

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**T**he first verse of Devarim, the fifth and culminating book of the Torah, sounds prosaic. "These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan -- in the wilderness, on the plain opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahav." There is no hint of drama in these words. But the sages of the Talmud found one, and it is life-changing.

What is odd in the verse is the last place-name: Di-zahav. What and where is this place? It hasn't been mentioned before, nor is it mentioned again anywhere else in Tanakh. But the name is tantalising. It seems to mean, "Enough gold." Gold is certainly something we have heard about before. It was the metal of which the calf was made while Moses was on the mountain receiving the Torah from God. This was one of the great sins of the wilderness years. Might the enigmatic mention of a place called "Enough gold" have something to do with it?

From these clues and cues, the sages inferred a remarkable drama. This is what they said: Moses spoke audaciously [hiti'ach devarim] towards Heaven... The school of R. Jannai learned this from the words Di-zahav. What do these words mean? They said in the school of R. Jannai: Thus spoke Moses before the Holy One, blessed be He: "Sovereign of the Universe, the silver and gold [zahav] which You showered on Israel until they said, 'Enough' [dai], was what caused them to make the calf... R. Hiyya bar Abba said: It is like the case of a man who had a son. He bathed him and anointed him and gave him plenty to eat and drink and hung a purse around his neck and set him down at the door of a house of ill-repute. How could he help sinning? (Berakhot 32a)

Moses, in this dramatic re-reading, is portrayed as counsel for the defence of the Jewish people. Yes, he admits to God, the people did indeed commit a sin. But it was You who provided them with the opportunity and the temptation. If the Israelites had not had gold in the wilderness, they could not have made a golden calf. Besides which, who needs gold in a wilderness? There was only one reason the Israelites had gold with them: because they were following Your instructions. You said: "Tell the people that every man is to ask his neighbour and every woman is to ask her neighbour for

objects of silver and gold" (Ex. 11:2). Therefore, do not blame them. Please, instead, forgive them.

This is a wonderful passage in its own right. It represents what the sages called chutzpah kelapei Shemaya, "audacity toward heaven." (Sanhedrin 105a. We tend to think of chutzpah as a Yiddish word, but it is in fact Aramaic and comes to us from the Babylonian Talmud). The question, though, is: why did the sages choose this passage to make the point?

After all, the episode of the Golden Calf is set out in full in Exodus 32-34. The Torah tells us explicitly how daring Moses was in prayer. First, when God tells him what the people have done, Moses immediately responds by saying, "Lord, why should Your anger burn against Your people?... Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that He brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth?'" (Ex. 32:11-12). This is audacious. Moses tells God that, regardless of what the people have done, it will be His reputation that will suffer if it becomes known that He did not lead the Israelites to freedom, but instead killed them in the desert.

Then, descending the mountain and seeing what the people have done, he does his single most daring act. He smashes the tablets, engraved by God Himself. The audacity continues. Moses goes back up the mountain and says to God, "These people have indeed committed a great sin. They have made themselves an idol of gold. But now, please forgive their sin -- but if not, then blot me out of the book You have written." (Ex. 32:31-32). This is unprecedented language. This should be the passage to which the sages attached an account of Moses' boldness in defence of his people. Why then attach it here, to an obscure place-name in the first verse of Deuteronomy, where it is radically out of keeping with the plain sense of the verse. (Note, for example, that Rashi gives almost the opposite interpretation.)

I believe the answer is this. Throughout Devarim Moses is relentless in his criticism of the people: "From the day you left Egypt until you arrived



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here, you have been rebellious against the Lord... You have been rebellious against the Lord ever since I have known you." (Deut. 9:7, 24). His critique extends to the future: "If you have been rebellious against the Lord while I am still alive and with you, how much more will you rebel after I die!" (Deut. 31:27). Even the curses in Deuteronomy, delivered by Moses himself, are bleaker than those in Leviticus 26 and lack any note of consolation.

(According to the Talmud, Megillah 31b, Moses delivered the curses in Leviticus but the words themselves came from God; the curses in Deuteronomy were formulated by Moses himself. Obviously, the fact that they are in the Torah means that God ratified them.)

Criticism is easy to deliver but hard to bear. It is all too easy for people to close their ears, or even turn the criticism around ("He's blaming us, but he should be blaming himself. After all, he was in charge"). What does it take for criticism to be heeded? The people have to know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the leader is always ready to defend them. They have to know that he cares for them, wants the best for them, and is prepared to take personal risks for their sake. Only when people know for certain that you want their good, do they listen to you when you criticise them.

That is what led the sages to give the interpretation they did to the place-name Di-zahav in the first verse of Devarim. Why was Moses able to be as critical as he was in the last month of his life? Because the people he was talking to knew that he had defended them and their parents in his prayers for Divine forgiveness, that he had taken the risk of challenging God, that he had declined God's offer to abandon the Israelites and begin again with him -- in short, that his whole life as a leader was dedicated to doing what was the best for the people. When you know that about someone, you listen to them even when they criticise you.

One of my all-time heroes is the great Hassidic rabbi, Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev (1740-1809). Many stories are told of how he interceded with Heaven on behalf of the Jewish people. My favourite, doubtless apocryphal, story is this: Levi Yitzhak once saw a Jew smoking in the street on Shabbat. He said, "My friend,

surely you have forgotten that it is Shabbat today." "No," said the other, "I know what day it is." "Then surely you have forgotten that smoking is forbidden on Shabbat." "No, I know it is forbidden." "Then surely, you must have been thinking about something else when you lit the cigarette." "No," the other replied, "I knew what I was doing." At this, Levi Yitzhak turned his eyes upward to heaven and said, "Sovereign of the universe, who is like Your people Israel? I give this man every chance, and still he cannot tell a lie!"

The great leaders of Israel were the great defenders of Israel, people who saw the good within the not-yet-good. That is why they were listened to when they urged people to change and grow. That is how the sages saw Moses. This was the man who had the audacity to win forgiveness for the people who had made the Golden Calf.

It is easy to criticise, hard to defend. But the Midrash about Moses tells us a life-changing idea: If you seek to change someone, make sure that you are willing to help them when they need your help, defend them when they need your defence, and see the good in them, not just the bad. Anyone can complain, but we have to earn the right to criticise. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

"Zion shall be redeemed because of her moral justice and her children shall return to her because of her compassionate righteousness" (Isaiah 1:27). The Shabbat before the bleak day of Tisha Be'Av, the fast commemorating the destruction of both Holy Temples, is called Shabbat Hazon, the Shabbat of Vision. This title is based on the prophetic reading of that day which starts: "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz which he saw concerning Judea and Jerusalem..." (Isaiah 1:1).

But a "vision" usually refers to a positive sight intensified with a Divine revelation, a manifestation of the Divine presence as when "the elite youth of Israel... envisaged the Almighty" (Exodus 24:11). Likewise, in our liturgy, we pray in the Amida: "May our eyes envisage Your return to Zion in compassion." Isaiah's vision, however, is one of moral turpitude and religious hypocrisy: "Woe to the sinning nation, people heavy with transgression...My soul despises your festivals...your hands are filled with blood...." Where is the positive "vision" of Divine grace?

The answer may be found in last week's portion, where we read about the journeys of the Israelites through the desert – perhaps a metaphor for the journeys of the Israelites through history. "And Moses transcribed the places of origin toward their

places of destinations and these are the places of destinations toward their places of origin" (Numbers 33:2).

This verse contains an internal contradiction: Where do we ever find a point of destination leading to a point of origin?

If your point of origin is the place where you discovered your personal or national destiny, you must always return to it, no matter how many places you settle along the way, in pursuit of your original destiny.

Israel began her historic journey with Abraham in Hebron, where God charged the first Hebrew with our universal mission: "Through you shall be blessed all the families of the earth" (Genesis 12:13). God, likewise, revealed what it was that Abraham was to teach the world: "I have known him in order that he command his children ... to observe the path of the Lord, to do compassionate righteousness and moral justice" (Gen. 18:19). This is the Abrahamic mission and destiny, and so wherever Israel may travel, she must always return to her roots and purpose – being in Hebron, where her journey began.

It is fascinating that in Hebrew past and future tenses are inextricably bound together; a single letter vav can transform a verb in the past tense into the future tense, and vice versa.

Similarly, when used in the context of time, the word "lifnei" means "before" (as in "Simeon was born one year before [lifnei] Reuben"), whereas, when used in the context of space the same word means "ahead" (as in "Simeon is walking one step ahead of [lifnei] Reuben").

Temporally, the Hebron experience came before our Babylonian experience, but Hebron and its message – as well as its geographic locus – was always in Israel's future; the Cave of the Patriarchs is both the fount of Israel's mission and the guide-post for Israel's ultimate destiny. It serves both as a burial site (kever) and a womb (rehem) – and both of these words are used interchangeably by the Talmudic Sages.

Hence when Moses makes reference to God's command that we inherit and conquer the land of Israel (Deuteronomy 1:8), it is immediately followed by the necessity to establish a proper moral, judicial system; and when Moses deals with the rebellion of the scouts, he excludes Caleb from punishment, since he was in favor of conquering the Land of Israel. What made him stand virtually alone with God, Moses and Joshua? Our Sages explain that he began the reconnaissance journey with a side trip to Hebron to garner inspiration from the patriarch who established the mission in the first place. Caleb went back in order to properly forge ahead.

The true vision in the first chapter of Isaiah is not the tragedy of Israel's backsliding or the reality of Israel's hypocritical sacrifices; the inspiring prophetic vision – from which this tragic Shabbat is named – is

the vision which concludes the prophetic reading, "Zion shall be redeemed because of her moral justice, and her children shall return to her because of her compassionate righteousness" (Isaiah 1:27).

God guarantees that Israel will return to her Abrahamic mission and that she will ultimately arrive at her point of origin. At that time, with the Third Temple, the entire world will be blessed by Israel's message of a God of moral justice and compassionate righteousness. ©2018 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

In summing up the story of the Jewish people, from Egyptian slavery to the eve of their entry into their promised homeland, our great teacher and leader Moshe minces no words. He reminds the people of Israel of their shortcomings and of their transgressions during the 40 years that he has led them. There is very little bitterness in his narrative but rather just the damning truth of hard facts and known circumstances.

Though this fifth book of the Bible will contain many commandments and legal matters in it, the overall message of the book is one of historical perspective -- of the past and of the future, of the weaknesses and foibles of the people and of their greatness and search for spirituality and holiness. The rabbis taught us that it is better to hear criticisms and chastisement from Moshe who loves us, than compliments and blandishments from Bilaam, who essentially hates us.

The truth is that all of us find it difficult to accept criticism easily and coolly. Our ego flares up and we immediately build up a wall of resentment and excuses in order to deflect the criticism leveled against us. But that is certainly a self-defeating mechanism that only reinforces our shortcomings and prevents us from taking the necessary steps to bring about self-improvement. The Talmud itself bemoans the fact that the diminution of the generations has left us with a society that finds it difficult to accept criticism, and a lack of people who can administer criticism correctly. That certainly seems to be the case in our world today as well.

The reading of the first chapter of the prophet Isaiah, from which this Shabbat derives its name -- Chazon -- is a strongly worded indictment of the Jewish society in first Temple times and provides the background as to why destruction and exile followed. The prophet will complain later that the people were not attentive to his words and in fact inflicted physical harm upon him for having the temerity to address them in such a fashion.

The great men of Mussar over the past two centuries have placed a greater emphasis on being able to hear the opinions and criticisms of others. Needless to say, this attitude did not prove to be overly

popular even amongst religious Jews. Yet, it is abundantly clear that having a closed mind and deaf ears leads to great societal problems, both personal and national.

I would say that, in my opinion, it is one of the more serious failings that exists in our attitudes and behavior patterns. Smugness and self-righteous contentment are truly enemies of progress and spiritual advancement. The Lord Himself, so to speak, asks of us to come, debate and discuss behavior and problems directly with the Almighty. But the fear of criticism and the lack of the ability to truly digest such criticism prevents many such a discussion or debate from somehow taking place. A little less ego and a lot more humility and attentiveness to others would certainly stand us in good stead. ©2018 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**here is a Talmudic story that reveals a lot about how we should react when facing adversity. It is one that is obviously an appropriate one to focus upon just days before Tisha B'Av, the 9th of Av, when both Temples were destroyed in Jerusalem.

The story goes as follows: Rabbi Yossi said: "Once I was traveling on the road and entered one of the ruins of Jerusalem to pray." Elijah appeared and said, "My son, why did you go into the ruin." Rabbi Yossi responded, "To pray." Elijah then said to Rabbi Yossi, "You should have prayed on the road." Rabbi Yossi answered, "I feared that a passerby would interrupt me." To which Elijah said, "You could have then said a short prayer."

Rabbi Yossi concluded that he learnt several principles from the words of Elijah. First, it is important not to enter a ruin. Second, it is permissible to pray on the road, as long as the prayer is short. (Berakhot 3a)

What is the message that underlies these principles? Rabbi Shlomo Riskin argues that it's important to recognize that Rabbi Yossi was a sage who was suffering, living as he did in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple. The prophet tells us that Elijah will announce the coming of the Messiah. Elijah is therefore known as the teacher, par excellence, of how to achieve redemption. Thus, Rabbi Yossi states, "I have learned from Elijah important ideas concerning how to turn destruction into rebuilding, galut into ge'ulah, exile into redemption."

It is first of all important not to enter into rooms that represent tragedy and not to get side tracked by wallowing in disaster. Elijah was teaching Rabbi Yossi to stay on the road, to stay the course of human action

and effort to repair the Jewish people, an act through which the whole world will be repaired.

But Elijah also taught a second message. He was teaching that on that road to redemption, it is important to pray. But the prayer itself should be short in order to make time for investing incredible amounts of energy into human activity and initiative.

Life requires a combination of action and prayer. History is a partnership between human endeavor and divine intervention.

A story is told of Rabbi Isaac Blazer, Reb Itzele Petersburger. One day, a rumor spread that he was a Zionist. The community decided that he would be fired. After all, in the prayers we speak of God as the builder of Jerusalem. Yet, Reb Itzele was declaring that he would do his share in building Jerusalem himself. Reb Itzele turned to one of the leaders of the community and responded, "But when your daughter was sick, did you not seek out a doctor, even though God is spoken of in the prayers as the healer of Israel?" And turning to another, Reb Itzele said, "don't you do all you can to make a living, even though in our prayers we speak of God as the provider of sustenance?" If health and sustenance is a combined effort of human beings and God, so too in Zionism, prayer must work hand in hand with action.

When one acts, one must act as if everything depends on us and when one prays, our must pray as if everything depends on God. We must live a life where we honor both sides of these two seemingly contradictory directives - action and prayer.

As we prepare our prayers for Tisha B'Av we must make them ones of meaning and concentration, yet realize that full service of God is incomplete without action on the part of each and every one of us. ©2018 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

#### **RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN**

### **Open Your Eyes & See**

**I**n his final words to the people, Moshe reminds them that they need not have spent these forty years of wandering had they had faith in Hashem and accepted the positive words of Calev ben Yefuneh and Yehoshua bin Nun instead of the negative report from the other spies. The people cried the entire night and Hashem punished them for their lack of faith in Him.

The Torah reports Moshe's words to the people: "But you did not wish to ascend and you rebelled against the word of Hashem your Elokim. And you slandered in your tents and said, 'because of Hashem's hatred for us did He take us out of the land of Egypt and deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us. To where shall we ascend, our brothers have melted our hearts saying, a people greater and

taller than we, cities great and fortified to the heavens, and even children of giants have we seen there'. And I said to you, 'do not break down and do not fear them. Hashem your Elokim will do battle for you like everything that He did for you in Egypt before your eyes. And in the wilderness as you have seen Hashem, your Elokim carried you, as a man carries his son, on the entire way that you traveled, until you arrived at this place. Yet in this matter you do not believe in Hashem, your Elokim. Who goes before you on the way to seek out for you a place for you to encamp with fire by night to show you the road that you should travel and with a cloud by day. And Hashem heard the sound of your words and He was incensed and He swore saying. 'If even a man of these people, this evil generation, shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers. Except for Calev the son of Yefuneh he shall see it and to him I shall give the land upon which he trod and to his children because he followed Hashem wholeheartedly.'"

Moshe says to the people, "And in the wilderness as you have seen Hashem, your Elokim carried you, as a man carries his son, on the entire way that you traveled, until you arrived at this place." Rashi quotes the Zohar saying, "When bandits came to take the son captive the father took his son from in front of him and placed his son behind him. When a wolf came from behind the father put his son in front of him. When bandits came in front and a wolf came behind him the father put his son on his arms and fought against them." Hashem placed a pillar of fire between the B'nei Yisrael and the Egyptians that protected the Jews from the arrows of the Egyptians while at the same time dispersing the waters of the Red Sea so the B'nei Yisrael could travel on dry ground. The image presented here is similar to one from Hashem when He tells Moshe to say to the B'nei Yisrael, "You have seen what I did to Egypt and that I brought you out on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me." An eagle flies higher than any other bird and so the eagle can place the young on top of its wing and it will be protected from any predator below. One might ask why the metaphor was changed as any change in the Torah's wording is to be examined closely. When the B'nei Yisrael first left Egypt they were spiritually infants and unable to "fly" on their own. Hashem needed to protect them by placing them on His wing. After undergoing many trials in the desert, they were able to stand as a young child but they still were in need of Hashem's protection.

Moshe told the B'nei Yisrael. "Yet in this matter you do not believe in Hashem, your Elokim." Rashi explains that the people failed to believe that Hashem would bring them into the land. They could not believe that the report of Calev and Yehoshua was enough to guarantee that Hashem would bring them into the land. The Or HaChaim believed that Moshe is criticizing the people for not believing that Hashem was with them to

protect them. The Or HaChaim brings as proof for his theory the words of the people when they say, "Is it possible that Hashem is in our midst or not." This was true in spite of the fact that the B'nei Yisrael were witnessing daily many miracles which should have alleviated that doubt. The Torah states, "Who goes before you on the way to seek out for you a place for you to encamp with fire by night to show you the road that you should travel and with a cloud by day. And Hashem heard the sound of your words and He was incensed and He swore saying. If even a man of these people, this evil generation, shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers."

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin, the Aznayim L'Torah explains that we first learn that the aspect of Hashem that heard the people was the quality of rachamim, mercy, rather than the quality of din, judgment. The second lesson that we learn is that Hashem heard a kol, a sound. Our Rabbis tell us that the word kol is associated with lashon hara, spreading gossip (literally: evil tongue). Hashem understood that we were frightened and believed the words of the ten bad spies. The problem is that they also claimed that Hashem did not like the Jewish People. "And you slandered in your tents and said, 'because of Hashem's hatred for us did He take us out of the land of Egypt and deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us'." It was possible for Hashem to disregard the people's belief in their leaders' evil report, but Hashem could not forgive the people for saying that He hated them. This was the worst form of lashon hara for it spread a falsehood that could not be excused

Even today we see a breakthrough in the area of science which enables us to cure a rare illness and people focus on the brilliance of the doctors who discovered this cure. Few if any focus on the fact that Hashem provided that cure from within the realm of the Nature which He created. Seldom does anyone recognize Hashem's hand in providing that cure through the eyes of a doctor. It is much easier for us to view in hindsight the great miracles which Hashem performed for the B'nei Yisrael than it is to be able to see those miracles which happen all around us regularly. But this is a skill which we can hone within our own experiences. We can learn to see Hashem's hand in everything around us if we can only open our eyes and our minds to a different perspective. May we each learn to recognize Hashem's presence and may we be worthy then to fully possess this land that was promised to our forefathers. ©2018 Rabbi D.S. Levin

**RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS**

## **Who Wrote Sefer Devarim?**

I'm always baffled on the differences in style and content that appear in the book of Devarim in

contrast to the preceding four books of our Torah. Any serious student of Torah would notice a host of variations between these texts and the obvious question is "Why?"

Let me explain. First the language is different. In Devarim, Moshe our teacher often speaks in the first person something that is not found in the first four books of the Torah. Second, there are blatant disparities when contrasting the book of Devarim to the preceding books. For example, the differences in the language of the Ten Commandments. The obvious inclusion of additional words in the text in Devarim as well as a host of laws which do not appear in the preceding books. The section dealing with the blessings and rebukes are markedly different. One can therefore ask the question as to why this discrepancy? Was this book written by someone else? Is it G-d driven as the other books or was it written by Moshe?

These questions are indeed the discussion of our sages as well.

When one reads the commandments of Shabbat as it appears in the book of Shmot and Devarim, two divergent languages appear; "Zachor" and "Shamor". Which one appeared on the Ten Commandments? Or did they both appear? Our Rabbis state that these two languages were said at one time, something that no human can achieve. So that each time the Decalogue appeared, the second language was also used.

But the questions still abound? What about all the other dissimilarities in the book of Devarim? The additional laws-the additional curses and blessings-how were they written? Were they written and given by G-D or was it Moshe's words?

Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky author of the book "Emes L'Yaakov" develops an interesting approach. He claims that there are times in the Torah that we see the word written in one way yet we read it in another way. Examples of this can be found in the portion of Ki Tavo, in which the Torah writes one language, yet we vocalize it very differently. This phenomenon is referred to as the axiom of "Kri and Ktiv". He therefore posits the innovative notion that the differences between the text in Dvarim and the conflicting texts in the other sections of the Torah are just an example of this principle of "Kri and Ktiv", in which one time it appears as we should read it and the next time it appears as it is written or visa versa.

I believe that perhaps there is another explanation to these apparent differences.

In defining how the Torah was given to the Jewish people, the Bais Halevi states that on the original Decalogue were written the unwritten Torah as well ( The Torah shbeal Peh). When the second set of tablets were given however, the Oral Torah was omitted. This omission made the Jewish people an integral part in the transmission of the Torah. Before

they were outsiders looking at the text as it appeared in writing. Now that the Oral law was not written, the Jewish people were charged to be intimately involved in the transmission, and they became the conduit for the receiving and the transmission of the Oral Torah. They fundamentally became the unwritten law!

It is this line of reasoning that I believe explains the blatant disparities from the book of Deuteronomy to the other four preceding books. I would like to offer the theory that the book of Dvarim is the first example of the Oral law as interpreted by our teacher Moses. Its importance and value remains equal to the other books but it represents the beginnings of the elucidation and expounding of the preceding written Torah and the meanings of those words. In essence then, Moshe our teacher in the book of Devarim provided the first example of the exposition of the preceding books of the Torah; the "Torah Shbeal peh", the unwritten Torah. Using this reasoning we can easily explain the contrast in language, style and content of the book of Devarim when compared to the other books and arrive possibly at the conclusion that one book is an explanation of the others.

When I presented this theory to my esteemed colleague and Rabbi in West Hartford he commented that perhaps this is the intent of the words that appear at the beginning of Devarim that "Hoil Moshe beer et hatorah hazot", Moshe began to explain this Torah.

I believe it is! ©2009 Rabbi Mordechai Weiss - Rabbi Mordechai Weiss is the former Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigal Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford and the Hebrew Academy of Atlantic County where together he served for over forty years . He and his wife D'vorah live in Efrat. All comments are welcome at ravmordechai@aol.com

#### **RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

### **Speaking Louder**

**M**oshe is saying his last good-byes to his beloved nation. He stands at Israel's border and reviews forty years of trials and tribulations, the good times and the bad, and how his nation Israel matured to become the inheritor of the Promised Land. The first verse in this week's portion alludes to the ensuing topics of discussion. The Golden Calf, the incident with the spies, and the time when Israel faltered at the idol Ba'al Pe'or are amongst the many issues that are re-examined.

But the Torah defines Moshe's rebuke by confining it to a specific time frame. The Torah tells us that only "after smiting Sichon, king of the Amorites, and (the giant) Og, king of Bashan, did Moshe begin explaining this Torah (rebuke) to them." (Deuteronomy 1:4)

The fact that the Torah makes a point of stating that the reproofs occurred only after Moshe smote two powerful enemies has obvious connotations. Rashi explains: "if the Jews were to say, 'what has Moshe

done for us? Has he brought us into the Land? How does he have the right to rebuke us?' Moshe thus waited until the defeat of the last two major enemies before rebuking the nation."

Perhaps Moshe wanted to tell us a bit more.

Reb Mendel Kaplan (1913-1985) was a Rebbe at the Talmudical Yeshiva of Philadelphia from 1965 until he passed away. In the later years, he would conduct an early morning class with a select group of students. He would study with them Daas Chachma U'Mussar, the magnum opus of his Rebbe, Rabbi Yeruchum Levovitz, the Mashgiach of the Mirror Yeshiva of Europe and later Shanghai. Each day the group would meet before Shacharis (morning prayers) and listen to their elderly Rebbe discuss deep philosophical issues concerning the nature of man and the profound eternal struggle he faces.

One night a heavy snow covered the streets of Philadelphia. As the boys trudged into the classroom they were dazzled by the view of the dawn breaking over the white blanket that softly covered the frozen ground. But an even more amazing sight beheld then inside the classroom. Rav Mendel was sitting at his desk wearing his boots, gloves, and an overcoat that was as warm as his expression. "Today we will learn the real Mussar (ethics)," he smiled. "Don't take off your boots and coats." He closed the large tome on his desk and pointed to six shovels neatly stacked in the corner of the classroom.

With that, he took a shovel, walked outside, and began to lead the boys in shoveling a path from the dormitories to the Bais Medrash where the entire school would soon conduct their morning prayers.

Moshe knew that for forty years he had admonished his nation on issues of faith, trust in Hashem, and belief in the prophets. He had put his honor on the line, as he constantly defended their misdeeds. He prayed for them as they battled with Amalek and prayed for them when G-d's wrath was upon them. But he had yet to do physical battle.

The call came. Moshe had to fight the most notorious and powerful rulers of the region, Sichon and Og. They were stronger and bigger and surely more aggressive than he was. His faith was on the line. He had to teach real Mussar. Only after conquering those two foes, showing his people that he too can get down in the trenches, did he begin to admonish the nation for forty years of various improprieties.

Sometimes, if you'd like your friend to become as pure as snow, you can't just talk about it. You have to shovel it. ©2018 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

**RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**A**s he begins to give the Children of Israel rebuke, Moshe says: "The Almighty, the God of your fathers, should add (to the number of your

people) -- similar to you -- a thousand fold" (Deut. 1:11).

Why did Moshe add the words, "similar to you" when giving them a blessing for increased multitudes?

Rabbi Leibel Eger explains that since Moshe was reproving the people for their errors, he wanted to make sure that they would not feel depressed and discouraged by his criticism. Therefore, he told them that he did not consider them to be evil, but rather there should be a thousandfold more just like them!

Our lesson: If we need to admonish someone, then the goal is for them to change. To do that, the person must feel good about himself and feel that you value him. Therefore, 1) don't condemn the person 2) find something positive to praise 3) gently show the person the negative results of his behavior 4) set out the benefits to him for changing his actions. Anyone can make a person feel awful; it takes a real artisan to build someone up. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2018 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

**RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## Haftorah

**T**his week's haftorah concludes the three week series regarding the Jewish people's exile and the destruction of their Bais Hamikdash. This final reading of rebuke goes down in history as the strongest message of reprimand ever delivered to the Jewish people. The prophet Yeshaya depicts the moral conduct of the Jews to be the most corrupt and wicked since the days of Sedom and Gemorah. He declares the Jews worse than the animals, and says in the name of Hashem, "The ox knows his master and the donkey his owner's feeding tray but My nation doesn't know and doesn't even consider Me. Woe guilty people, heavy with sin, evil and corrupt children who forsook Hashem and disgraced Israel's Holy One." (1:3,4) Yeshaya continues with harsh words of chastisement, and says, "Why should you continue to be beaten if you just increase your straying? From head to toe there is no clear spot, only stabs, bruises and open wounds. But you have not treated them, not bandaged them or even softened them." (1:5,6) The prophet indicates that after all the beatings they have received the Jewish people haven't even made an attempt to rectify their faults.

Yeshaya then concentrated on the Jewish service in the Bais Hamikdash and attacked them even on that count. He expressed that Hashem was displeased with their sacrifices and lacked interest in their service. Hashem says, "When you come to see Me who asked you to trample on My courtyard? Don't continue bringing useless offerings; your incense is disgusting to Me. I cannot tolerate your gatherings on Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh, and I despise your festivals and celebrations; they're too much bother for Me." (1:12,13) The Jewish people were going through



the motions of Judaism but lacked any level of sincerity. They assembled in the Bais Hamikdash during the holiday seasons but did not dedicate their efforts to Hashem, rather to themselves. Hashem therefore referred to those gatherings as theirs rather than His. Even their prayers, their direct line to Hashem, were being rejected. Yeshaya said in the name of Hashem, "When you stretch out your hands in supplication I will ignore you; even when you increase your prayers I won't listen because your hands are full of blood." (1:15) These last words refer to the increasing number of murders and crimes that were taking place amongst the Jewish people, even in the Bais Hamikdash proper. Yeshaya said that Hashem had literally closed the door on His people and was not interested in seeing or hearing from them anymore.

Suddenly, we discover a complete change in nature and the prophet extends the Jewish people an open invitation. Hashem says, "Please go and reconcile, if your sins are likened to scarlet they will be whitened like snow and if they are like deep red crimson they will be like white wool. If you consent and listen then you will eat the goodness of the land." (1:18,19) This seems to indicate a total reversal of direction. Moments earlier, the prophet proclaimed that Hashem had absolutely no interest in His people and despised their trampling on His property. Hashem was so angry and disgusted with them that He severed all lines of communication. And now, one passage later Hashem was prepared to brighten and whiten the Jewish people to the extent of glistening snowflakes?!

The answer to this perplexing message is found in the insightful words of Chazal in explanation of a puzzling passage in Shir Hashirim. Shlomo Hamelech presents the overall status of the Jewish people shortly before their bitter exile from their homeland. They project themselves to Hashem in the following manner, "I am asleep but my heart is awake." (Shir Hashirim

5:2) Rashi (ad loc.) quotes the comment of Chazal in the Pesikta explaining the Jewish people's response.

They said that they fell into a deep slumber and basically abandoned their service of Hashem but their heart, Hashem himself would



always remains awake. He doesn't permit them to disappear from the scene and continuously sends them opportunities to return to Him. He consistently sends His prophets to awaken His people even from their deep comatized state.

This is the hidden secret of the Jewish people's eternal existence. From the vantage point of their actions, the Jews at that time fell into a deep coma and developed the most corrupt and immoral standards conceivable. They did not demonstrate any inner interest of being with Hashem or any sincerity regarding their service to Him. But Hashem, the heart and pulse of the Jewish nation retained His interest in His people. His love for them is so great that He never gives up on them. And so, when their actions were so corrupt that they didn't even deserve "the time of day" from Hashem, He didn't forget His people. He beckoned them to reconcile their ways and informed them that He was prepared to cleanse them from all of their sins. This experience reinforces the fact that Hashem is forever waiting for His people to return. He patiently awaits that glorious moment when all of His people will finally proclaim, "You are our father and we are Your sons!" May this day come speedily in our times. ©2018 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

### **Weekly Dvar**

**T**he best part about books is that you can always look back at parts that are either unclear, or parts that you've missed or liked, and the Torah is no exception. With that in mind, though, why do we need a whole Sefer (Devarim, the book of Deuteronomy) dedicated to review the first 4 books, when all we'd have to do is look back and examine them? Separately, why would you start a book of review with words of rebuke, as our Parsha does?

As Rabbi Twerski points out, the answer lies in a quote by Shlomo Hamelech (King Solomon), who said: "A conceited fool has no desire for understanding, but only wants to express his own views (18:2)." What's the point of a past if we don't learn from it? And what's the point of learning from our mistakes if we don't keep what we've learned and integrate it into our future? As we get closer to Tisha B'av, when both Beit Hamikdashim (Temples) were destroyed on the same day, the question applies even more.. Didn't the Jews learn from the destruction of the first Temple merely a few hundred years prior? Do we learn from the destruction of both Temples so many years later? There's a whole Sefer in front of us pointing its finger at itself and the four volumes before it, begging us to read it, and read it again, until we find the meaning intended for us, and use it to enforce what we WILL do. It's the thirst of knowledge of our past that will lead to the accomplishments of our future. ©2018 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.