, the European Union, CNN, the New York Times, the Universities of the US and Europe, the State Department, and all of the Arab countries will decry Israel as an apartheid state, occupying Palestinian soil and controlling land annexed from another nation, the Jewish people will be able to open their own constitution, the Torah, and present its unwavering message:

"Listen ye, defenders of morality and human rights! Do not preach to us about stolen land. At a time when most tribes and nations were slaughtering their very own children to pagan gods (3); in a milieu when parents regularly practiced infanticide, murdering their weak newborn children; in an era when cannibalism was a routine diet, and most people lacked the slightest idea about the very notion of right and wrong -- Jewish children growing up in a desert were taught that they could not touch that which did not belong to them. They could not step foot into a territory that was not theirs.

"When your great-great grandparents were still entrenched in barbaric pagan rites, our children were studying G-d's instruction to cultivate absolute respect for the property and nationhood of others.

"This was to teach the Jewish people that the land that they were instructed to settle was theirs for eternity."

The very same G-d who instructed them not to set foot on foreign soil, granted the Land of Israel -- the entire territory from the Jordanian River to the Mediterranean Sea -- as His gift to the Jewish people. It is not stolen land; it is the eternal heritage of the Jewish people.

Israel became a nation in 1313 BCE, 2,000 years before the birth of Islam. Forty years later, in 1273 BCE, the Jews conquered Eretz Israel and enjoyed dominion over the land for a thousand years. Even after the Babylonians and then the Romans put an end to the Jewish sovereignty, Jews continued to reside there throughout all of their history. The Jews have had a continuous presence in the land of Israel for the past 3,300 years.

"You Are Thieves"

The great 11th-century French biblical commentator, Rashi (Rabbi Solomon Yitzchaki), one of the greatest sages in the history of the Jewish people, asks the following question in his commentary on the opening verse of Genesis. If the Hebrew Bible is a book of Jewish law, why does it begin with the story of creation, and the entire book of Genesis, and not proceed immediately to the first mitzvah given to the Jews in the book of Exodus?

Rashi, who wrote these words as Christian crusaders were attempting to purge the land from Muslim rule, presents an incredible answer. One day in the future, Rashi says, the nations of the world will turn to the Jewish people and declare, "You are thieves! You have stolen the land of Israel from non-Jewish tribes."

What ought to be the appropriate Jewish response? To answer this question, the Hebrew Bible commences its text with the story of creation of the universe, and the entire story of Genesis, in order to grant the Jew the best and truest answer to the accusation that he is a bandit. The entire universe, the Bible is saying, belongs to G-d. He created it. Every piece of land belongs to Him, and He chose to give the Land of Israel to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. To call Israel occupiers is akin to calling France occupiers of Paris or Britain occupiers of London.

The Bible -- a book embraced by 1.5 billion Muslims and 2.5 billion Christians as the word of G-d -- states clearly hundreds of times that the entire country, including the West Bank and Jerusalem, is G-d's eternal gift to the Jewish people. In fact, our ownership of Israel surpasses that of any other nation's ownership of its country. Every other nation in the world bases its claim to its land on conquest. A people came, conquered the indigenous people, took the land, settled it, and called it by a new name.

"Might makes right" is the historical claim of almost all nations in history. With one exception: Israel, Eretz Israel. This country belongs to the Jewish people because, as the Bible states hundreds of times, G-d gave it to them as their eternal heritage. It is the most moral claim by every definition of morality.

The Truth About the Refugees

Harvard University professor Ruth Wisse wrote these wise words in The Wall Street Journal (June 16, 2003):

"Unfortunately, the Arab war against Israel is no more a territorial conflict than was al Qaeda's strike against America, and it can no more be resolved by the 'road map' than anti-Americanism could be appeased by ceding part of the U.S. to an Islamist enclave. From the moment in 1947 when Jewish leaders accepted and Arab rulers rejected the U.N. partition plan of Palestine, the Arab-Israeli conflict bore no further likeness to conventional territorial

struggles. Arab rulers defied the U.N. charter by denying the legitimacy of a member state. Arab countries refused to acknowledge the existence of a single Jewish land. Arab rulers did not object to Israel because it rendered the Palestinians homeless. Rather, they ensured that the Palestinians should remain homeless so that they could organize their politics around opposition to Israel.

"At any point during the past 55 years, Arab governments could have helped the Palestinian Arabs settle down to a decent life. They could have created the infrastructure of an autonomous Palestine on the West Bank of the Jordan and the Gaza territory that Egypt controlled until 1967, or encouraged the resettlement of Palestinians in Jordan, which constitutes the lion's share of the original mandate of Palestine. Rather than fund the Palestine Liberation Organization to foment terror against Israel they could have endowed Palestinian schools of architecture, engineering, medicine and law. What Israel did for its refugees from Arab lands, Arabs could have done much more sumptuously for the Palestinians displaced by the same conflict. Instead, Arab rulers cultivated generations of refugees in order to justify their ongoing campaign against the 'usurper.'"

Every decent human heart goes out to the pain of innocent Arab children, women and men who grew up in impoverished refugee camps. Their suffering should evoke the compassion of all moral men. But let us be clear on the matter: Their suffering has absolutely nothing to do with Israel. Their profound agony is the result of the Arab and Palestinian leaders who have in a most cynical way used them as weapons in their bloody battle against Israel, robbing them of any prospect of a brighter future.

This abuse of the Arab refugees by their leaders began back in 1948. For the most part, the refugees were encouraged by Arab leaders to leave Israel, promising to purge the land of Jews. Sixty-eight percent left their homes without ever seeing an Israeli soldier.

Out of the 100 million refugees after World War II, theirs is the only refugee group in the world that was not absorbed or integrated into their own peoples' lands. Jewish refugees which numbered the same amount as Palestinian refugees were completely absorbed into Israel, a country no larger than the state of New Jersey. Yet the Arab refugees were intentionally not absorbed or integrated into the Arab lands to which they fled, despite the vast Arab territory. Why? Because cynical Arab leaders realized that the true value of the refugees was not as Arab brothers but as pawns to be used against Israel.

What About the Palestinian People?

How about the ingrained notion that the Palestinians are fighting for their ancient homeland annexed by the Jews? The truth about this matter has been so deliberately obscured that even raising the issue seems strange to many people.

Let us reflect on some undisputed historical facts. (Please read till the end and reflect on these facts before you dismiss them instinctively). In the 1967 war, did Israel annex territory from a Palestinian nation? No. Not a single inch. Israel captured the West Bank and Eastern Jerusalem from Jordan's King Hussein and the Gaza Strip from Egypt, after they planned to destroy the Jewish State. It was only following the Six-day War in 1967 that Arab refugees living in these territories began identifying themselves as part of a "Palestinian people."

One must wonder why these Palestinians suddenly discovered a national identity after Israel won the war, but not during the "Jordanian occupation"? If the people you mistakenly call 'Palestinians' are anything but generic Arabs collected from all over -- or thrown out of -- the Arab world, if they really have a genuine ethnic identity that gives them right for self-determination, why did they never try to become independent until Arabs suffered their devastating defeat in the Six Day War?

Here are the facts, and you can check them out. There has never been a land known as Palestine governed by Palestinians. Palestinians are regular Arabs, indistinguishable from Jordanians, Syrians, Lebanese, Iraqis, Egyptians, etc., who have all lived for hundreds of years under Turkish rule, and then, after World War I, under British rule. At that time even Jews living in the Holy Land were called "Palestinians." There is no language known as Palestinian.

There is no distinct Palestinian culture. There is no such an entity as a "Palestinian people."

The name "Palestine" was created in the second century after the Romans committed genocide against the Jews, burnt the Temple and declared that the land of Israel would be no more. From then on, the Romans promised, it would be known as Palestine. The name was derived from the Philistines, a Goliathian people conquered by the Jews centuries earlier. It was a way for the Romans to add insult to injury. (They also tried to change the name of Jerusalem to Aelia Capitolina, but that had even less staying power.)

The present conflict between Israel and the Arabs has absolutely nothing to do with any occupation. In 1967, when there was not one Jewish settlement and no occupation, five Arab countries -- Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon joined by Saudi Arabia -- contrived a plan to annihilate Israel and "drive the Jews into the sea." Israel fought back and won the war -- and the territories from which it was attacked. Keep in mind that in 1967 the Arabs controlled 99.9 percent of the Middle East lands. Israel represented less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the land mass. But even that was too much for the Arabs. They wanted it all. No matter how many land concessions the Israelis make, it will never be enough.

During the summer of 2000 at Camp David, Yasser Arafat was offered by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak 98 percent of the "occupied territories" and a first time ever Palestinian State with its capital in East Jerusalem. Arafat rejected the Israeli offer and initiated three years of horrific bloodshed in Israel. Then in 2005, Israel evacuated every last Jew from Gaza, giving away Gaza exclusively to the Arabs. The result? Gaza became Chamastan, and Israel has not enjoyed a day of peace coming from Gaza. October 7th was the 'gift' Hamas gave to Israel for returning Gaza to them.

The History of the Palestinians

In Hal Lindsey's book "Everlasting Hatred: The Roots of Jihad," he traces the history of the people now being called the "Palestinians." I want to quote a few critical paragraphs.

"In the 7th century, the Muslims took control of Palestine for the first time. From 635 CE until 1917, the Muslims ruled it, with only a few interruptions by the European Crusaders. During that span of time, the land was reduced to total desolation. Many people who traveled the land in the 19th century remarked on the fact that Palestine was as desolate as the moon and very few people lived there.

"In 1867, Mark Twain remarked about his visit to the Holy Land in his book, 'The Innocents Abroad.' He lamented: 'Stirring scenes occur in the valley [of Jezreel] no more. There is not a single village throughout its whole extent -- not for 30 miles in either direction. There are two or three small clusters of Bedouin tents, but not a single permanent habitation. One may ride 10 miles hereabouts and not see 10 human beings.'

"Twain described the country as 'A desolate country whose soil is rich enough but is given over wholly to weeds. A silent, mournful expanse. We never saw a human being on the whole route. There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country.'

"By all eyewitness accounts of that era, Palestine was a total desolation. There were virtually no trees and no people. Because of lack of trees, the weather changed and it rarely ever rained. The irrigation systems of the once fertile valleys were all destroyed, rendering most areas into malaria-ridden swamps. The terraces of the mountainsides were torn down, causing terrible erosion that left only barren rocks. This was the condition of Palestine by the beginning of the 19th century.

"It was at this time that Jews began to flee severe persecution in Russia and Eastern Europe. In the mid-1800s, some Jews came to Palestine and, with the generous aid of some successful Jews, began to buy property from Muslim Ottoman Turks. The Muslims thought the land was worthless anyway, so they sold it to the 'dumb Jews' for extremely inflated prices.

"To everyone's amazement, the Jews were very successful at reclaiming the land. Many of them died from malaria and the rigorous life the work demanded, but they performed an agricultural miracle that made the land very productive again. As a result of their success, poor migrant workers

from the surrounding Muslim countries began to flood in to work for the Jews. The Jews literally became victims of their own success -- almost all of the people calling themselves 'Palestinians' today are the descendants of those migrant workers.

"When the Hashemite Tribe, who were rulers over Mecca and Medina for centuries, were driven out by the Saudis, the British gave them control over the vastly greater numbers of 'migrant workers' in Trans Jordan. The British said this would be, in effect, 'The State of Palestine.' Instead, the Hashemites, who make up only about 20 percent of the population, turned it into their own kingdom and called it the Kingdom of Jordan.

"When the Jordanians and Egyptians controlled the so-called West Bank and the Gaza Strip for 19 years (1948 to 1967), there was never a thought of giving the disorganized mass of 'migrant workers' a state. Why? Because they knew there were no cohesive, homogeneous people known as 'Palestinians.'

"The current efforts of Jordan and Egypt and all the rest of the Muslim Middle East nations to give these same people a state is clearly a ploy to get a foothold inside Israel. It is a strategic accommodation to establish a base from which the final assault against Israel can be made. What they couldn't do militarily is now being facilitated through the United Nations and the E.U. "Muslims will never accept a permanent presence of infidels in what they claim is sacred Islamic soil. Especially Jewish infidels, for which the Koran reserves its most vehement condemnations. In their minds, the Koran and Allah will not let them accept Jews in what they view as their third holiest site."

The Best Kept Secret

The early founding fathers of modern Israel, even if they were not religious, were deeply steeped in the realization of the Jewish Biblical connection to the land. David Ben Gurion, for example, had an appreciation of the necessity of anchoring a modern, even secular, Israeli state in biblical and Jewish tradition.

Yet, tragically, this has changed dramatically in recent years. You will rarely, if ever, hear an Israeli leader state the truest and most moral justification for a Jewish presence in the Holy Land: G-d's gift to the Jewish people. I am sure our leaders are trying to do the best for their country, but the practical consequences of this policy are counterproductive.

The Arabs are protesting against Israel, saying, "You have annexed our land; you are building settlements on our soil; you are intruding into our territories." And Israel routinely responds: "Yes, you have the right to create on these territories a Palestinian state, but we have a right for self-defense." The world, we know, has embraced the Arab point of view. Condemnation of Israel as an apartheid state has become the norm.

The world is sympathetic to the Arab propaganda against Israel because Israel itself has embraced the Arab version of "truth."

Israel never refuted the core Arab claim that the territories captured in the 1967 war constitute ancient Palestinian land. Israel only states, that notwithstanding the validity of the Arab claim, she has a right for self-defense. So the world says: "OK, so defend yourself in your territories, not in theirs."

This remains Israel's most profound diplomatic and strategic error. In many of its actions, it treats the 1967 territories as though they belonged to Israel; yet in its words, Israel agrees to the Arab claim that this is Palestinian land. So the world is confused: The Arab position is clear to all; the Israeli position is shrouded in mystery. Do they believe this land belongs to them or not? If yes, let them stop saying that they consent to create a Palestinian State there. If not, why do they still maintain a presence there? The Arabs are not confused. Israel is.

And when Jews are confused about who they are and what they believe in, the world resents them. "You are the nation who heard G-d speak at Sinai; if you guys can't speak moral truth, you must be up to something really devilish." As long as the status of the entire country remains ambiguous, the terror campaign against Israel will, Heaven forbid, continue. The Arabs will view Israel's moral and political ambiguity as a green light to proceed with their aspiration to "liberate all of Palestine from the Zionist entity." And the

world will sympathize with this craving for statehood and freedom. Israel must stand up and put an end to the ambivalence around Jewish ownership of the land.

Israel must state clearly that "There will be no more negotiations on even a single inch of the land of Israel. We have attempted to negotiate land for peace with our neighbors; we have offered them 98 percent of the territories and an independent state side-by-side with our state. Yet they have reciprocated by sending suicide bombers to our pizza shops, cafés, supermarkets, schools, and private homes. They have blown to pieces hundreds of innocent Jewish men and women. They have sent thousands of rockets and aim daily to murder as many Jews as possible. They have murdered, raped, burned thousands of Jews, and taken hundreds into captivity. They have vowed to do this again and again. One cannot give land to leaders who teach their followers to put children into ovens, beheads women while raping them, plays soccer with Jewish skulls, and who inculcate in their children's hearts, from infancy onward, with venomous hatred toward the people of Israel."

Israel should allow anybody who wishes to depart for another country to do so. There are 22 Arab countries in the Middle East, and one tiny Jewish country, the size of New Jersey. Israel must reclaim its permanent sovereignty over all of the territories and crush every vestige of terror. Anyone who wants to live as a guest in the Jewish eternal homeland, great. But whoever wants to murder Jews --would be dealt with in the strongest way. Jews should be encouraged to live in their entire homeland. This will save not only countless Jewish lives but also scores of Arab lives. It will once and for all purge the region from continuous bloodshed and terror. This is not occupied territory. It is the land of Israel, given by G-d to the Jewish people.

Let's set the record clear: This is Jewish land, not Arab land. Let all Jews and people of moral standing unite and encourage Israel to bring life and peace to all good people in the region, Jew and Arab alike. (4)

Footnotes:

1) Deuteronomy chapter 2:2-6. All of the subsequent quotes are from this chapter. 2) Later on, Moses relates the story of the two kingdoms of Sichon and Og, located on the Eastern bank of the Jordan who, in response to Israel's request for peace, declared war against Israel and were subsequently wiped out. 3) When paganism ruled, it was common to see human beings sacrificed to pagan gods. Child sacrifices were common rituals of the Canaanite Baal worshipers in ancient times. Moses warned the Jews a number of times that if they would leave the Canaanite tribes in their midst, they might begin to emulate their cruel and barbaric pagan practices. This indeed transpired. It was this practice of many Jews that caused the prophet Elijah, with G-d's approval, to condemn and destroy 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:6-40). Near Mount Carmel on the site of the ancient city of Meggido, archaeologists have discovered the remains of infants who, under the corrupt rule of the Israelite King Ahab and Queen Jezebel in the ninth century B.C.E., had been sacrificed in a temple of Ashtoreth, the goddess of Baal. In the eighth century B.C. the corrupt King Ahaz of ancient Israel sacrificed (by burning) his own son to the Canaanite god Molech (2 Kings 16:3). Not too long after Ahaz, another immoral monarch of Israel, King Manasseh, sacrificed his son (also by burning) in the Valley of Hinnon (2 Kings 21:6). And during the latter part of the seventh century B.C., the prophet Jeremiah condemned numerous Israelites for sacrificing "their sons and daughters in the fire" (Jeremiah 7:31). 4) This essay is based on a talk delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, 4 Av 5740, July 17, 1980 (published in Sichos Kodesh 5740 vol. 3 pp. 704-706.) The Rebbe's opposition to ceding land for peace was not based on his belief that the sanctity of the land is more important than life. To the contrary, he often said—quoting Jewish law (Orach Chaim 329)—that this is exactly what will distance peace. The more Israel gives up land, the more bloodshed and loss of life on both sides. The enemy uses all autonomy to increase terror against Israel and simply brings the enemy closer to Israel. If anyone ever doubted the accuracy of the Rebbe's predictions, just study the case of Gaza or ANY

other period when Israel gave up sovereignty over any piece of land, i.e. the Oslo Accords.

from: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com> date: Aug 8, 2024, 8:26 PM
subject: Potomac Torah Study Center: Devrei Torah **for Shabbat Devarim 5784**

Hamas continues to manipulate the media while pretending to negotiate with Israel. Hersch Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours and a U.S. citizen, remains a captive. Concerns are increasing that fewer than half of the hostages may still be alive. We continue our prayers for the hostages and all our people stuck in Gaza. May Hashem enable us and our people in Israel to wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by Hezbollah and other anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully.

We always read parshat Devarim on the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av. Moshe reviews significant lessons from Jewish history for the new generation and gives them a pep talk as they stand where their parents did thirty-eight years earlier – by Jericho, a distance of only a walk of eleven days from Egypt, at the entry point to Israel. The name of this Shabbat is Shabbat Chazon, the Shabbat of the Vision, based on the opening verse of Isaiah, his vision of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and Judah. The vision comes true, and we read the result on Tisha B'Av, with Jeremiah's Eicha (Lamentations), the horribly graphic and bitter central reading on this most unhappy day in the calendar. In retrospect, after considering the entire period in the Midbar, Moshe realizes his error and the reason why he cannot enter the land with the new generation. There is no mention of hitting a rock. In Moshe's story, we see references back to Gan Eden and realize that the generation of the Exodus does not learn from man's errors. Adam and Chava Rishon disobey God's one rule – that they must not eat from Hashem's one special tree, the tree of knowledge of good and evil. As Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alephbeta.org explain, only God has the right to determine what is good and what is evil in the world that He creates for humans. The punishment for disobeying God's commandment is death and exile. Death – once eating from that tree, humans lose immortality – some day they will all die. Also, God bans humans from Gan Eden – exile. Isaiah warns that by disobeying Hashem's mitzvot, especially in mistreating fellow humans, Jerusalem and Judah are on a path that will bring them to death and exile (to Babylon). The generation of the Exodus has an opportunity to enter the land thirty-eight years earlier, but they sin rather than accepting God's gift. The first generation sees Hashem bring a series of plagues to Egypt and save B'Nai Yisrael from the effects. They see God free them from slavery to Paro, split the Sea of Reeds for them, and then destroy the Egyptian horses, chariots, and army. The people understand God's power. When Hashem brings manna from the sky six nights a week and quail when they want meat, the people should understand that Hashem loves them and takes care of them, even when they cannot not see Him in action.

Standing by Jericho thirty-eight years earlier, after sending ten of the greatest men of their generation to visit the land, the Meraglim have a majority and a minority report. Calev and Yehoshua both say that Hashem will fight for us and enable us to defeat the Canaanite tribes, as He defeats other nations during their years in the Midbar. However, the other eight meraglim exaggerate the dangers and scare the people. Rather than accepting Hashem's loving gift of a very special land, the people choose to go back to Egypt, where they had loved the variety of food and felt safe, even as slaves. The adults at the time of the Exodus all die in the desert, and only their children "who do not know good and evil" (accept that Hashem sets the rules) will enter the land. Near the end of his life, Moshe realizes that he did not adequately prepare the first generation to realize Hashem's love – and that failing is why he could not enter the land.

With Tisha B'Av, Rabbi Yehoshua Singer reminds us that we do not mourn the past. Rather, we mourn that we still do not have a Temple Mount and a Beit HaMikdash, and we still cannot bring back the system of korbanot. Hashem shows His mercy by limiting the destruction to inanimate items (the

Temple and vessels) and keeping alive enough of our people for them to do teshuvah so later B'Nai Yisrael can return to Israel and Jerusalem. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, observes that Judaism is a religion of both love and justice. Tzedek is a combination of justice and compassion. To merit the most from Hashem, we must focus on justice and compassion. Tisha B'Av reminds us that sinat chinam, senseless hatred, is the primary reason for the destruction of the Temple. The more we can focus our lives on justice, compassion, and active works to make the world a better place for widows, orphans, and immigrants – the most disadvantaged members of our society – the sooner we shall be worthy of rebuilding the Temple. May this time come speedily, hopefully in our lifetimes.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan Fisher

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

from: OU Israel <tt@ouisrael.org> reply-to: tt@ouisrael.org date: Aug 8, 2024, 12:17 PM subject: Torah Tidbits - Parshat Devarim - Issue 1575

From the Desk of **Rabbi Moshe Hauer** Ou Executive Vice President

Anchoring Our Future in Our Past

The Jewish People's future must be based firmly on a deep respect for our past, on the tradition of values that have characterized our people since Avraham and Sarah and since we stood as a nation at Sinai. This point is underscored every year, on the Shabbos before Tisha b'Av, when we read about the sin of the spies, the story of the original Tisha b'Av that undermined our permanent connection to Eretz Yisrael. As told in the Parshat Devarim version, the story began on the initiative of the Jewish people, and from the very first words of that account, the dye is cast and our critical failFor more info see <http://> is highlighted (Devarim 1:22): "Then all of you approached me and said, "Let us send agents ahead to explore the land for us...."

Rashi notes the contrast between the approach as described here – a low point for the Jewish people – in contrast to a description we will read next week that describes the Jewish people in a far better place, at the feet of Har Sinai. Here it describes "all of you" approaching, in a disorganized crowd, in conFor more info see <http://> to what it describes there (Devarim 5:20): "You approached me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders." As Rashi explains, based on the Sifrei: "That approach to me was a fitting one — young people showing respect to their elders, letting these precede them, and the elders showing respect to the heads of the tribes that should precede them. Here, however, you approached me in a crowd, the young pushing aside their elders, the elders pushing aside the heads."

At the core of our failure in initiating the mission of the spies was our lack of respect for the continuity of values within Klal Yisrael, reflected in the absence of genuine deference to our parents and leaders and their values. Honoring parents is not only an expression of gratitude and decency; it serves as the foundation of our Mesorah, the tradition of both our knowledge and values. It is when we abandon that genuine respect that we lose our connection to that which anchors us, to the morasha kehillat Yaakov, the ultimate heritage of our nation, the Torah given to us at Sinai. Along with that, we similarly undermine the other element referred to as our mora-sha, our connection to our homeland,

Eretz Yisrael. Ramban makes this clear in his commentary to the original version of the story of the spies (Bamidbar 14:17): "Moshe did not pray [for mercy] here based on the merit of the patriarchs, and [therefore] he did not mention Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov at all in this prayer. The reason [for not mentioning them] was because the Land was given to the patriarchs, and it is from them that they were to inherit it, but they rebelled

against their ancestors, and did not want the gift which the patriarchs desired very much, so how could he say now, "Remember AvraFor more info see <http://>am, Yitzchak, and Yisrael, Thy servants, to whom You did swear by Your own self, ... and all this Land that I have spoken of will I give to your seed, (Shemos 32:13), since they were saying: "We do not want this gift!"

During this month of "Av", we need to reset our own values such that they affirm and reflect that which was cherished and valued by our "Avos", reestablishing in both heart and mind our firm bond with our twin legacies of Torah and Eretz Yisrael.

from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org> date: Aug 8, 2024, 3:43 AM subject: **Rav Kook on Tisha B'Av**: Seeing Jerusalem in its Joy

Tisha B'Av: Seeing Jerusalem in its Joy

The Sages taught in Ta'anit 30b:

כָּל הַמֵּתְאַבֵּל עַל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם — זֹכֶה וְרוֹצֵה בְּשִׂמְחָתָהּ (תענית ל:)

"All who mourn the destruction of Jerusalem will merit to see it in its joy."

At first glance, this statement seems peculiar. Why did the Sages say that those who mourn Jerusalem's destruction will merit seeing it be-simchata - "in its joy"? Would it not be more logical to say that they will merit seeing Jerusalem be-vinyana — when the city will be restored and rebuilt? After all, our primary hope and prayer is for the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Rav Kook offered an insightful interpretation for this statement. The Sages knew that a time would come when Jerusalem would be rebuilt, and everyone alive at that time would witness its physical reconstruction. This includes even those who did not mourn for Jerusalem's destruction.

The Sages chose their words with great precision. Indeed, many will witness the rebuilding of Jerusalem. But only those who were grieved by Jerusalem's destruction will merit to behold the city "in joy." Only those who mourned its desolation will experience the profound joy and simchah as Jerusalem is restored to its former splendor.

Rejoicing in Jewish Independence

In the exhilarating days following the 1920 San Remo conference, when the League of Nations adopted the Balfour Declaration, Rav Kook remarked:

"There are some Jews for whom international recognition of the Jewish people's right to its land fails to inspire joy. This is because the primary focus of their mourning is the spiritual destruction of Jerusalem and Eretz Yisrael. The bitter humiliation of the Land of Israel being subjected to foreign rule does not trouble them.

But for those who always felt a deep sorrow, not only for the destruction of Jerusalem and the desolation of the Land, but also for the lack of Jewish sovereignty in our homeland... the international declaration that the Land of Israel must return to the people of Israel is a source of great joy. These individuals merit 'to see Jerusalem in its joy.'"

Repairing the Baseless Weeping Rav Kook's dictum for the month of Av also speaks of our joy in witnessing the initial steps of redemption:

גִּילַת עַם בְּשִׁבְיָי אֹר יְשׁוּעָה תְּקוּמָם אֲשֶׁר הָרְסָה בְּכֵי: שֶׁל הַצָּם

"The people's joy in sparks of redemption will rebuild what was destroyed by baseless weeping."

The term "baseless weeping" (bechayah shel chinam) refers to the episode in which the spies sent by Moses spoke against the Land of Israel, causing the people to despair and weep without cause. This sin requires a profound correction. How do we rectify their cries of despair?

Rav Kook explained that the repair, the tikkun, for this sin is through teshuvat ha-mishkal — a repentance that counterbalances the initial wrongdoing. To counteract the baseless weeping, we must respond with a tangible and enthusiastic joy as the Land of Israel is rebuilt, stone by stone. We need not wait until the final stages of redemption to experience this profound sense of excitement. Even if the redemption is only partial - even if we only witness "sparks of redemption" - we should still feel immense joy. We should actively work toward hastening the process of redemption with all our strength.

As Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi wrote at the end of his classic work, *The Kuzari*: “Jerusalem will be rebuilt when the Jewish people yearn for it with the deepest longing, so that they cherish even her stones and dust.” (Adapted from *Mo'adei HaRe'iyah*, pp. 567-568)

from: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com> date: Aug 6, 2024, 11:02 AM subject: Torah Musings Daily Digest for 08/06/2024

The Sick Fasting on Tisha B'av

by **R. Daniel Mann**

Question: How sick does one need to be to be exempt from fasting on Tisha B'av? What food limitations, if any, does he have?

Answer: The closest gemara on the subject says that pregnant and nursing women are required to fast on Tisha B'av (Pesachim 54b). Rishonim posit that this is because they are considered healthy, but that a woman within thirty days after childbirth and a person who is sick with a not-expected-to-be dangerous illness need not fast (see Ran, Ta'anit 10a of Rif's pages; Beit Yosef, Orach Chayim 554). Although such people must fast on Yom Kippur (see details in Shulchan Aruch, OC 617:4), Tisha B'av is different because it is not a Torah-level prohibition. Even though the non-dangerously sick may not eat a Rabbinically forbidden food (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 123:2), the Rabbis built into the institution of the fast of Tisha B'av that it does not apply to clearly sick/weak people (Ran, *ibid.*; Shulchan Aruch, OC 554:6).

How do we define sick in this regard? The leading definition regarding Shabbat leniencies is *nafal l'mishkav* – needing to spend serious time in bed (Shulchan Aruch, OC 328:17). That phrase is not found in the poskim here (see Aruch Hashulchan, OC 554:7). Significant fever certainly qualifies, as well as conditions that fasting complicates (see *Ohr L'tzion* III, 29:(5)). Generally, a situation that prevents the average person from going to work is included. Remember, our sick person is equivalent to a woman in the first month after birth (the differences are that she can feel perfectly wonderful, but her body is known to have gone through a major trauma). Rav M. Feinstein (*Igrot Moshe*, OC IV:114) says that one who is fasting particularly poorly counts as sick. It is very difficult to know where to draw the line on that (consider that fasting is usually difficult for pregnant and nursing mothers).

Regarding a woman after childbirth, the Rama (OC 554:6) says that despite the halachic exemption, the minhag is to fast (see *Chayei Adam* II, 135:2; *Mishna Berura* 554:13). Regarding a sick person, stringency is less encouraged (*ibid.* and *ibid.*:16).

To what extent do we say the fast does not exist, as opposed to the situation of a dangerously sick person on Yom Kippur, to whom the fast exists but is compromised as needed (Shulchan Aruch, OC 618:7)? The Shulchan Aruch (OC 554:6) says it was not instituted for them – apparently, at all. Therefore, several poskim said that there is no need to limit eating (Kaf Hachayim, OC 554:31; *Avnei Nezer*, OC 540; *Shevet Halevi* IV:56).

It is also possible to say that a sick person should try to limit the amount of eating on Tisha B'av, but the specific size/time formula (*shiurim*) we find regarding Yom Kippur (see Shulchan Aruch, OC 618:8) is irrelevant. The Aruch Hashulchan (OC 554:7) implies that *shiurim* are significant only concerning Torah-law prohibitions. There, they are important for the Torah punishment, which does not apply to Rabbinic prohibitions like eating on Tisha B'av. This is not obvious because the gemara (Yoma 79a) bases the amounts for Yom Kippur on their effect on the experience of fasting, which can apply to Tisha B'av as well.

The difference between the approaches to why not to require *shiurim* is regarding other means of limiting the eating. The *Chayei Adam* (*ibid.*) says that one should try to fast part of the day (see Yoma 82a in regard to the partial fasting of children under *bar/bat mitzva*). Some explain that the delaying or minimizing of the eating does not indicate a partial existence of the fast per se, but is based on the idea of wanting to share with the general pain that everyone is experiencing (see *Chut Shani* III:93). There may be a distinction between someone who starts the day fully sick and someone who we do not want to fast because it likely will make him sick, in which case he should wait until it is necessary (see *Dirshu* 554:26).

לעילוי נשמת יואל אפרים בן אברהם עזריאל זלצמן ז"ל

from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>
subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

איכה אשא לבדי טרחם ומשאם וריבם

Eichah, how can I alone bear your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels. (1:12)

Chazal (Eichah Rabbah 1:1) observe that three leaders prophesized using the word *eichah*, how: Moshe Rabbeinu, Yeshayahu, and Yirmiyahu. Moshe said, *Eichah essa levadi?* “How can I alone bear?” Yeshayahu said, *Eichah haysah l'zonah kiryah ne'emanah?* “How has the faithful city become a harlot?” (Yeshayahu 1:21). Yirmiyahu said, *Eichah yashvah vadad?* “How she sits alone” (Eichah 1:1). This, say Chazal, may be compared to a woman who had three guests: one she saw when she was successful; the other when she was failing; and, the third, following her downfall. According to the Midrash, the three *eichah*'s represent a timeline of Jewish history. Moshe's complaint addresses the nation's refusal to accept the judgment the *bais din* issued, and the machinations they resorted to in an attempt to subvert the judicial system. The later *Neviim*, Yeshayahu and Yirmiyahu, also rendered their complaints with the word, *eichah*. The obvious question is how three distinct complaints, which addresses three distinct periods of the continuum of Jewish history, all begin with the same word. Words are significant, and the Hebrew lexicon is exact; nothing is arbitrary. Imagine if a speaker would render the same speech at three different venues: a wedding; a school function; and a funeral. Unless a common thread winds through them, he will appear inappropriate.

Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita, observes that the Jewish People possess a *middah*, character trait, that can work to their benefit and elevate them to unparalleled greatness. This *middah*, if misapplied, can also lead to their detriment and plummeting to serious impairment. He quotes Maharal, who posits that the *neshamah*, soul, is the dominant factor in the nature of a Jew. He uses the example of *am k'shei ofref*, a stiff-necked people, which is not one of our finer qualities. From a practical point of view, we refuse to accept criticism and reproof. We are always right. Here our spiritual side comes into play. Something material can be altered and manipulated. Something spiritual defies alteration. Thus, the Jew is change-resistant. We will do what we want, regardless of the opinion and advice of others. Furthermore, when one is stubborn and unbending, he must have his way, regardless of who stands in his way. He will just aggressively push his way through.

The Rosh Yeshivah explains that the Jewish People are all *bnei melachim*, royalty, princes. The spiritual royalty from which we descend has imbued us with a profound regality, which manifests itself in our disdain of being subjugated in any manner, to the point that it is not unnatural for us to resist authority or be bound by someone's views. They do what they feel is correct and proper. (Truthfully, the Torah decides this for us. We follow its dictates, regardless whether or not it conforms to popular opinion).

The Maharal had a Christian acquaintance who asked why Jews have strong opinions – often not agreeing even with their own co-religionists. The fact that ideological differences exist which give voice to varied approaches to religious service did not elude him. This fellow, who was a pastor, boasted, “My congregants accept anything I say. The mere fact that they fall in line whenever I issue an injunction is proof positive that the Christian faith is the emblem of Divine truth.”

The Maharal countered with an analogy. A flock of sheep will obsequiously accept a leader and adhere to his instructions with blind faith. This is due to their being simple-minded animals with no hint of a regal bearing. Not so the lion. A pack of lions will superficially appear to be in disarray, its members each independent of one another. They roam where they want, staking out their own individual territory at will. To the casual observer, they appear to be weak, but what resembles weakness actually bespeaks their strength.

Am Yisrael may be compared to a pack of lions, with their differences and obstinacy against bending to authority (with which they do not agree) finding its roots in our regal lineage – *bnei Avraham*, *Yitzchak* and *Yaakov*. Our Patriarchs did not bend, neither will we. This is but one of our strengths.

This, explains the Rosh Yeshivah, is the underlying message of the word *eichah* that weaves its way through the three prophecies. They each focused on Klal Yisrael's regal-centered strength which they demonstrated in three disparate venues. Moshe underscored the nation's stubbornness with regard to acquiescing to the judgment issued by the *bais din*. Here the refusal to be swayed by another person (albeit greater in knowledge and wisdom) can be both beneficial and detrimental. On the one hand, it motivates one to plumb the depths of the halachic question to see what his own cognitive ability can unfold. Nonetheless, if this obstinacy is overused, it can be self-destructive. Even the most logical argument requires the correct time for its presentation. In other words, one must know when to agree and when to dissent. This demands *seichel*, common sense, which is at a premium. When the *Neviim* Yeshayahu and Yirmiyahu admonished the people, pointing out their faults and issuing warning concerning the impending punishment which would be visited upon them if they did not alter their ways, they stubbornly refused to listen. Hence *eichah* – bemoaned by Yeshayahu and later by Yirmiyahu – expressed the Jewish People's obstinacy. There is a time and place for everything. If one is unable – or refuses – to accept and decipher this reality, he will be forced to accept *eichah*.

The regal nature of the yehudi is derived from a Divinely implanted spiritual power source called the neshamah. The Yiddishe neshamah, soul, is an infinitesimal component of the Divine which transforms us from mere flesh and blood into a creation with unimaginable spiritual potential. The neshamah is our essence; sadly, some of us cover it with so much dross that it is difficult for it to shine through. But it exists, and wherever a “break” in the murky clouds that conceal it occurs, it springs forth and empowers the person, so that he finds it hard to believe it is the same person that previously had been acting in the most spiritually contemptible manner. Apparently, a spark breaks through the dross, and the intrinsic regality of the neshamah bursts forth.

Consider the following incident. In Auschwitz, in 1944, “dinnertime” consisted of non-kosher meat. The Nazi fiends not only wanted to destroy our bodies, but also whatever semblance of spiritual dignity we might possess. One Jew emphatically refused to eat dinner. He would not touch the treif meat. It was not as if the Nazi commandant cared if the Jew starved to death; he just could not tolerate him practicing his religious beliefs. He immediately walked over, lifted his truncheon, and said, “Eat!” The Jew said, “No!” This was too much for the Nazi to swallow. No observant Jew was going to refuse his direct order. He was, however, mistaken. This Jew was as secular as could be. His entire life he had eaten non-kosher meat as part of his anti-religious lifestyle. Yet now he would not budge. He knew that he was relinquishing his life to die a painful death by refusing to do now what had been natural for him. The Nazi took his truncheon and beat the Jew within an inch of his life – but he did not eat the meat. When asked later what prompted him to act in complete opposite of his past life, he said, “I just realized the severity of eating non-kosher food.” What transpired within this man? His royal essence burst forth. A spark of inspiration penetrated years of apathy and self-loathing. In one spiritual moment, he had returned home – to the palace of the King.

from: Michal Horowitz <contact@michalhorowitz.com> date: Aug 8, 2024, 11:01 AM subject: [New post] Tisha b'Av 5784 Tisha b'Av 5784 By Michal Horowitz on Aug 08, 2024 08:01 am

Av 5784. The month of our mourning for churban Batei Mikdash (the destruction of both Temples, Bayis I by the Babylonians, and Bayis II by the Romans), the exile of Tzion and Yerushalayim, and all our travails that have befallen us in exile since that bitter day when the 2nd Temple was destroyed almost 2,000 years ago.

– ככל תבכה בלילה, ודמעתה על לחנה – אין לה מנחם. מכל-אהבית: כל-רציה בגדו בה, היא לה לאיבם – She surely weeps in the night, and her tears are on her cheek; she has no one to comfort her among all her lovers; all her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies (Eichah 1:2); דרכי ציון אבולות מבלי בוא מועד כל-ששעריה שוממין כהנה אצנתם – The roads of Tzion are in mourning because no one comes at the appointed (festival) times; all her gates are desolate, her kohanim groan; her virgin daughters grieve while she herself suffers bitterly (1:4); שיללה הלכו שכי לפניו, her young children went into captivity before the enemy (1:5).

The day I pen these words, Yom Sheni, Rosh Chodesh Av 5784 (Monday, August 5, 2024), is the fifth birthday of Ariel Bibas, who was brutally kidnapped on Oct. 7, along with his mother, Shir, father, Yarden, and baby brother, Kfir. In honor of his 5th birthday, his paternal grandmother (his maternal grandparents were murdered on Oct. 7, HY”D) wrote her grandson a birthday letter.

My dear Luli, Happy birthday to my first grandchild. You’re five years old! Five years... Do you even know that this big day is approaching? Can you feel our longing, the immense love that fills our hearts? Over nine months have passed since you were taken from us by bad people. Nine months of tears, prayers, and unwavering hope. The world around us continues to turn, but time seems to have frozen without you. You’ve grown a year older, but there’s no celebration. The kumquat tree you love so much has blossomed again, its branches filled with tiny orange fruits. I see them and remember your small hands, eager to pick and taste them. The loquat tree near your home has also borne fruit, orange ones, and I can imagine you running to your mum, so proud of what you’ve picked.

When I read a story to your cousin Toto, my eyes search for you. As if looking hard enough would find you sitting beside her, listening intently and smiling your shy, sweet smile. My heart skips a beat every time I remember how much you’re missed. I try to imagine the moment you’ll return to us. Will you still call me ‘Grandma Nini’? Will you still want to play ‘piggyback’? I can almost hear your laughter as you splash water on me while we water the plants in the garden. Luli, so much has changed in the last year. Instead of celebrating all the new things you’ve learned, we’re dealing with an absence – of you, of your mum and dad, and of little Fir Fir. We’re also in the shadow of a terrible loss. Grandpa Yossi and Grandma Margit are no longer with us, and how will you react when you learn this news?

But we never stop hoping. Every day I dream of the moment we’ll be together again. I imagine the excitement, the tears, the hugs. I see you shouting ‘Grandma Nini!’ and little Kfir, who might not remember me anymore, smiling at me with a big grin. My dear Luli, you’re so close yet so far away. I pray that soon we’ll receive the greatest gift – to hug you and the whole family again. I’m waiting for this dream to

become reality. Until then, Luli, know that you are loved, that we think of you every moment. And one day, we’ll celebrate all the birthdays we’ve missed, together. Love, Pnini (<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13708125/Grandmother-Ariel-Bibas-held-captive-Gaza-Hamas-pens-poignant-letter-grandson-fifth-birthday.html>) Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav zt”l, teaches that “There is aveilus chadasha (‘new mourning’) and aveilus yeshana (‘old mourning’, for churban Tzion). We all know the aphorism, ha’avar ayin, v’ha’asid adayin, v’ha’hoveh ke’heref ayin...However, in my opinion, this is wrong. The past is not gone; it is still here. The future is not only anticipated, it is already here, and the present connects the future and the past. This is what is meant by a unitive time consciousness. “Tisha b’Av, the 9th of Av, would be a ludicrous institution if we did not have the unitive time consciousness. We say in the Kinnos, ‘On this night, b’layl ha’zeh, my Temple was destroyed.’ This night means a night nineteen hundred years ago; b’layl zeh means tonight. Apparently, that night nineteen hundred years ago is neither remote nor distant from us; it is living – as vibrant a reality as this fleeting moment in the present. The unitive time consciousness contains an element of eternity. There is neither past nor future nor present. All three dimensions of time merge into one experience, into one awareness. Man, heading in a panicky rush toward the future, finds himself in the embrace of the past. Bygones turn into facts, pale memories into living experiences and archaeological history into a vibrant reality. “Of course, historical mourning is based upon this unitive time consciousness.

Without that experiential memory it would be ridiculous to speak of mourning due to an event which lies in antiquity” (Out of the Whirlwind, p.17).

For Klal Yisrael, our destiny is one where past, present and future all merge together into one continuous stream of time, and experience. Tisha b’Av is a day of mourning for destruction; but not only of ancient destruction, of days long gone and time epochs long past. The mourning of Tisha b’Av is an aveilut into which is enmeshed all of our mourning, our staggering losses, and the entirety of the bitterness of exile, from ‘yamim ha’hem’, those days, to ‘b’zman ha’zeh’, our times.

Says the Rav, “Kalir also notes in the kinnos that the desire to kill children is more pronounced than the desire to kill adults. They first killed the children and then the intellectuals. Intellectuals they killed not only among the Jews, but among all the nations. But killing the children was a special privilege bestowed upon the Jewish people alone. There was a psychopathic desire to kill the children. From the view of the psychopath, this kind of killing is more satisfying to his psychopathic urge because in the children they see the future of the people, and they want to destroy the future. Once you kill the children, there is no future.

“This was also the case during the Holocaust. The children were taken away immediately, even before the ghettos were liquidated. By the time the adults were sent off to Treblinka, Auschwitz and Buchenwald, there were not many children left. The children were already exterminated by the time they started to liquidate the middle-aged and the elderly people” (The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways, p.294-295). Tisha b’Av is a day of mourning for events of past and present, for aveilus yeshanah and aveilus chadasha, for the burning of the BHM”K and the burning of Kfar Aza and Nir Oz, for the blood-thirsty enemy of old, and the one of new, for the German Jewish communities of Speyer, Mainz and Worms, annihilated during the first Crusade one thousand years ago, and for the innocent blood spilled in Be’eri and Sderot on Simchas Torah 5784.

“Our historical mourning is based upon this unitive time consciousness.”

From the Egyptian enslavement – תאכר תשליכיהו – כל-הבן הילוד, every baby boy that is born, he shall be cast into the river (Shemos 1:22);

To Yirmiyahu’s lament – אֲנִי בֹכֶה עֵינַי וְרֹדֶה מַיִם כִּי-רִדְתָּק מִמֶּנִּי מִנְחָם מִשִּׁיב נִפְשִׁי – Over these I cry; my eye, my eye, runs with tears, for the comforter to restore my soul is far from me; my children are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed (Eichah 1:16).

From evil Haman and wicked Achashvairosh – בל-היהודים מער – to destroy, kill and obliterate all the Jews, from youth to elderly, from small children to women, on one day (Esther 3:13);

To the suffering exiles upon the River Babylon – By the rivers of Bavel, there we sat and there we wept, as we remembered Tzion; On the willows in her midst, we hung our harps; For there our captors asked us for words of song and our tormentors [asked of us] mirth, “Sing for us of the song of Zion”; אֵל אֲדַמְתָּ נָר, how can we sing the song of Hashem on foreign soil? אִם-אֶשְׁכַּח תְּשַׁכַּח מִיָּנִי – if I forget thee O J’lem, let my right hand be forgotten, may my tongue cleave to its palate if I do not remember thee, if I do not raise J’lem at the head of my rejoicing (Tehilim 137:1-5).

May we merit the immediate redemption, peace in our Land, and the building of the third BHM”K in our day and in our time, when G-d will have mercy on His nation and His Land.

בברכת מנחם ציון ובונה ירושלים

Parshas Devarim: Moshe Becomes "Moshe Rabbenu"

by Rabbi Yitz Etshalom

I. INTRODUCTION

Sefer D'varim is divided into three sections (just like Bamidbar – see our Siyyum on Sefer Bamidbar):

A) Historical Recounting (Chapters 1-11)

B) Mitzvot (Chapters 12-26)

C) Covenant Ceremonies (27-33)

(Chapter 34, describing Moshe's death, is a topic for a separate discussion)

Although we will focus our discussion on a few of the elements mentioned in the historical recitation/recounting (specifically those mentioned in the first three chapters; i.e. Parashat D'varim), we will also suggest, in broad strokes, some overarching themes of the entire Sefer – along with its purpose.

II. WHY ARE JUDGES MENTIONED HERE?

Near the beginning of our Parashah (1:13-17), Mosheh recounts the story of his delegating judges to handle the many complaints and disputes among the people.

[There is an anomaly in our practice worth pointing out here: When we read the Torah on Shabbat afternoon and on Monday and Thursday mornings, the general custom is to read the first "Aliyah" of the upcoming Shabbat morning Parashah. Only when that first Aliyah is too short to make three Aliyot (less than 10 verses), such as Parashat Nitzavim, or when it is too long (e.g. Ki Tissa), do we do otherwise.

During the week leading up to Shabbat Parashat D'varim, we read the first 11 verses, ending just before the verse which starts with the word Eikhah. These 11 verses are divided into 3 "mini"-Aliyot. On Shabbat morning, however, we end the first Aliyah after verse 10. This is done so that we don't begin the next Aliyah with the word Eikhah; which, even though it doesn't necessarily have a "tragic" implication here, carries the saddest associations for us – it is the banner word of Yirmiyah's book of dirges, known as Eikhah or "Lamentations". Since Parashat D'varim is always read on the Shabbat just prior to Tish'ah b'Av, we don't want to begin an Aliyah with a word that has such sad and immediate associations – so we begin the Aliyah one verse "early".]

After reminding the people that he had told them (almost 40 years ago) that they have become numerous and blessed by God – and blessing them that God should increase their numbers a thousand-fold – he notes that this burden was too much for him to bear. In response, he approached them, as follows:

Choose for each of your tribes Anashim (men) who are wise, discerning, and reputable to be your leaders." You answered me, "Tov haDavar Asher Dibarta la'Asot (The plan you have proposed is a good one)." So I took the leaders of your tribes, wise and reputable Anashim, and installed them as leaders over you, commanders of thousands, commanders of hundreds, commanders of fifties, commanders of tens, and officials, throughout your tribes. I charged your judges at that time: "Give the members of your community a fair hearing, and judge rightly between one person and another, whether citizen or resident alien. You must not be partial in judging: hear out the small and the great alike; you shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's. Any case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it." (1:14-17)

[Note that this story seems to be a blending of two distinct events: Yitro's advice to Mosheh to delegate judicial responsibility (Sh'mot 18:19-26) and Mosheh's complaint to God that the burden of the people is too great to bear (Bamidbar 11:11-15). In addition to the "blurring", Yitro's role is omitted here. Addressing this "slant" in historic retelling is beyond the scope of this shiur and will be dealt with in a future shiur.]

This narrative raises (at least) two questions:

A) Why is the mention of the delegation of judicial responsibility worthy of mention right at the beginning of Mosheh's

historical recounting? Wouldn't it have been more reasonable to mention the Exodus, the Stand at Sinai or the Construction of the Mishkan at this point?

B) Why is Mosheh sharing his charge to the judges with the people? ("I charged your judges...")

The same question may be asked in reference to a later verse in our Parashah:

Even with me Hashem was angry on your account, saying, "You also shall not enter there. Yehoshua bin Nun, your assistant, shall enter there; Oto Hazek (give him strength/encourage him), for he is the one who will secure Israel's possession of it." (1:37-38)

Why is Mosheh sharing God's "personal" charge (to him regarding Yehoshua) with the people?

III. THE FIRST ANSWER: PROPER VS. IMPROPER LEADERSHIP

I would like to suggest an answer which will only satisfy our first problem – the very mention of the judges. It is predicated upon a methodological approach which we regularly utilize. The Torah will often use common language to create an association between two narratives (or areas of Halakhah). The result may be a newly discovered similarity (such as we found in our Siyyum on Sefer Bamidbar) – or a deliberate contrast (such as the Bil'am-Avraham association, mentioned in this year's shiur on Parashat Balak).

We begin with an assumption that is fairly safe – that Mosheh was going to mention the story of the scouts (M'raglim) in this historic recitation. This is a safe assumption because that one event (solely, if not chiefly) is what caused the present situation – only now were we prepared to enter the Land, instead of having been there for nearly 39 years. That being the case, Mosheh may be telling us about the judges in order to draw an "inverted parallel" with the disaster of the M'raglim. Note how he describes the genesis of the mission of the scouts (again, this telling is different than that in Parashat Sh'lach – see the note above):

I said to you, "You have reached the hill country of the Amorites, which Hashem our God is giving us. See, Hashem your God has given the land to you; go up, take possession, as Hashem, the God of your ancestors, has promised you; do not fear or be dismayed." All of you came to me and said, "Let us send Anashim ahead of us to explore the land for us and bring back a report to us regarding the route by which we should go up and the cities we will come to." vayi'Av b'Einei haDavar (The plan seemed good to me), and I took from you twelve Anashim, one from each tribe. (1:20-23)

The association with the "judges" narrative is clear – the common Anashim is one connection, as well as the reaction (Mosheh's in one case, the people's in the other) – which includes the phrase Tov haDavar (albeit with some grammatical variation). Now that we see the association of these two stories, we can immediately spot the difference, as per this chart:

JUDGES – SCOUTS

Whose Idea? – Mosheh – The People

Who Approved? – The People – Mosheh

Who Selected the Anashim? – Mosheh – The People

As we can see, the M'raglim incident, which led to a disaster of great proportions, was handled in the opposite manner of the appointment of judges (which was, from everything we know, a successful process). This teaches us a valuable lesson about leadership – one which was indispensable advice to the people as they were about to enter the Land and come under new leadership (Yehoshua).

Ideally, the leader actually leads – he inspires the people and directs them. Nevertheless, he cannot act without their approval and support – hence, even though Mosheh suggested the idea of the judges, the people's approval was a necessary step in the success of this venture. Afterwards, however, it was Mosheh who selected the right people for the job.

When the opposite direction is taken, disaster is inevitable and imminent. In the story of the scouts, the people made the demand and Mosheh approved (but we get the sense that it was more of a "rubber stamp", realizing that the people would

rebel if he didn't give in) – and then the people selected their representatives for the mission. (Look carefully at the difference between the beginning of v. 15 and the beginning of the second half of v. 23 – it will only be clear if you look in the Hebrew).

In other words, **by telling us the story about the judges (in apposition to the scouts), Mosheh is teaching us about leadership. The leaders must be the ones who direct, with the support and approval (referendum) of the people – and they must execute their decisions. If, on the other hand, the people are leading the leader, who has no choice but to approve and leave the execution up to them – disaster is the assured result.**

Valuable as this lesson is, we are still “stuck” with the second question – why Mosheh shared his charge to the judges (and God's charge to him regarding Yehoshua) in this recounting.

In order to answer this, we need to ask a more general question about the first 11 chapters of D'varim.

IV. WHY THE HISTORICAL RECOUNTING?

As we noted, the first 11 chapters are devoted to a historical recounting of some of the events of the past 40 years – with a focus on the Stand at Sinai. This recounting is interspersed with Mussar – rebuke and warnings about the potential for “backsliding” waiting for the B'nei Yisra'el in the Land.

Why did Mosheh engage in this recounting? Didn't the people already know what they had gone through?

The first answer which comes to mind – and which is valid – is that indeed this group had not experienced these events. Keep in mind that the generation which had left Egypt, stood at Sinai and constructed the Mishkan (and rejected the Land) had died out in the desert and Mosheh was addressing the next generation. This explains the recounting – but not the style of that recounting. If we look through the entire recitation, we note that it is entirely presented in the second person:

“All of you came to me...and I took from you twelve Anashim...” and so on. See, especially, the following citation: But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children, how you once stood before Hashem your God at Horeb, when Hashem said to me, “Assemble the people for me, and I will let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me as long as they live on the earth, and may teach their children so”; (D'varim 4:9-10)

The entire stand at Sinai is presented to this generation as if they were there!

This strange (and technically inaccurate) recitation surely demands more explanation.

V. SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS – AND ONE MORE

In summary, we have the following questions with which to contend:

- * Why did Mosheh mention the “judges” at the beginning of this historical recitation?
- * Why did Mosheh share his charge to the judges with the B'nei Yisra'el?
- * (Likewise) why did Mosheh share God's charge to him regarding Yehoshua with the B'nei Yisra'el?
- * What is the purpose of this recitation, in which Mosheh recounts all of the events that happened to his audience's parents – but presents it in the second person, without mentioning the previous generation?
- * What is the purpose of Sefer D'varim?

Before addressing these, we need a quick brush-up on the notion of “themes” within each Sefer of the Humash.

VI. THEME OF SEFER D'VARIM

As we discussed in our introductory shiur to Sefer Bamidbar, each of the five Humashim of the Torah reflect our

relationship with God through a different vehicle. Here is the relevant “clip” from that shiur (with some editing):

FIVE UNIQUE BOOKS

Unlike the division into chapters, which is a foreign “overlay” onto the Torah (generally credited to Stephen Langton, an English churchman, who created this division in 1205 CE), the division into five books is inherent in the text itself. Not only does every Sefer Torah contain four blank lines between each Sefer, but each begins and ends in a style that is appropriate for a beginning or ending (as the case may be); case in point is the end of Vayyikra, the beginning of D’varim etc.

Each of these books reflects our relationship with haKadosh Barukh Hu through a different perspective:

B’RESHEET: THE PEOPLE AND THE LAND

In his first comment on the Torah, Rashi asks the famous question in the name of R. Yitzchak : Why did the Torah begin with the story of Creation – it should have begun with the first Mitzvah given to the Jewish people? His answer gives us an insight into the nature of the entire book of B’resheet: By committing the Creation to writing, our “deed” to Eretz Yisra’el becomes affirmed. In the future (!), when the nations of the world will come to dispute our claim on Eretz Yisra’el, we will show them that the Land is not theirs – nor is it ours. The Land belongs to God (as demonstrated in the Creation narrative); He gave it to whom He favored and then took it from them to give it to us. B’resheet is the only book of the Torah which takes place in the Land; it is the description of our well-anchored past there and the development of the covenant with the Patriarchs which gives us title to the Land. The final statement of this book is Yoseph’s reminder to his brothers that one day, God will remember them and take them out of this land to bring them back to the land that He promised to the Avot. In summary, B’resheet is a description of our relationship with the Almighty through Eretz Yisra’el.

SH’MOT: THE PARADIGM OF JEWISH HISTORY

As we see through the rest of T’nakh – and in literature and liturgy until this day – all of Jewish history is viewed through the prism of the Egypt-Sinai- experience, known broadly as Y’tziat Mitzrayim. Whether the focus is on the oppression of slavery, the miracles of salvation, the Song of thanksgiving, the faithfulness of the desert experience, the stand at Sinai or the intimacy with the Divine realized in the Mishkan, the events of Sefer Sh’mot serve as the all-encompassing paradigm for Jewish history. In summary, Sh’mot is a description of our relationship with God through history.

VAYYIKRA: THE MISHKAN-RELATIONSHIP

As is easily evidenced, the entire focus of the book of Vayyikra is our relationship to God as it is realized through the vehicle of the Mishkan. Here, unlike in Sh’mot, the Mishkan is not an end in and of itself, rather it is that place of offering Korbanot, coming close to God – with all of the attendant restrictions and considerations. Vayyikra is, indeed, a description of our relationship with God through the Beit haMikdash/Mishkan.

BAMIDBAR: THE BOOK OF K’LAL YISRA’EL

Bamidbar is the description of our relationship with the Ribbono shel Olam through K’lal Yisra’el – the interactions of the Jewish people. That is why there is so much emphasis on our numbers (two full censuses), the placement of each tribe, the division of the Land – and the numbers lost through the plague at P’or. This also explains the inclusion of the interactions between the tribal leaders and Mosheh Rabbenu (especially at the end of the Sefer), and the dramatic challenges to Mosheh’s leadership.

D’VARIM: “ASEH L’KHA RAV”

Unlike the first four books, Sefer D’varim is not said in God’s “voice”; the voice of this book is Mosheh’s. God is presented in the “third person”.. From the introductory line: “These are the words that Mosheh spoke...” to the finale, the eulogy for Mosheh, D’varim is a book in which our Master and Teacher, Mosheh Rabbenu, takes center stage. D’varim is a description of our relationship with God through a Rebbe – through our association with tradition via our teachers.

VII. THE JOB OF A REBBI: THE PERSONIFICATION OF MESORAH

The job of Sefer D’varim can best be understood through this light.

The original Divine plan was to take the B'nei Yisra'el out of Egypt and to bring them directly into Eretz Yisra'el. In other words, the generation of the Exodus (Dor Yotz'ei Mitzrayim) would be the same as the generation of the Conquest (Dor Ba'ei ha'Aretz). As a result of the tragedy of the M'raglim, this plan was subverted and these two events, Exodus and Conquest, were "spread" between two generations. Mosheh, then, had an awesome task – to tie these two generations together, such that the distance between Sinai and Tziyyon would be bridged.

This is where Mosheh "earned" the title by which he is forever known – Mosheh Rabbenu – "Mosheh, our Rebbi". Indeed, the job of a Rebbi is more than instructive, even more than inspirational or exhortative. The Rebbi is the bridge with previous generations, taking us back to Sinai (along with taking us back to the Beit haMikdash, to Yavneh etc.). In simple terms, the Rebbi's job is to turn the past into the present. [I recall experiencing this first-hand when participating in the shiur of Rav Soloveitchik zt"l, seeing the Tannaim, Amoraim and Rishonim all sitting around his table as he orchestrated their debates. It was a marvelous experience, one which he describes beautifully in "uVikkashtem Misham" (pp. 231-232).]

The first person to set out to do this job was Mosheh, as he turned the generation of the Conquest into the generation of the Exodus. Indeed, the Plains of Mo'av was the first "Beit Midrash" and Sefer D'varim the first "Shiur". (See Abravanel's resolution of the challenges to Divine authorship of D'varim [in the moving i]n the moving introduction to his commentary on D'varim]iginally taught D'varim orally and then God commanded him to commit it to writing.)

How did Mosheh do it? One simple device which he utilized is one that became the staple of the Haggadah – talking about the past in the present and talking to the people as if they had experienced these events first-hand. In other words, by saying "You approached me..." etc., they were drawn in to the sense of "being there."

[Note that Mosheh barely mentions any of the events which this generation "really" saw – the majority of the events mentioned belong to the previous generation] Mosheh was indeed "Rabbenu" – to the second generation! He was the first to perform this function – a function which guaranteed the potential for the eternity of the Jewish people. If it can be done once, it can be replicated every time! If one generation can be "brought back" to Sinai, so can every subsequent generation.

VIII. THE "THREAT" OF RENEWAL

This successful "education" project brought a terrifying danger in its wake – one to which the master teacher, Mosheh Rabbenu, was acutely aware. He was poised to bring them back to Sinai, to that great moment of Revelation – after which, he would ascend Har ha'Avarim (or Har N'vo) and die. Mosheh had already been told that that was he would die, when God instructed him to ascend that mountain (Bamidbar 27).

Mosheh remembered well what had happened the last time he had "disappeared" atop a mountain. When the B'nei Yisra'el had just experienced (in "real time") the Revelation, Mosheh ascended the mountain to receive the rest of the Law (along with the tablets). When the people were concerned about Mosheh's disappearance (remember – they did not know how long he was supposed to be on top of the mountain), they regressed to the idolatry of the golden calf.

How could Mosheh avoid the same pitfall? How could he insure that the B'nei Yisra'el would not achieve a "complete" return to Sinai, including the tragic aftermath of idolatry after his "one-way" ascension of the mountain?

IX. THE SOLUTION

Here is where the master teacher utilized his wonderful talent for education. In advance of retelling the people about their most glorious moments (Chs. 4-5, including the stand at Sinai and the Exodus), he instilled in them the understanding that he would not completely be leaving them. He told them about the two major functions which he held – leadership and instruction – and how he empowered others to continue his role. He immediately told them about the judges and how he charged them, such that even in his absence, there would be judges who would be an extension of Mosheh-as-instructor. We now understand why Mosheh introduced the judges at the beginning of his historical recitation – to reassure the people (as they felt closer to their past) that his leadership would still be their guide as they conquered and settled the Land. We also understand why Mosheh shared his charge to the judges: The people needed to hear for themselves about the close relationship he had with those judges, such that they were not just filling a position, but really continuing his role. We can also understand why Mosheh shared God's command to him vis-a-vis Yehoshua: Just as the people needed to hear about his connection with the judges, they needed to hear about how his "presence" would be felt through Yehoshua. The phrase Oto Hazek (give him strength/encourage him), said about Yehoshua, reminds us of the empowerment which is

the purpose of the S'mikhah (laying on the hands), by which Mosheh Rabbenu transferred the mantle of leadership to Yehoshua. (See this year's shiur on Parashat Vay'chi).

X. AFTERWORD

In section VI, I alluded to the difference between Sefer D'varim and the first four books. I'd like to share the observations of an old friend, Uzi Weingarten (benuzi@isracom.co.il), as published in the insightful weekly "Judaic Seminar" (which can be accessed through Shamash):

That Deuteronomy is called "Moses's book," as opposed to the other four books of the Torah, is substantiated by comparing two passages in Nehemiah that describe public readings of the Torah. On each occasion, a mitzvah that had fallen into disuse was "found." The first was the mitzvah of sitting in the sukkah during Sukkot, which appears only in Leviticus (23:42-43), and the second was the prohibition on an Ammonite or Moabite entering God's community, which appears only in Deuteronomy (23:4-7).

There is a crucial difference in how the two readings are described. Concerning sukkah, the author tells us: They found written in the Torah, that God commanded through Moses that the Israelites sit in sukkot... (Nehemiah 8:14). Regarding who can enter God's community, the author tells us:

On that day the Book of Moses was read to the people, and it was found written in it that an Ammonite or a Moabite should not enter God's community forever. (ibid. 13:1).

So a clear distinction is made: Leviticus is part of "the Torah that God commanded through Moses," and Deuteronomy is "the Book of Moses." The people did not consider the latter any less authoritative, and act on both commandments immediately. But there is still a difference in the linking to a source.

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In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

SEFER DEVARIM Introduction

What is Sefer Devarim?

Most everyone would answer - a review or repeat of Chumash, just as its 'nickname' - 'Mishneh Torah' - seems to imply.

Is this really so?

As we now demonstrate, it won't take more than a minute to show how that popular answer is simply incorrect!

Let's quickly review the first four books (of Chumash), noting which of their primary topics are either included or missing from Sefer Devarim:

* Sefer Breishit: Sefer Devarim makes almost no mention of any of its stories - be it the story of Creation, the Flood, the Avot, or the brothers, etc.

* Sefer Shmot: We find only scant details of the Exodus, and not a word about the mishkan; even though we do find the story of Ma'amad Har Sinai & chet ha-egel.

* Sefer Vayikra: Here again, Sefer Devarim makes almost no mention of any of its mitzvot or stories, aside from a few laws that 'ring a bell' from Parshat Kedoshim, and some kashrut laws; but hardly a summary.

* Sefer Bamidbar: Indeed Sefer Devarim does tell over the stories of the 'spies' and the defeat of Sichon & Og (with some major 'minor changes'). However, there is barely a mention of the remaining stories found in Bamidbar (and there are many), nor do we find a review of any of its mitzvot (e.g. nazir, sota, challa, etc.).

Furthermore, Sefer Devarim contains numerous mitzvot that had never been mentioned earlier in Chumash! Certainly, if the book was a summary, then we should not expect for it to contain totally new material. [To clarify this point, simply imagine that you are a teacher who assigns the class to summarize the first four books of Chumash. How would you grade a student who handed in Sefer Devarim as his assignment?]

Even though it took us only a few minutes to prove that Sefer Devarim is not a review of Chumash - it will take us much longer to explain what Sefer Devarim is, and why Chazal refer to it as "Mishneh Torah".

INTRODUCTION

Like many good books, Sefer Devarim can only be fully understood after you have read it. So for those of you who are not patient enough to read the entire book first (and analyze it), the following shiur will 'spill the beans'.

As usual, our shiur will focus on identifying its structure and theme. It is recommended that you study this shiur carefully, as its conclusions will provide the basis for our entire series on Sefer Devarim (in the weeks to follow).

A BOOK OF SPEECHES

The key to understanding Sefer Devarim lies in the recognition that it contains a very important (albeit long) speech delivered by Moshe Rabeinu, prior to his death; as

well as several 'shorter' speeches; one which introduces that 'main speech', and others that form its conclusion.

Therefore, the first step of our shiur will be to identify those speeches. To do so, we must first note how the style of Sefer Devarim is unique, as it is written almost entirely in the first person - in contrast to the first four books of Chumash, which are written in 'third person'.

[Recall (from when you studied grammar) that speeches are recorded (or quoted) in first person, while narrative (stories) are usually written in third person.]

Therefore, to determine where each speech begins (and ends), we simply need to scan the book, noting where the narrative changes from third person (i.e. the regular narrator mode of Chumash) to first person (i.e. the direct quote of Moshe Rabeinu, as he speaks).

If you have ample time (and patience/ and of course a Tanach Koren handy), you should first try to do this on your own. On the other hand, if you are short on time - you can 'cheat' by reading at least 1:1-7, 4:40-5:2, 26:16-27:2, 28:69-29:2, & 30:19-32:1, noting the transition from third person to first person, and hence where and how each speech begins.

IDENTIFYING SPEECH #1

For example, let's take a quick look at the opening psukim of Sefer Devarim (1:1-7). Note how the first five psukim are written in third person:

"These are the devarim (words / speeches) which Moshe spoke to all of Israel... In the fortieth year on the first day of the eleventh month... in Arvot Mo'av, Moshe began to explain this Torah saying..." (see 1:1-5);

This introduces the speech that begins (in the next pasuk) with the first sentence of Moshe Rabeinu's speech:

"God, our Lord, spoke to us at Chorev saying..." (see 1:6).

[Note how this pasuk, and those that follow are written in first person.]

Then, scan the psukim that follow, noting how this speech continues from 1:6 all the way until 4:40 (i.e. the next four chapters). This entire section is written in first person, and hence constitutes Moshe's opening speech.

IDENTIFYING SPEECH #2 [the 'main speech']

In a similar manner, note how the first pasuk of chapter five introduces Moshe's next speech. Here again, the opening pasuk begins in third person, but immediately changes to first person, as soon as the speech begins:

"And Moshe called together all of Israel and said to them [third person] - Listen to the laws and rules that I tell you today... - [first person]" (see 5:1).

Where does this second speech end? If you have half an hour, you could scan the next twenty some chapters and look for its conclusion by yourself; otherwise, you can 'take our word' that it continues all the way until the end of chapter 26!

This observation (even though it is rarely noticed) will be the key towards understanding Sefer Devarim - for this twenty chapter long 'main speech' will emerge as the primary focus of the book!

After this 'main speech', in chapters 27-30 we find two more short speeches that directly relate to the main speech. Finally, from chapter 31 thru 34, Sefer Devarim 'returns' to the regular narrative style of Chumash, as it

concludes with the story of Moshe Rabbeinu's final day.

The following table summarizes the division of Sefer Devarim into its four speeches:

SPEECH #1

Chaps. 1-4

Introductory speech

SPEECH #2

Chaps. 5-26

Main speech

SPEECH #3

Chaps. 27-28

Tochacha & Covenant

SPEECH #4

Chaps. 29-30

Teshuva

THE MAIN SPEECH

As this table indicates, Speech #2 is by far the longest, so we'll begin our study by trying to figure out its primary topic. [Afterward, we will show how Speech #1 actually introduces this main speech.]

To help us identify the primary topic of the main speech [without the need to read it in its entirety], let's assume that Moshe Rabbeinu will employ the 'golden rule' for an organized speech, i.e. he will:

(1) 'Say what you're gonna say' -

(2) 'Say it' - & then

(3) 'Say what you said.'

[We'll soon see how Moshe Rabbeinu beautifully follows this golden rule in this speech.]

Let's take a careful look at how Moshe's begins this main speech, noting how he explains to the people what to expect:

"Listen Israel to the chukim & mishpatim which I am teaching you today, learn them and keep them..." (5:1).

This 'opener' immediately tells the listener that this speech will contain chukim & mishpatim [laws and rules] that must be studied and observed; and indeed that is precisely what we will find (when we will study the content of this speech).

However, these laws - that we now expect to hear (based on 5:1) - don't begin in the next pasuk. Instead, Moshe Rabbeinu uses the first section of his speech (chapter five) to explain how and when these laws (that will begin in chapter six) were first given.

In other words, instead of beginning his speech immediately with this set of laws, he will preface these laws by first explaining why everyone is obligated to keep them (5:2-5), followed by the story of how he first received them at Har Sinai forty years earlier (5:20-30).

To appreciate this introductory chapter, and to understand why it contains a 'repeat' of the Ten Commandments, let's carefully review its flow of topic.

INTRO TO THE MAIN SPEECH - OBLIGATION & COVENANT

As his first point, Moshe emphasizes how these laws (that he is about to teach) were given as an integral part of the covenant between God and Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai: "Hashem made a covenant with us at Chorev. Not [only] with our forefathers did God make this covenant, but [also] with us

- we, the living - here today..." (5:2-3).

Even though (and because) most of the members of this new generation were not present at Ma'amad Har Sinai, Moshe must first remind Bnei Yisrael that their obligation to keep these laws stems from that covenant at Har Sinai (forty years earlier)!

Recall as well how God had spoken the Ten Commandments directly to Bnei Yisrael as part of that covenant.

[Hence - the two tablets upon which they were inscribed are known as 'luchot ha-brit' - i.e. tablets of the Covenant.]

It is for this reason that Moshe Rabbeinu first reviews the Ten Commandments (in 5:6-19), before he begins his teaching of the detailed 'chukim 'mishpatim' - for they form the key guidelines of this "brit" between God and His nation. Note however that the Ten Commandments are presented as part of the story of 'how the laws were given' - the detailed laws, referred to in 5:1, don't begin until chapter six (and continue thru chapter 26).

WHY MOSHE IS TEACHING THE LAWS

Now comes the key story in this introductory section, for Moshe (in 5:20-30) tells the story of how Bnei Yisrael immediately became fearful after hearing the 'Dibrot' and asked Moshe that he become their intermediary to receive the remaining laws. As we shall see, this story explains when and how the laws (that Moshe is about to start teaching) were first given.

To clarify this, let's carefully study these psukim, for they will help us understand the overall structure of the main speech: "When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, you came up to me... and said... Let us not die, for this fearsome fire will consume us... you go closer and hear all that God says, and then you tell us everything that God commands, and we will willingly do it..." (5:20-26).

[Keep in mind that from this pasuk we can infer that had Bnei Yisrael not become fearful, they would have heard additional mitzvot directly from God, immediately after these first Ten Commandments.]

Note how God grants this request (that Moshe should act as their intermediary) by informing Moshe of His 'new plan:

"Go, say to them: 'Return to your tents.' But you remain here with Me, and I will give you the mitzvah, chukim & mishpatim... for them to observe in the land that I am giving them to possess..." (5:27-28).

Read this pasuk once again, for it is key towards understanding how the 'main speech' first came about. The mitzvot that Moshe will now teach (in this speech) are simply the same laws that God had first given to him on Har Sinai, after Bnei Yisrael asked him to become their intermediary.

In fact, Moshe himself states this explicitly in the next set of psukim that clearly introduce this set of laws:

"And this ('ve-zot') is the mitzvah, chukim & mishpatim that God has commanded me to teach you to be observed in the land you are about to enter..." (see 6:1-3).

Recall from 5:28 that God told Moshe that he should remain on Har Sinai to receive the mitzvah, chukim & mishpatim. This pasuk (6:1), explains how Moshe's lecture is simply a delineation of those mitzvot.

THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Based on this introduction (i.e. 6:1-3), we conclude that these laws (that begin with 6:4) are simply those mitzvot that God had given to Bnei Yisrael - via Moshe Rabbeinu - as a continuation of the Ten Commandments at Ma'amad Har Sinai. If so, then the first mitzvah of this special unit of laws is none other than the first parsha of 'kriyat shema':

"Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad, ve-ahavta... ve-hayu ha-devarim ha-eileh..." (see 6:4-7).

[This can help us appreciate why this parsha is such an important part of our daily prayers - to be discussed in our shiur on Va'etchanan.]

This first parsha of kriyat shema begins a lengthy list of mitzvot (and several sections of rebuke) that continues all the way until Parshat Ki Tavo (i.e. chapter 26).

[That is why this speech is better known as 'ne'um ha-mitzvot' the speech of commandments. Just try counting how many mitzvot are indeed found in these 21 chapters - you'll find plenty!]

Note as well that after the first two cardinal mitzvot - belief in God and the commandment to love Him with all your heart - we find a statement that serves as yet another introduction to the mitzvot that will now follow:

"ve-hayu ha-devarim ha-eileh..." - And these words [clearly, this refers to the laws that will now follow in the speech] that I am teaching you today must be kept in your heart - (see 6:6-7)

We will soon return to discuss this pasuk in greater detail; however, we must first clarify an important point. Even though the core of this speech consists of the mitzvot that Moshe initially received at Har Sinai, it is only natural that Moshe Rabbeinu will add some comments of his own, relating to events that have transpired in the interim. [See, for example, chapters 8-9.] Nonetheless, the mitzvot themselves were first given forty years earlier.

Furthermore, as the psukim quoted above explain, these mitzvot share a common theme - for they all apply to Bnei Yisrael's forthcoming entry into the Land of Israel (see 5:28 & 6:1). [In next week's shiur we will discuss how these mitzvot divide into two distinct sections, the mitzva section (chapters 8 thru 11) and the chukim u-mishpatim section (chapters 12 - 26).]

WHEN THIS SPEECH WAS FIRST GIVEN

So when did Bnei Yisrael first hear these mitzvot?

If they were given at Har Sinai, then certainly Moshe should have taught them to the people at that time.

The answer to this question is found in Parshat Ki Tisa. There, in the story of how Moshe descended from Har Sinai with the second luchot, the Torah informs us:

"And it came to pass, when Moshe came down from Mount Sinai with the two tables of the testimony in his hand... and afterward all the children of Israel came near, and he [Moshe] commanded them all of the laws that God had spoken with him on Mount Sinai.

(See Shmot 34:29-32)

Clearly, Moshe had already taught these laws to Bnei Yisrael when he came down from Har Sinai. Yet, Sefer Shmot only tells the story of when Moshe first taught them, but doesn't record all of the actual laws that he both received and taught at that time. Instead, the Torah prefers to record some of those laws in Sefer Devarim, others in Sefer

Bamidbar, and others in Sefer Vayikra.

In other words, Moshe Rabbeinu reviews an entire set of laws in Sefer Devarim; laws that he had already taught to the first generation when they were encamped at Har Sinai. Hence, the laws in Sefer Devarim are indeed a review of a set of laws that Bnei Yisrael had already received. However, they are not a review of the laws that Chumash had already recorded.

[This point clarifies why so many people misunderstand what is meant when Sefer Devarim is referred to as a 'review of laws'. It is indeed a review of laws that Moshe Rabbeinu had already taught Bnei Yisrael, but it is not a review of the first four books of Chumash.]

One could also suggest a very logical reason for why the Torah preferred to record these laws in Sefer Devarim, rather than in Sefer Shmot. As we shall see, these mitzvot will focus on how Bnei Yisrael are to establish their nation in the Land of Israel (see 5:28 and 6:1/ 'la'asot ba-aretz' - to keep in the land). Hence, the Torah prefers to record them as they were taught by Moshe to the second generation - who would indeed enter the land; and not as they were given to the first generation - who sinned, and hence never entered the land.

This background will now help us understand why Chazal refer to this Sefer as "Mishneh Torah", and why this name is so commonly misunderstood. While doing so, we will also explain the 'simple meaning' of the famous psukim of kriyat shema that we recite every day.

MISHNEH TORAH

Let's return to the opening psukim of kriyat shema (6:4-8), which form the opening set of commandments that Moshe first received on Har Sinai (to relay to Bnei Yisrael) - soon after the Ten Commandments were given to the entire nation.

Moshe begins this set of laws with an opening statement that reflects a tenet of faith:

"shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad" (6:4)

This is followed by the most basic mitzva regarding attitude, which in essence is a way of life for every Jew:

"ve-ahavta ..." - to love God with all your heart... (see 6:5),

Then, Moshe introduces the laws that he now plans to teach in a very interesting manner:

"ve-hayu ha-devarim ha-eileh..."

- And these words [i.e. laws that will now follow] that I am teaching you today must be kept in your heart - ve-shinantam - and you must repeat them (over and over) to our children and speak about them constantly, when at home, when you travel, when you lie down and when you get up..." (see 6:5-8).

Note the Hebrew word 've-shinantam' - which means more than simply to teach, but rather to 'repeat' [from the 'shoresh' (root) - 'leshanen' [sh.n.n.]. Moshe instructs the nation that these forthcoming laws (i.e. the laws of the main speech of Sefer Devarim), need not only to be taught, but they also require constant repetition!

Thus, the word 'mishneh' - in the phrase "mishneh Torah" also stems from this same root - "leshanen" - to repeat. Hence, the name "Mishneh Torah" implies a set of laws that require constant repetition!

This explains the confusion in regard to the meaning of this alternate name for Sefer Devarim. Mishneh Torah does not

imply that Sefer Devarim is a repeat (or review) of what has been written in Chumash thus far; rather, it refers to a special set of laws that requires constant repetition - i.e. when we sit in our homes etc. / see 6:6-7,

In other words, the mitzvot of the main speech of Sefer Devarim are special, insofar as they must be constantly repeated and taught ('ve-shinantam'), as its name - Mishneh Torah - implies. In fact, we fulfill this mitzva each day by reciting the first two parshiyot of kriyat shma.

Further proof of this interpretation is found in the sole pasuk in Sefer Devarim that contains the phrase mishneh Torah, in regard to the King in Parshat Shoftim: "And when the King is seated on his royal throne, he must write this mishneh ha-torah in a book... and it must be with him and he must read from it every day of his life, in order that he learns to fear God..." (see 17:18-19).

Clearly, in this context, the term "Mishneh Torah" does not refer to a repeat of earlier laws, but rather to a set of laws that need to be repeated. [Similarly, the word 'mishna' (as in Torah she-ba'al peh) has the same meaning. The mishnayot require 'shinun'; they must be repeated over and over again - hence they are called Mishna.]

BACK TO PARSHAT DEVARIM

This interpretation can help us understand the opening psukim of Sefer Devarim - which otherwise appear to be rather cryptic. Before we continue, it is suggested that you read Devarim 1:1-2, noting the difficulty of its translation. "These are the devarim that Moshe spoke to Bnei Yisrael in Transjordan, in the desert, in the Arava, opposite Suf, between Paran and Tofel, and Di Zahav" (1:1).

First of all, what does the word devarim refer to: the entire book? - the first speech? - all the speeches?

It's not clear. Secondly, what is the meaning of this long list of places?

The location of 'ever ha-yarden' [Transjordan] makes sense, for Bnei Yisrael are now encamped there (see 1:5); but the remaining list of places - ba-midbar, ba-arava, mul suf, bein paran u-tofel etc. - seems to be totally disjoint from the first half of this pasuk.

Are these many places, or just one place? What happened at all of these places? Again, it is not clear.

The next pasuk is even more enigmatic! "Eleven days from Chorev, via Mount Se'ir, until Kadesh Barnea" (1:2).

This pasuk doesn't even form a complete sentence. What does it describe? What does it have to do with the previous pasuk?

Nonetheless, the next pasuk appears to be quite 'normal', and could easily have been the opening verse of the book:

"And it came to pass in the fortieth year on the first day of the eleventh month, Moshe spoke to Bnei Yisrael in accordance with the instructions that God had given him for them [after he had defeated Sichon]" (1:3-4).

This third pasuk seems to form an introduction to Moshe's speech. But this only strengthens our questions on the first two psukim. Why doesn't the Sefer just begin with the third pasuk?

Indeed, one who never studied Sefer Devarim should find himself terribly confused when reading these psukim.

However, based on our shiur, it is possible to suggest a very simple explanation (that will find support in Ibn Ezra and Ramban as well).

A SUPER INTRO

Recall how the main speech (i.e. ne'um ha-mitzvot / chapters 5-26) forms the focal point of Sefer Devarim, including a lengthy set of mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael must keep as they enter the Land of Israel. As we explained, Moshe had first taught these mitzvot to Bnei Yisrael when he came down from Har Sinai with the second luchot (see Shmot 34:32). However, since these laws require constant repetition [mishneh torah], it would only make sense that Moshe would have taught them numerous times.

Recall as well that the Torah uses this very same word 'ha-devarim' to introduce the mitzvot of the main speech / see 6:6 -ve-hayu ha-devarim ha-eileh asher anochi metzaveh "

Therefore, one can assume that the phrase 'eileh ha-devarim' (in 1:1) refers to the same mitzvot that 've-hayu ha-devarim' refers to in 6:6) i.e. to the mitzvot of the main speech!

If so, then the first pasuk of the Sefer introduces this main speech! Hence, the first two psukim of Sefer Devarim can be understood as follows:

"These are the devarim [i.e. the mitzvot of the main speech] that Moshe delivered in Arvat Mo'av, [just as he had already delivered a similar speech in] the midbar, and arava, opposite suf, between Paran and Tofel, and at Di-zahav. [Furthermore, these mitzvot were also taught by Moshe to Bnei Yisrael during] their eleven day journey from Har Chorev to Kadesh Barnea." [Then] in the fortieth year... Moshe taught these laws (one last time] after the defeat of Sichon..." (see Devarim 1:1-4)

[See commentary of Ibn Ezra on 1:1-2.]

This explanation fits in beautifully with both Ibn Ezra's & Ramban's interpretation of the word "devarim" in the first pasuk of Sefer Devarim, as both commentators explain that the word "devarim" refers specifically to the mitzvot that Moshe will teach later on in the main speech.

[Ramban explains that these devarim begin with the Ten commandments (i.e. from chapter 5), while Ibn Ezra explains that they begin with the chukim & mishpatim in Parshat Re'eh (see 12:1). The underlying reason for this controversy will be explained in our shiur on Parshat Va-etchanan. The reason why Rashi explains that devarim refers to the 'rebuke' will be discussed in our shiur on Parshat Ekev.]

When we consider this setting, the Torah's emphasis in the second pasuk on the eleven day journey from Har Sinai to Kadesh Barnea becomes quite significant. Recall, that this eleven day journey was supposed to have been Bnei Yisrael's final preparation before conquering the land (had they not sinned)! As such, Moshe found it necessary to teach and review these important laws several times during that journey. [Again, see Ibn Ezra inside.]

Now, in the fortieth year on the first day of the eleventh month, Bnei Yisrael find themselves in a very similar situation - making their final preparations for the conquest of the land. Therefore, Moshe gathers the people in Arvat Mo'av to teach and review these mitzvot one last time.

In this manner, the first four psukim of Sefer Devarim actually form the introduction to the main speech (chapters 5-26).

However, before Moshe begins that main speech, he

first makes an introductory speech that is introduced by 1:5 and continues until 4:40. That speech will be discussed in our next shiur (on Parshat Devarim).

Untill then,
shabbat shalom
menachem

=====

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. FROM HAR SINAI TO SEFER DEVARIM

In our shiur, we showed how the main body of Sefer Devarim contains the mitzvot that Moshe Rabbeinu originally received on Har Sinai. However, Moshe received many other mitzvot on Har Sinai. Therefore, it appears that even though Moshe received all of the mitzvot on Har Sinai, each book of Chumash focuses on a different category. Therefore, the important question becomes - what characterizes the mitzvot found in other books of Chumash? Or, more directly, on what basis were the mitzvot distributed among the five books?

To answer this question, we simply need to review our conclusions from previous shiurim.

First of all, let's review the main themes of each Sefer that we have found thus far:

* BREISHIT - God's creation of the universe and His choice of Avraham Avinu and his offspring to become His special nation.

* SHMOT - The Exodus of Am Yisrael from Egypt; their journey to Har Sinai; Matan Torah; chet ha-egel, and building the mishkan.

* VAYIKRA - Torat kohanim, the laws relating to offering korbanot in the mishkan, and various other laws that help make Am Yisrael a holy nation.

* BAMIDBAR - Bnei Yisrael's journey from Har Sinai (with the mishkan at its center) towards the Promised Land; and why they didn't enter the Land.

With this in mind, let's see how the laws in Sefer Devarim may relate to what we have found thus far.

Recall that God's original intention was to take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, bring them to Har Sinai (to receive the Torah), and then immediately bring them to Eretz Canaan, where these mitzvot are to be observed.

At Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael entered into a covenant and heard the Ten Commandments. As we explained, they should have received many more mitzvot after hearing the first Ten Commandments. However, they were overwhelmed by the awesome experience of Ma'amad Har Sinai and thus requested that Moshe act as their intermediary.

It is difficult to ascertain the exact chronological order of the events following their request. However, by combining the parallel accounts of this event in Sefer Shmot (see 20:15-21:1, & 24:1-18) and Sefer Devarim (see chapter 5), we arrive at the following chronology:

* On the day of Ma'amad Har Sinai, God gives Moshe a special set of laws, better known as Parshat Mishpatim (i.e. 20:19-23:33), which Moshe later conveys to Bnei Yisrael (see 24:3-4). Moshe writes these mitzvot on a special scroll ['sefer ha-brit' (see 24:4-7)], and on the next morning he organizes a special gathering where Bnei Yisrael publicly declare their acceptance of these laws (and whatever may follow). This covenant is better known as 'brit na'aseh ve-nishma'. [See 24:5-11. We have followed Ramban's peirush; Rashi takes a totally different approach. See Ramban 24:1 for a more detailed presentation of their machloket.]

* After this ceremony, God summons Moshe to Har Sinai to receive the luchot & additional laws ['ha-Torah v-

hamitzva'; see 24:12-13], and so Moshe remains on Har Sinai for 40 days and nights to learn these mitzvot. It is not clear precisely to what 'ha-Torah ve-hamitzva' refers, but we may logically assume that it is during these 40 days when Moshe receives the mitzvot he later records in Sefer Devarim. [Note the use of these key words in the introductory psukim of Sefer Devarim: Torah in Devarim 1:5, 4:44; ha-mitzva in 5:28 & 6:1.] [Moshe most likely received many other mitzvot as well during these forty days, possibly even the laws of the mishkan. (see famous machloket between Rashi & Ramban - and our shiur on Parshat Teruma.)]

* As a result of chet ha-egel, the original plan to immediately conquer the land of Israel requires some modification. Consequently, we never find out precisely which mitzvot were given to Moshe during the first forty days and which were transmitted during the last forty days. Either way, Bnei Yisrael themselves do not hear any of these mitzvot until Moshe descends with the second luchot on Yom Kippur (see Shmot 34:29-33). At this point, Moshe teaches Bnei Yisrael all the mitzvot he had received, though they are not recorded at that point in Sefer Shmot (see again Shmot 34:29-33).

* During the next six months, Bnei Yisrael build the mishkan and review the laws they had just received from Moshe. Once the mishkan is built in Nissan and the korban Pesach is offered (in Nissan & Iyar), Bnei Yisrael are ready to begin their 11 day journey from Har Sinai to Kadesh Barnea, the excursion that was to have begun their conquest of the land. Instead, the people fail with the incident of the meraglim, and the rest is history.

This background can help us appreciate how the mitzvot are divided up among the various sefarim of Chumash, even though most all of them were first given to Moshe at Har Sinai, or at the Mishkan in Midbar Sinai.

Let's discuss them, one book at a time:

SHMOT

Sefer Shmot records the Ten Commandments and Parshat Mishpatim since they comprise an integral part of Ma'amad Har Sinai, i.e. the covenantal ceremony in which Bnei Yisrael accept the Torah. Although Sefer Shmot continues with the story of Moshe's ascent to Har Sinai, it does not record the specific mitzvot that he received during those forty days! Instead, the remainder of Sefer Shmot focuses entirely on those mitzvot relating to the atonement for chet ha-egel (34:10-29) and the construction of the mishkan (chapters 25-31, & 35-40 / plus the laws of Shabbat which relate to building the mishkan).

The exclusive focus on these laws at the end of Sefer Shmot is well understood. The theme of the second half of Sefer Shmot revolves around the issue of whether or not God's Shchina can remain within the camp of Bnei Yisrael. Whereas the mishkan provides a solution to this dilemma, its taking center-stage in the latter part of Sefer Shmot is to be expected. [See Ramban's introduction to Sefer Shmot, ve-akmal.]

What about the rest of the mitzvot transmitted to Moshe on Har Sinai?

As we will see, some surface in Sefer Vayikra, others in Sefer Bamidbar, and the main group appears in Sefer Devarim!

VAYIKRA

Even though Sefer Vayikra opens with the laws given from the ohel mo'ed (see 1:1), many of its mitzvot had already been presented on Har Sinai. This is explicit in Parshat Tzav (see 7:37-38); Parshat Behar (see 25:1); and Parshat Bechukotai (see 26:46 & 27:34). Certain parshiyot of mitzvot

such as Acharei Mot obviously must also have been given from the ohel mo'ed, but there is good reason to suggest that many of its other mitzvot, such as Parshat Kedoshim, were first given on Har Sinai.

So why are certain mitzvot of Har Sinai included in Sefer Vayikra? The answer is quite simple. Sefer Vayikra is a collection of mitzvot dealing with the mishkan, korbanot and the kedusha of Am Yisrael. Sefer Vayikra, better known as torat kohanim, simply contains all those parshiyot that contain mitzvot associated with its theme. Some were given to Moshe on Har Sinai, while others were transmitted from the ohel mo'ed. [See previous shiurim on Sefer Vayikra for more detail on this topic.]

BAMIDBAR

Sefer Bamidbar, we explained, is primarily the narrative describing Bnei Yisrael's journey from Har Sinai towards Eretz Canaan. As we explained in our shiurim on Sefer Bamidbar, that narrative is 'interrupted' by various parshiyot of mitzvot, which seem to have belonged in Sefer Vayikra. [For example: nazir, sota, challa, nsachim, tzitzit, tum'at meit, korbanot tmidim u-musafim, etc.] These mitzvot were probably first given to Moshe on Har Sinai (or some possibly from the ohel mo'ed, as well). Nonetheless, they are included in Sefer Bamidbar because of their thematic connection to its narrative.

DEVARIM

Now we can better understand Sefer Devarim. The books of Shmot, Vayikra, and Bamidbar contained only a limited sampling of the mitzvot that God had given to Moshe on Har Sinai, each Sefer recording only those mitzvot related to its theme. Sefer Devarim, as it turns out, is really our primary source of the mitzvot taught to Moshe on Har Sinai. As we explained above, this is exactly what chapter 5 indicates. [Recall that chapter 5 is the introductory chapter of Moshe's main speech, the presentation of the mitzva, chukim & mishpatim.]

Expectedly, these mitzvot of Har Sinai recorded in Sefer Devarim are presented in an organized fashion and share a common theme. To identify that common theme, let's take a look once again at the introduction to this collection of mitzvot:

"And this ('ve-zot') is the mitzva, chukim & mishpatim that God has commanded me to teach you to be observed in the land which you are about to enter..." (6:1-3 / see also 5:28).

The mitzvot of Moshe's main speech are simply a guide for Bnei Yisrael's conduct as they conquer and settle the land. [As we study the Sefer, this theme will become quite evident.] Therefore, practically speaking, this speech contains the most important mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael must follow as they enter the Land and establish their society. As these laws are so important, they must be studied 'over and over' again [= mishneh Torah].

Hence, it is only logical that Moshe decides to teach these mitzvot at a national gathering (as he is about to die and Bnei Yisrael are about to enter the Land). This also explains why these mitzvot will be taught once again on Har Eival, after Bnei Yisrael cross the Jordan (see Devarim chapter 27), and then again thereafter, once every seven years at the hakhel ceremony (see 31:9-13; notice the word Torah once again!).

B. BETWEEN THE NARRATIVES IN DEVARIM & BAMIDBAR

This understanding of the purpose and theme of each sefer helps explain the many discrepancies between the details of various events as recorded in Shmot and Bamidbar,

and their parallel accounts in Sefer Devarim. (A classic example is chet ha-meraglim.) Neither book records all the details of any particular event; instead, each sefer records the events from the unique perspective of its own theme and purpose.

In the shiurim to follow, this understanding of the nature of Sefer Devarim will guide our study of each individual Parsha. Our shiur on Parshat Devarim (to follow) will be a direct continuation of this shiur. Till then,

C. TORAH SHE-BA'AL PEH

In the above shiur, we showed how the various mitzvot that Moshe received on Har Sinai are distributed among the various sefarim of Chumash, based on the theme of each Sefer. What about the mitzvot which Moshe received on Har Sinai that, for one reason or other, 'never made it' into Chumash? One could suggest that this is what we call 'halacha le-Mosheh mi-Sinai' in Torah she-ba'al peh (the Oral Law). This suggestion offers a very simple explanation of how the laws that Moshe received on Har Sinai are divided up between the Oral Law and the Written Law. Based on our shiur, that Moshe must have received many other laws on Har Sinai which were not included in any sefer in Chumash is almost pshat!

Obviously, the division between what became the Oral Law and the Written Law was divinely mandated and not accidental. Our above explanation simply makes it easier to understand how this division first developed. It also helps us understand why Torah she-ba'al peh is no less obligatory than Torah she-bichtav.

[See also Ibn Ezra to Shmot 24:12, re:"ha-Torah ve-hamitzva...", which may refer to the Written and Oral Laws.]

Furthermore, the prominent view in Chazal that all the mitzvot were first given on Har Sinai, repeated from the ohel mo'ed, and then given one last time at Arvat Mo'av. Our discussion shows how this statement actually reflects the 'simple pshat' in Chumash, once one pays attention to the story that Moshe tells as he begins his main speech in Sefer Devarim!

PARSHAT DEVARIM

[shiur revised 5765]

Why are there so many details in Parshat Devarim that appear to contradict what was written earlier in Chumash?

[For example, the story of: the "meraglim" (1:22-40 vs. Bamidbar 13:1-22), whose idea it was to appoint the judges (see 1:12-18 vs. Shmot 18:13-26), and how we confronted Edom in the fortieth year (see 2:4-8 vs. Bamidbar 20:14-).

In contrast to the 'heretical' solutions offered by the 'bible critics' - in the following shiur we suggest a very simple and logical reason for these discrepancies - based on our understanding of the overall theme and structure of Sefer Devarim, as discussed in our introductory shiur.

Therefore, we must begin our shiur with a quick review of the conclusions of that shiur - in order to understand the purpose of Moshe Rabeinu's first speech, which comprises the bulk of Parshat Devarim.

[If you didn't read that shiur, it is available on the website at www.tanach.org/dvarim/dvarint.pdf.]

INTRODUCTION

In the first four chapters of Sefer Devarim, Moshe Rabeinu delivers a speech to Bnei Yisrael, which serves as an introduction to his 'speech of Mitzvot' - the main speech (chapters 5 thru 26).

In that 'main speech', Moshe teaches a complete set of laws that Bnei Yisrael must keep as they conquer the Land, and establish their nation. Even though Moshe first received (and taught) those laws forty years earlier, he must teach them one last time, before his death - as the new generation now prepares to enter the Land.

Our shiur will demonstrate how the first speech introduces the main speech, which will then enable us to explain why its details may differ from their parallel accounts in Sefer Shmot and Bamidbar.

We begin our study by noting how and where the first speech begins.

THE OPENING LINE

In our introductory shiur, we explained how the first four psukim of Parshat Devarim (1:1-4) serve as an intro to the entire book, and hence introduce the main speech (that doesn't begin until chapter five). It is specifically the fifth pasuk that introduces the first speech:

"In Transjordan in Moav, - "ho'eel Moshe" - Moshe BEGAN explaining this TORAH saying:Y" (See 1:5, and Rashi!)

[The phrase "ha'Torah ha'zot" refers to the main speech (that begins in chapter five), as Sefer Devarim consistently uses the word "torah" in this context - see 4:44, 17:18 and 27:3 & 8.]

Hence, the next pasuk begins the actual speech - with Moshe telling Bnei Yisrael:

"Hashem spoke unto us in Chorev [=Har Sinai] saying: 'You have dwelt long enough in this mountain; "turn you, and take your journey, and go to the hill-country of the Amorites and unto all the places... the land of the Canaanites, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. "

Behold, I am giving you the land: **go in and possess it**, which Hashem swore unto your forefathers..." (see 1:6-8)

When Moshe begins his speech by retelling how Bnei Yisrael left Har Sinai, it may appear that he is simply beginning a short historical review of everything that happened during their journey in the desert. However, as we read on, we'll see how the details that Moshe Rabeinu recalls, relate directly to the topic of the main speech. Let's explain why he begins with 'leaving Har Sinai'.

DEJA - VU

Recall that the mitzvot of the main speech were first given to Moshe at Har Sinai, and they were taught at that time, because Bnei Yisrael were supposed to travel from Har Sinai directly to the Land of Israel. Now, it is forty years later, and the new generation is in a very similar situation, i.e. ready to enter the land. Just as Moshe had taught their parents' generation these laws at Har Sinai - now he is teaching the new generation.

As the laws of the main speech relate to what Bnei Yisrael must do when they enter the land, Moshe begins his speech by explaining to the nation why forty years have passed since these laws were first given.

[Note that even though this may sound like a similar account Parshat Yitro (see Shmot 18:13-26), based on the context, the primary parallel is to Bamidbar chapter 11. See also Ibn Ezra (and Rashi) in Shmot 18:13, who explain that this story of the appointment of judges actually took place after the Torah was given, and hence, that chapter is out of place. Note as well how Shmot 18:27 may be parallel to Bamidbar 10:29-33!]

But what is the thematic importance of Moshe's discussion about the appointment of these judges? Even if those events took place 'at that same time' [see 1:9], these details don't appear to share any

This neatly explains why the story of the spies emerges as the primary topic of chapter one (see 1:19-45) - for that sin was the principal reason for this forty year delay. [If Sefer Devarim was a simply a review of Chumash, then there are many other stories that Moshe should have mentioned beforehand!]

However, before Moshe retells the story of the spies, he inserts a short 'digression' regarding the appointment of judges, as detailed in 1:9-18, which at first glance appears to be superfluous.

Let's take a look at what this 'digression' includes; afterward we will suggest a reason for its inclusion.

WHAT DO JUDGES HAVE TO DO WITH ALL THIS?

Review 1:6-22, noting how it would have made much more sense for Moshe to go from 1:8 directly to 1:19 (please verify this on your own). Nonetheless, this more logical flow is 'interrupted' by what appears to be an unrelated statement:

"And I spoke unto you 'at that time', saying: 'I am not able to lead by myself...' (1:9)

Moshe's statement, even though it sounds at first bit negative, does not have to be understood as a complaint. In fact, the next two lines come precisely to counter that impression:

"Hashem has multiplied you, and, behold, you are this day a multitude as the stars of heaven. Hashem, the God of your fathers, should make you a thousand times so many and bless you, as He promised you! (1:10-11)

[btw, note the parallels to Breishit 15:5-7!]

Moshe's inability to carry the burden of the entire nation stemmed from their population growth, which Moshe now explains was the fulfillment of a divine blessing.

In fact, based on the context of 1:6-8, the phrase "b'et ha'hi" [at that time] in 1:9 must relate to the time when Bnei Yisrael first left Har Sinai - as recorded in chapter 11 in Sefer Bamidbar. And sure enough, we find almost that identical wording in a statement that Moshe had made precisely 'at that time':

"lo uchal anochi l'vadi la'set et kol ha'am..." - I myself am not able to lead this nation... (see Bamidbar 11:14!)

In response to Moshe's 'complaint', God commanded Moshe to share his leadership with the 'seventy elders' (see Bamidbar 11:16-29). That response is reflected in Moshe's next statement in his speech in Sefer Devarim, explaining how his burden of leadership was alleviated by the appointment of judges, in a hierarchical system of leadership:

"How can I alone bear your cumbrance, and burden, and disputes? [Therefore,] Get you, from each one of your tribes, wise men, and understanding, and full of knowledge, and I will make them heads over you... So I took the heads of your tribes, wise men, and full of knowledge, and made them heads over you, captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds, and captains of fifties, and captains of tens, and officers, tribe by tribe. And I charged your judges at that time, saying: 'Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him... and the case that is too hard, you shall bring unto me, and I will hear it'. (See 1:12-17.)

thematic connection to the story of the spies, nor to the laws of main speech! So why does Moshe mention it at all?

JUDGES AND/OR TEACHERS

The answer to this question lies in the next (and final) pasuk of this 'digression':

"And I commanded **you** [the people] 'at that time' - et kol ha'DEVARIM - all the things which you should do." (see 1:18)

Pay attention to the phrase "va'atzave **etchem**" - which must refer to the people, and not the judges.

[You can prove this by simply comparing "v'atzave **et shofteichem**" in 1:16, to "v'atzave **etchem**" in 1:18!]

This short pasuk, even though it is often 'overlooked', connects everything together. Moshe explains that at that time, i.e. after appointing the judges, as Bnei Yisrael prepared to leave Har Sinai, he had commanded the people in regard to all the - DEVARIM - which they must do.

But what are those 'DEVARIM'?

Based on our introductory shiur, the answer should be obvious! These are the same '**devarim**' that:

- the opening pasuk of Sefer Devarim refers to (see 1:1)
- "v'hayu ha'devarim ha'eyleh" refers to (see 6:6)
- which are none other than the laws of the main speech of Sefer Devarim! [See Ibn Ezra & Chizkuni on 1:18.]

This makes perfect sense, for that special set of laws (that require constant repetition /"mishne Torah") relate to what Bnei Yisrael will need to keep when they enter the land. Therefore, when Bnei Yisrael first left Har Sinai forty years earlier, Moshe had taught the people these laws - **with the help of these judges**; and now forty years later, he reminds the people of those events, as he is about to teach them those laws one last time.

As it is the responsibility of the appointed judges to assist with the teaching of these laws (and their implementation /see 27:1-8!), Moshe includes those events at the beginning of his introductory speech.

Unfortunately, that generation failed. It is now Moshe's hope [and goal], that this generation will fare much better.

As Moshe's introductory speech focuses on Bnei Yisrael's need to be prepared for their conquest of the land, and their need to study the relevant laws, it actually makes sense that he mentions the appointment of judges first - for they will be the key towards the success of this endeavor. [Note as well 16:18 in the main speech.]

Finally, this interpretation of the word "devarim" in 1:18, explains why Moshe continues his speech by returning to their journey from Chorev to Kadesh Barnea (see 1:19). Based on our understanding that 1:2 describes how the laws of the main speech were taught and studied during the eleven day journey from Chorev to Kadesh Barnea (see Ibn Ezra), then the detail in 1:18-19 refer to this very same point!

WHERE'S YITRO?

This interpretation can also explain why Yitro himself is not mentioned in this speech. Even though Devarim 1:15-17 may sound very similar to Shmot 18:14-22, the purpose of Moshe's speech is not to give a complete historical review of every event that transpired in the desert. Instead, it focuses on this special set of laws that Moshe is about to teach.

Therefore, there is no need to mention (at this time) whose original idea it may have been to set up this hierarchal judicial system.

Instead, it is important to know that the judicial system that has been set up is there to serve the people, and it will facilitate their ability to establish themselves as God's nation in the land. [See again 27:1-8, noting again the parallel to Bamidbar chapter 11.]

WHO SENT THE SPIES?

Moshe continues his speech with the story of the "meraglim" [the spies]. As we explained, his purpose is to explain to the new generation why the first generation failed, in hope that they will

To summarize, we have shown the underlying logic behind the flow of topic in Moshe's opening speech (through at least the middle of chapter two), by considering the purpose of that speech .

THE PEP-TALK

Let's show now how the next section of this speech forms a reasonable continuation for this 'pep talk'.

In contrast to all the events that people may have viewed as a sign of

fare better. Therefore, Moshe retells those events from that perspective, blaming the people (more than their leaders) for the failure of that generation - for he wants to make sure that the people do not become fearful again (as their parents did).

Note how critical this point is; for if one understands Sefer Devarim as a review of Chumash, then he is confronted with unachievable task of resolving the obvious contradictions between these two accounts. However, once it is understood that Moshe is telling over those events as part of a 'pep-talk', it makes perfect sense that he emphasizes only the details that are relevant to the theme of his speech.

For example, as leadership is an underlying theme in Sefer Bamidbar, Parshat Shelach highlights the fault of the nation's leaders in those events. In contrast, as Moshe is worried that the nation may 'chicken out' once again, he will emphasize that generation's fear and lack of faith & motivation.

[To ascertain what really happened would require a lot of 'detective' work, but recording those events in their entirety was neither the goal of Sefer Bamidbar nor Sefer Devarim!

You could compare this to two TV cameras (one in the end zone and one on the sideline) filming a football game. Even though each camera is filming the same game, each one only shows the game for its own angle.]

THE MAAPILIM

Moshe includes the story of the "maapilim" (see 1:40-45), for it forms the conclusion of the "mergalim" incident. However that specific story, and those that follow, may have been included for an additional reason.

Moshe Rabeinu seems to be quite fearful (and rightly so) that the nation may 'chicken out' once again. In fact, realistically speaking, the people have some very good reasons to worry. Let's review them.

First of all, the last time they tried to conquer the land of Israel (see Bamidbar 14:40-45), they suffered a whopping defeat. Now Moshe may have explained that this was because God was not in their midst. However, surely the skeptics among them may have retorted that the very idea of conquering the land of Canaan was futile from the start (see Bamidbar 13:31-33).

Furthermore, only less than a year earlier, the entire Israelite nation was challenged by the army of Edom, demanding that they not dare trespass their land (see Bamidbar 20:14-21). Instead of fighting, Moshe led them through a lengthy 'by-pass road'. Surely, many of the 'right-wingers' among the people viewed this as a sign of weakness. If they couldn't stand up to the threats of Edom, how could they stand up to the threats of all the nations of Canaan!

Finally, it may look a little suspicious that Moshe's encouraging words that the time has now come to conquer the land just so happens to coincide with his announcement of retirement!

Any (or all) of the above reasons may have raised doubts among the people. Therefore, in his opening speech, Moshe must allay these fears by explaining the divine reason for those actions:

- 1) The 'maapilim' lost because God was not in their midst (see 1:42)
- 2) We didn't trespass Edom, for 'family' reasons (see 2:4-8)
- 3) We didn't trespass Moav for similar reasons (see 2:9-12)
- 4) We waited forty years because of "chet ha'mergalim" (see 2:13-17)
- 5) We didn't attack Ammon for divine reasons as well (see 2:18-23)

weakness, Moshe now goes into minute detail of how Bnei Yisrael achieved remarkable success in their military campaign against Sichon & Og (see 2:24 thru 3:20).

Note how in Moshe's account of the war against Sichon and Og, we find many more details than were recorded in Sefer Bamidbar. The reason why is simple, for that battle is Moshe's best proof (for this new generation) that God is indeed capable of helping them, and hence - 'no need to fear'.

Even the settlement of the two and half tribes in Transjordan (see 3:12-20) is presented in a positive light, for it provides addition support to Moshe's claim that it is indeed possible to successfully conquer the mighty nations of Canaan. Moshe presents those events to show that battle against Canaan has already begun, and thus far has been quite successful! Crossing the Jordan, and entering the land won't be something 'new', but rather a continuation of the task that has already been partially fulfilled.

Simply note, how Moshe concludes this section of this speech with these words of encouragement:

"And I commanded Yehoshua at that time, saying: '**Your own eyes have seen** all that Hashem has done unto these two kings; so shall the LORD do unto all the kingdoms where you go. You shall not fear them; for the LORD your God, He it is that fights for you.'" (see 3:21-22)

In case you didn't notice, we've already reached the conclusion of Parshat Devarim.

In Parshat Ve'etchanan, Moshe will continue this speech, by explaining why he himself will not be coming with them (once again, for divine reasons/ see 3:23-27).

ly"n we will continue this study of Moshe's opening speech next week. Till then,

shabbat shalom
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

1. Based on the shiur, attempt to explain the actual differences between the Torah's account of "chet ha'meraglim" here in Sefer Devarim and in Parshat Shelach.
2. Compare the account of the Bnei Yisrael's battle against Sichon and Og here in contrast to the account in Parshat Chukat. Explain why the account in Devarim lays more emphasis on the nature of these battles as conquest.
3. Recall our study of 1:9, and the phrase "ba'et ha'hee":
"And I told you AT THAT TIME saying: 'I can no longer carry the burden of leading you by MYSELF.'" (1:9)

Even though this may sound like Yitro's observation that Moshe is working too hard (see Shmot 18:13-18), it can't be for two simple reasons:

- 1) Moshe says that it was his own complaint.
- 2) The pasuk says "b'et ha'hee" - AT THAT TIME, i.e. the time that they left Har Sinai on their journey to Eretz Canaan, and Yitro came almost a year earlier (or at least some six months earlier, see Rashi Shmot 18:13).

However, there is a much better source in Parshat B'haalotcha that matches this pasuk not only chronologically, but also thematically and textually! Recall that immediately after Bnei Yisrael left Har Sinai (note Bamidbar 10:33-36), we encountered the sin of the "mitavim" (see Bamidbar 11:1-10). Let's take a look now at Moshe's reaction to that sin:

"And Moshe said to God: Why have you been so evil to me by putting the BURDEN of leading this people ("masa ha'am") upon me! Did I give birth to them? I MYSELF CAN NO LONGER CARRY THE BURDEN [to lead] this nation for it is too much for me!" (see 11:11-15)

Note how (1) this story takes place "ba'et ha'hee" - at this exact time - as Bnei Yisrael leave Har Sinai on their journey. (2) Moshe Rabeinu himself complains that he can no longer carry the burden of their leadership; and (3) we find the identical Hebrew words "lo your punishment should you not follow these forthcoming mitzvot, and the eternal option to do 'teshuva'.

uchal anochi L'VADI LA'SET et kol ha'am ha'zeh" (Bamidbar 11:14/ compare Devarim 1:9)!

Furthermore, recall God's reaction to Moshe's complaint - He takes from Moshe's spirit ["ruach"] and divides it among the seventy elders of Israel, i.e. the nation's religious leadership. Thematically, this fits in very nicely with Moshe's opening speech, for now (in Sefer Devarim) we find Moshe's leadership being passed on to a new generation of leaders. Furthermore, it is precisely the job of these national leaders to teach and clarify the laws that Moshe will now teach them in his main speech. As noted in 1:18:

"And I commanded you at that time - all of the DEVARIM that you must do."

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A SUMMARY OF THE FIRST SPEECH

The following outline reviews the main points of the first speech. It can serve as a review of this week's shiur, and preparation for next week's shiur:

A) INTRO

1:1-5 Opening narrative explaining background of the main speech. (what, when, where, etc.).

[the 'double introduction']

B) FROM HAR SINAI TO ARVOT MOAV

The reason for the 40-year delay.

1:6-11 The original trip from Har Sinai to Eretz Yisrael, (what should have happened back then, instead of now).

1:12-18 Moshe's leadership shared with the elders etc. (they will help lead, judge, and teach the laws)

1:19-40 "Chet ha'Meraglim" - the REASON why that generation did not enter the Land, and why forty years have passed. [Accented in this account is not to fear nations of Canaan like the previous generation had feared them.]

2:1-23 The journey from Kadesh, around Har Seir until Nachal Zared. The death of "Dor HaMidbar" (2:14-16)

Explaining why Edom, Moav & Amon were not trespassed.

[Edom, Moav, and Amon were not attacked due to a divine command and NOT because Bnei Yisrael were not able to fight them!]

2:24-30 The challenge of Sichon to battle, God's involvement (2:30)

2:31-3:22 The war against Sichon, and Og King of Bashan, Conquest of most of Transjordan, Inheritance of Reuven and Gad, and Menashe', and their promise to assist in the conquest of Canaan. [Note God's assurance to assist the people, based on these events in 3:20-22.]

3:23-29 Moshe's final request to see the Land.

C) INTRODUCTION TO THE MITZVOT

4:1-24 General principles regarding mitzvot in forthcoming speech,

i.e. not to add or take away, their purpose- to be a example for other nations, not to worship God through any type of intermediary after Moshe dies.

4:25-40 a 'mini- tochacha',

4:41-49 - A short narrative explaining how Moshe designated the three cities of refuge in Transjordan, followed by several introductory psukim for the forthcoming main

speech.]

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Lamentations: Putting the Mouth before the Eye

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INTRODUCTION

For over forty years preceding the destruction of the first Temple (627-586 B.C.E.), Jeremiah incessantly warned his people that Jerusalem, the Temple, and their lives were in the gravest jeopardy. The people mocked, threatened, and physically mistreated the prophet. Most scorned his message, thereby sealing their own doom.

Finally, Jeremiah's nightmarish visions became a reality. The Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem, killing and plundering, and burning the city to the ground. Other nations, including spurious allies, mocked Israel, looted her wealth, and even turned Jewish captives over to the Babylonians. The Temple was destroyed, and most of the humiliated survivors were dragged into captivity, wondering if they would ever see their homeland again.

The Book of Lamentations describes this calamity from the perspective of an eyewitness. It contains five chapters. Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 contain twenty-two verses each, and chapter 3 contains sixty-six verses (three verses per letter). Chapters 1-4 are arranged in *aleph-bet* acrostics. There is meaning in the content of Lamentations, and in its structure. Both make the book particularly poignant.

Chapter 1 casts the destroyed Jerusalem as a woman whose husband has abandoned her. While this initial imagery evokes pity, the chapter then adds that she took lovers and therefore deserved this abandonment. Israel admits that she has sinned and asks for mercy and for God to punish her enemies.

Chapter 2 asks: how could God be so harsh? The tone shifts from one of shame and despair to one of anger. There also is a shift of emphasis from Jerusalem as a victim to God as the Aggressor. At the end of the chapter, there is another plea for God to help.

Chapter 3 presents the voice of the individual who begins in a state of despair but who then regains hope. He expresses a desire to restore order and return to the pre-destruction state.

Chapter 4 is a painful step-by-step reliving of the destruction. It also contains lamenting over how the destruction could have happened, and it curses Israel's enemies.

Chapter 5 depicts the people left behind as looking at the ruins, absolutely miserable. They call on God for help, but conclude with disappointment and uncertainty as to what the future will bring.

REFLECTIONS ON THE TRAGEDY[\[1\]](#)

Chapter 1 acknowledges that the destruction of Jerusalem is God's work (1:12-15). While the main theme of chapter 1 is mourning, the author repeatedly vindicates God for the disaster, blaming it squarely on Israel's sins (see 1:5, 8, 14, 18, 20, 22).

Throughout chapter 1, the author adopts a rational, transcendent perspective. Reflecting an ordered sense of the world, the *aleph-bet* order is intact, poetically showing a calculated sense of misery.[\[2\]](#)

While chapter 1 acquits God, chapter 2 adopts a different outlook. Suddenly, the author lashes out at God:

How has the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not His footstool in the day of his anger!...He has bent His bow like an enemy...He has poured out His fury like fire... (Lam. 2:1-4)

Chapter 1 gave the author a chance to reflect on the magnitude of this tragedy: death, isolation, exile, desolation, humiliation. In this context, the point of chapter 2 is clear: although Israel may be guilty of sin, the punishment seems disproportionate to the crimes. *Nobody* should have to suffer the way Israel has. The deeper emotions of the author have shattered his initial theological and philosophical serenity.

This emotional shift is reflected in the *aleph-bet* order of chapter 2. While the chapter maintains the poetic acrostic order, the verse beginning with the letter *peh* precedes the verse beginning with *ayin*. Why would Lamentations deviate from the usual alphabetical order? At the level of *peshat*, one might appeal to the fluidity of the ancient Hebrew *aleph-bet*, where the order of *ayin* and *peh* was not yet fixed in the biblical period. If this is the case, then there is nothing unusual or meaningful about having different orders since each reflects a legitimate order at that time.^[3]

On a more homiletical level, the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 104b) offers a penetrating insight. The Hebrew word *peh* means “mouth,” and *ayin* means “eye.” The author here put his mouth, that is, words, before what he saw. In chapter 1, the author evaluates the crisis with his eyes, in that he reflects silently, and then calculates his words of response. But in chapter 2, the author responds first with words (*peh*) that emerge spontaneously and reflect his raw emotions.

In the first section of chapter 3, the author sinks further into his sorrow and despairs of his relationship with God (verses 1-20). However, in the midst of his deepest sorrow, he suddenly fills with hope in God’s ultimate fairness (3:21-41). The sudden switch in tone is fascinating:

And I said, My strength and my hope are perished from the Lord; Remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul remembers them, and is bowed down inside me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. The grace of the Lord has not ceased, and His compassion does not fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul; therefore will I hope in Him. (Lam. 3:18-24)

The final section of chapter 3 then vacillates between despair, hope in God, and a call to repentance:

Let him sit alone and be patient, when He has laid it upon him. Let him put his mouth to the dust—there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to the smiter; let him be surfeited with mockery. For the Lord does not reject forever, but first afflicts, then pardons in His abundant kindness. For He does not willfully bring grief or affliction to man...Let us search and examine our ways, and turn back to

the Lord; Let us lift up our hearts with our hands to God in heaven: We have transgressed and rebelled, and You have not forgiven. You have clothed Yourself in anger and pursued us, You have slain without pity. (Lam. 3:28-43)

In chapter 4, there are further details of the destruction. Horrors are described in starker terms, climaxing with a description of compassionate mothers who ate their own children because of the dreadful famine preceding the destruction (4:9-10). The author blames God for the destruction (4:11), blames Israel for her sins (4:13), and expresses anger at Israel's enemies (4:21-22). In both chapters 3 and 4, the poetic order remains with the *peh* before the *ayin*, reflecting the author's unprocessed painful feelings. The author's conflicting emotions create choppiness in the thematic order and logic:

Those who were slain with the sword are better than those who are slain with hunger; for these pine away, stricken by want of the fruits of the field. The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they were their food in the destruction of the daughter of my people. The Lord has accomplished His fury; He has poured out His fierce anger, and has kindled a fire in Zion, which has devoured its foundations...It was for the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, who have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her. (Lam. 4:9-13)

Chapter 5 opens with a desperate appeal to God, a profound hope that He will restore His relationship with Israel. After further descriptions of the sufferings, the book ends wondering whether the Israelites would ever renew their relationship with God:

You, O Lord, are enthroned forever; Your throne is from generation to generation. Why do You forget us forever, and forsake us for so long? Turn us to You, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. But You have utterly rejected us; You are very angry against us. (Lam. 5:19-22)

Such a painful confusion leaves the reader uneasy. The author does not propose any solutions or resolution to the state of destruction. Reflecting this passionate plea, chapter 5 has no *aleph-bet* acrostic at all. With no clear end of the exile in sight, the author loses all sense of order. Perhaps the fact that chapter 5 still contains 22 verses suggests a vestige of hope and order amidst the breakdown of the destruction and exile.

To review: the *aleph-bet* pattern goes from being completely ordered in chapter 1, to a break in that order for three chapters. The last chapter does not follow the controlled *aleph-bet* order at all, signifying a complete emotional outburst by the community. The book ends on a troubling note, questioning whether or not it is too late for Israel to renew her relationship with God.

CONCLUSION

Although Lamentations attempts to make sense of the catastrophe of the destruction, powerful and often conflicting emotions break the ordered poetic patterns. This sacred work captures the religious struggle to make sense of the world in a time of tragedy and God's ways and the effort to rebuild damaged relationships with God following a crisis.

Our emotional state in the aftermath of tragedy often follows the pattern of Lamentations—we begin with an effort to make sense of the misfortune, but then our mouths come before what we see—that is, our deeper turbulent emotions express themselves. Ideally, we come full circle until we again turn to God. Our expression of persistent hope has kept us alive as a people.

In the wake of catastrophe, people have the choice to abandon faith, or hide behind shallow expressions of faith, but even while emotionally understandable, both are incomplete responses. We must maturely accept that we do not understand everything about how God operates. At the same time, we must not negate our human perspective. We must not ignore our emotions and anxieties. In the end, we are humbled by our smallness and helplessness—and our lack of understanding of the larger picture. Through this process, the painful realities of life should lead to a higher love and awe of God.

[1] The remainder of this chapter was adapted from Hayyim Angel, "Confronting Tragedy: A Perspective from Jewish Tradition," in Angel, *Through an Opaque Lens* (NY: Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2006), pp. 279-295. This chapter is predicated on the assumption that the Book of Lamentations is a unified poem that should be treated as a literary unit. For a scholarly defense of this position, see Elie Assis, "The Unity of the Book of Lamentations," *CBQ* 71 (2009), pp. 306-329.

[2] Walter Bruggemann observes that Psalms 37 and 145 also are arranged according to the *aleph-bet* sequence and similarly display orderliness (*Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit* [Oregon: Cascade Books, 2007], p. 3).

[3] See Aaron Demsky, “A Proto-Canaanite Abecedary Dating from the Period of the Judges and its Implications for the History of the Alphabet,” *Tel Aviv* 4:1-2 (1977), pp. 14-27; Mitchell First, “Using the *Pe-Ayin* Order of the Abecedaries of Ancient Israel to Date the Book of Psalms,” *JSOT* 38:4 (2014), pp. 471-485. First notes that in the Dead Sea text of Lamentations, the *peh* verse precedes the *ayin* verse in chapter 1, as well. For an attempt to explain the intentional deviation of the acrostics based on word patterns, see Ronald Benun, “Evil and the Disruption of Order: A Structural Analysis of the Acrostics in Ekha,” at http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_55.pdf.