

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L**

### Covenant & Conversation

**A**t the beginning of Devarim, Moses reviews the history of the Israelites' experience in the wilderness, beginning with the appointment of leaders throughout the people, heads of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. He continues: "And I charged your judges at that time, 'Hear the disputes between your people and judge fairly, whether the case is between two Israelites or between an Israelite and a foreigner residing among you. Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of anyone, for judgment belongs to God. Bring me any case too hard for you, and I will hear it.'" (Deut. 1:16-17)

Thus at the outset of the book in which he summarized the entire history of Israel and its destiny as a holy people, he already gave priority to the administration of justice: something he would memorably summarize in a later chapter (16:20) in the words, "Justice, justice, shall you pursue." The words for justice, *tzedek* and *mishpat*, are repeated, recurring themes of the book. The root *tz-d-k* appears eighteen times in Devarim; the root *sh-f-t*, forty-eight times.

Justice has seemed, throughout the generations, to lie at the beating heart of Jewish faith. Albert Einstein memorably spoke of "the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, an almost fanatical love of justice, and the desire for personal independence -- these are the features of the Jewish tradition which make me thank my lucky stars that I belong to it." In the course of a television programme I made for the BBC I asked Hazel Cosgrove, the first woman to be appointed as a judge in Scotland, and an active member of the Edinburgh Jewish community, what had led her to choose law as a career, she replied as if it was self-evident, "Because Judaism teaches: Justice, justice shall you pursue."

One of the great Jewish lawyers of our time, Alan Dershowitz, is about to bring out a book about Abraham, whom he sees as the first Jewish lawyer, "the patriarch of the legal profession: a defense lawyer

for the damned who is willing to risk everything, even the wrath of God, in defense of his clients," the founder not just of monotheism but of a long line of Jewish lawyers. Dershowitz gives a vivid description of Abraham's prayer on behalf of the people of Sodom ("Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?") as a courtroom drama, with Abraham acting as lawyer for the citizens of the town, and God, as it were, as the accused. This was the forerunner of a great many such episodes in Torah and Tanakh, in which the prophets argued the cause of justice with God and with the people.

In modern times, Jews reached prominence as judges in America: among them Brandeis, Cardozo, and Felix Frankfurter. Ruth Bader Ginsburg was the first Jewish woman to be appointed to the Supreme Court. In Britain, between 1996 and 2008, two of Britain's three Lord Chief Justices were Jewish: Peter Taylor and Harry Woolf. In Germany in the early 1930s, though Jews were 0.7 per cent of the population, they represented 16.6 per cent of lawyers and judges.

One feature of Tanakh is noteworthy in this context. Throughout the Hebrew Bible some of the most intense encounters between the prophets and God are represented as courtroom dramas. Sometimes, as in the case of Moses, Jeremiah and Habakkuk, the plaintiff is humanity or the Jewish people. In the case of Job it is an individual who has suffered unfairly. The accused is God himself. The story is told by Elie Wiesel of how a case was brought against God by the Jewish prisoners in a concentration camp during the Holocaust. (The Trial of God, Schocken, 1995. The story is believed to be fictional, though on one occasion Wiesel said that it happened and that he was there.) At other times, it is God who brings a case against the children of Israel.

The word the Hebrew Bible uses for these unique dialogues between heaven and earth is *riv*, which means a law-suit, and it derives from the idea that at the heart of the relationship between God and humanity -- both in general, and specifically in relation to the Jewish people -- is covenant, that is, a binding agreement, a mutual pledge, based on obedience to God's law on the part of humans, and on God's promise of loyalty and love on the part of heaven. (On the subject in general, see Anson Laytner, *Arguing with God: A Jewish Tradition*, Jason Aronson, 1977.) Thus either side can, as it were, bring the other to court on

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated  
in memory of Rachel Mintz  
Rachel Menucha bas Tzivia, z"l  
by Debra Markowitz & David Kaplan

grounds of failure to fulfill their undertakings.

Three features mark Judaism as a distinctive faith. First is the radical idea that when God reveals himself to humans He does so in the form of law. In the ancient world, God was power. In Judaism, God is order, and order presupposes law. In the natural world of cause and effect, order takes the form of scientific law. But in the human world, where we have freewill, order takes the form of moral law. Hence the name of the Mosaic books: Torah, which means 'direction, guidance, teaching,' but above all 'law.' The most basic meaning of the most fundamental principle of Judaism, Torah min ha-Shamayim, 'Torah from Heaven,' is that God, not humans, is the source of binding law. (Not the only meaning, to be sure. See Rambam, Hilkhot Teshuvah 3:5.)

Second, we are charged with being interpreters of the law. That is our responsibility as heirs and guardians of the Torah she-be-al peh, the Oral Tradition. The phrase in which Moses describes the voice the people heard at the revelation at Sinai, kol gadol velo yasaf, is understood by the commentators in two seemingly contradictory ways. On the one hand it means 'the voice that was never heard again'; on the other, it means 'the voice that did not cease,' that is, the voice that was ever heard again. (Deut. 5:19, and see Rashi ad loc., who gives both interpretations.) There is, though, no contradiction. The voice that was never heard again is the one that represents the Written Torah. The voice that is ever heard again is that of the Oral Torah.

The Written Torah is min ha-shamayim, "from Heaven," but about the Oral Torah the Talmud insists Lo ba-shamayim hi, "It is not in heaven." (Baba Metziah 59b) Hence Judaism is a continuing conversation between the Giver of the law in Heaven and the interpreters of the law on Earth. That is part of what the Talmud means when it says that "Every judge who delivers a true judgment becomes a partner with the Holy One, blessed be He, in the work of creation." (Shabbat 10a)

Third, fundamental to Judaism is education, and fundamental to Jewish education is instruction in Torah, that is, the law. That is what Isaiah meant when he said, "Listen to Me, you who know justice, the people in whose heart is My law; do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults" (Is. 51:7). It is what Jeremiah meant when he said, "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33). It is what Josephus meant when he said, nineteen hundred years ago, "Should any one of our nation be asked about our laws, he will repeat them as readily as his own name." The result of our thorough education in our laws from the very dawn of intelligence is that they are, as it were,

engraved on our souls. To be a Jewish child is to be, in the British phrase, "learned in the law." We are a nation of constitutional lawyers.

Why? Because Judaism is not just about spirituality. It is not simply a code for the salvation of the soul. It is a set of instructions for the creation of what the late Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein z"l called "societal beatitude." It is about bringing God into the shared spaces of our collective life. That needs law: law that represents justice, honoring all humans alike regardless of colour or class, that judges impartially between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, even in extremis between humanity and God, the law that links God, its Giver, to us, its interpreters, the law that alone allows freedom to coexist with order, so that my freedom is not bought at the cost of yours.

Small wonder, then, that there are so many Jewish lawyers. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

#### RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

## Shabbat Shalom

"**H**ow (eichah) am I able to bear your contentiousness, your burdens and your quarrels?!" (Deuteronomy 1:12) Just prior to the conclusion of the 1978 Camp David Accords, U.S. President Jimmy Carter submitted a letter for Prime Minister Menachem Begin that caused the Israeli leader to turn pale and promptly return it to the leader of the free world unsigned. "But I did not ask you to give up Jerusalem," said the astonished American president. "I only asked that you put it on the negotiating table."

Begin answered in his characteristically poetic style: "For two thousand years, we Jews have been reciting a verse from King David's Psalms at every wedding ceremony: 'If I forget thee O Jerusalem, may my right hand lose her cunning: Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I hold thee not above my highest joy.'"

"But does Judaism not state that you must give up a limb in order to save the entire organism?" remonstrated Carter. "Yes," countered Begin, "but not if the limb is one's heart. No human being can live without a heart. Jerusalem is the heart of Israel and the heart of the Jewish people."

At this time of year, as Tisha b'Av approaches, we are especially cognizant of the devastating impact of the destructions of our nation's heart in 586 B.C.E. and 70 C.E. With this in mind, it is important to note that Tisha b'Av is always immediately preceded by this week's Biblical portion, Devarim. What is the significance of this calendrical juxtaposition?

Firstly, there is the linguistic connection between Parshat Devarim and Tisha b'Av. In our Biblical portion, Moses expresses his exasperation with

the Jewish people: "How (eichah) am I able to bear your contentiousness, your burdens and your quarrels?!" To underscore the appearance of the word "eichah", this verse is publicly chanted with the same haunting cantillations as the Scroll of Lamentations (Megillat Eichah), which is read on the evening of Tisha b'Av.

Going one step deeper, this linguistic connection points to the sin that led to Jerusalem's first and second destruction and subsequent long exile: internal strife among the Jewish People. Our sages defined this contentiousness and quarrelsomeness as "sinat chinam," causeless hatred. And since "every generation that does not build [the Temple] is as if they destroyed it" [Jerusalem Talmud, Yoma 1:1], it is painfully evident that we have much room for improvement.

Despite this daunting challenge, it gives us hope to know that Jerusalem, whose destruction we currently mourn and feel, is also the city from which the redemption of humanity will one day come. Jerusalem, once the paradigmatic symbol of destruction and loss, will become a symbol of reunification and restoration.

Isaiah, in presenting his vision of redemption, calls out in the Haftarah of the Sabbath immediately following Tisha b'Av: "Comfort you, comfort you ("Nachamu nachamu"), My people, speak about Heart-Jerusalem ["Lev-Yerushalayim"], and call out unto her; her period [of exile] has been completed, her iniquity has been forgiven" (40:1-2).

Note that the prophet refers to the city as Heart-Jerusalem, a compound noun ("speak about Heart-Jerusalem"); it is "heart" that defines Jerusalem. This is what Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook likely referred to when he said of the Western Wall, "There are some hearts that are of stone; and there are some stones that are truly hearts." Such are the heart-stones of the Western Wall; such is Jerusalem – heart-stone.

According to all of our prophets, this message will be conveyed at the end of the days from the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, to which all the nations will flock. At that time they will beat their swords into ploughshares, forsake entirely the cultivation of warfare (Isaiah 2, Michah 4), and "the nations will change to speak a pure language; they will all call upon the name of God and serve Him with a united resolve" (Zephania 3:9). Jerusalem will become the vehicle for Israel's expression of the purpose for its being, the effectuation of a redeemed world of peace.

For these reasons and more, Prime Minister Begin was absolutely correct to insist that Jerusalem cannot be placed on the negotiating table! Jerusalem will one day reunite all of humanity within her bosom, for she is the heart of humanity. The love that will emanate from Jerusalem will be a love without cause ["ahavat chinam"], repairing the hatred without cause

that caused Jerusalem's demise in the first place.

We have the obligation and the ability to transform this vision to reality by taking it upon ourselves on a daily basis to do our part to increase love without cause. B'ezrat Hashem, in this merit, we will witness the full rebuilding of Jerusalem speedily and in our days. ©2022 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

This week's Torah reading begins the oration by our teacher Moshe during the final months of his life.

In this oration, he reviews the 40 years sojourn of the Jewish people in the Sinai desert, and prophesies regarding their future, first in the Land of Israel. and then throughout succeeding history. The Torah tells us that Moshe began his speech when the Jewish people were located between certain landmarks in the desert of Sinai. Rashi, following the ideas of the Midrash, explains that the locations that were identified were not meant to be specific geographic localities, but, rather, they were intended to highlight events that occurred to the Jewish people during their 40 years in the Sinai desert.

We have a rule that while there is a myriad of interpretations to the eternal words and depth of the narrative verses as written in the Torah, the Talmud cautions us that while we should always be aware of what the Torah really means, the simple explanation of the words is also primary to our understanding of its values and message.

The listing of these geographic locations where Moshe begins his oration to the Jewish people is an intrinsic value by itself. Moshe wants us to realize when and where, and under what circumstances, the message to the Jewish people is being delivered, by describing the place from which he is speaking, and giving it context and background. All statements, no matter how profound and eternal, must be understood within the context of place and time.

It is difficult to communicate any message to a generation that is living miraculously in a barren desert. The audience must require great imagination be able to deal with promises and issues concerning a country that they have never yet seen. It is also very difficult to speak to people about the future, which is always so uncertain, and, to a great extent, mysterious. But Moshe's oration addresses both concerns.

He wants the listener to know that he is speaking from the desert, but that his message is also for the future of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. And Moshe also looks far into the future, warning them of destruction and exile, horrendous events, but yet the eventual redemption and hope. It is the greatness of Moshe that he is able to speak in the present from an identifiable geographic location, and, yet project a

message that will last for thousands of years, valid and vital wherever one finds oneself on this planet. This is what makes Moshe the greatest of all prophets of the Jewish people, in all areas of life and faith, and for all eternity. ©2022 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**

**A**t first glance, the opening of the Book of Deuteronomy is a random recapitulation of events the Jews experienced in the desert. It seems without order, yet a closer look reveals a clear structure.

The first major section of Parashat Devarim deals with the experiences and episodes of the Jews during the first two years in the desert, up until God's decree that we were to wander there for forty years. This section describes God telling us immediately after our departure for Egypt that we will enter the Land of Israel (Deuteronomy 1:6–8). In preparation for that entry, Moses outlines a system of jurisprudence necessary for the proper functioning of the nation (1:9–18). With Am Yisrael ready to enter the land, the people ask Moses to send spies to Canaan to investigate how it can best be conquered. A description of the spy story follows, with the recounting of God's decree that the Jews will wander in the desert for forty years (1:19–46).

The second section in Parashat Devarim is a brief review of what happened to Am Yisrael in the last two years of its wanderings (Deuteronomy 2, 3). Here we find our interactions with the nations of Edom, Moab, Amon, Sichon, and Bashan as we took a circuitous route into the land. This is followed by Moses's unsuccessful appeal to God that he be permitted to enter the land, which is found in the beginning of next week's portion, Va'etchanan.

Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffmann points out that these two sections open and close with similar phraseology, establishing them as distinct units. The first section begins with the phrase "rav lachem" (it is enough [that you've been at Sinai]) and "penu u'se'u lachem" (turn [to the land of Israel]; Deuteronomy 1:6–7).

The second section begins with similar terminology: "rav lachem" (it is enough [that you've wandered here in the desert]), "penu lachem" (turn [to enter the land of Israel]; 2:3). Each section, writes Rabbi Hoffmann, also concludes with similar words – va'teshvu and va'neshev (1:46, 3:29).

Both sections are preceded by the first five sentences of Deuteronomy, which "headline" the forty years described in brief in the first two sections we have already discussed. The first two sentences of

Deuteronomy summarize the earlier events as found in the first section, and the next three sentences encapsulate the final happenings as laid out in the second section.

A surface reading leaves the impression that Devarim haphazardly repeats our travels through the desert. Yet when one looks deeper and more carefully, one realizes that Devarim possesses an exact and precise structure – much like the entire Torah. ©2022 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

#### **ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT**

## **Bishul Akum**

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**N**owadays, as in the past, many Jews hire non-Jewish domestic help. Often included in their job is cooking for their employers. This brings up the issue of *bishul akum* (a law forbidding Jews from eating food cooked or baked by a non-Jew). The rabbinic prohibition was enacted to prevent close social interaction with non-Jews, which could ultimately lead to intermarriage. This law is hinted at in the Torah. Moshe asked Sichon the king of the Emorites to "sell us food, and provide us with water to drink, and we will pay you" (*Devarim* 2:28). How could the Jews eat food cooked by Sichon? It must be that just as water is sold without being cooked, all the food supplied by Sichon would be similarly uncooked.

Of course, this interpretation of the verse is not the reason for the prohibition, only an additional support. After all, we could use the same logic to argue that water does not require grinding, and therefore it is prohibited to buy flour that was ground by non-Jews. Rather, we assume that the primary reason for the enactment is a concern about intermarriage. According to some (or possibly most) *Rishonim*, this concern is relevant only when the food is cooked in the house of the non-Jew. In contrast, if the cooking takes place in a Jewish home, there is no concern.

This distinction is strengthened by the story marshaled to support the enactment. The food that Sichon was asked to prepare for the Jews would have been prepared in his home, not in the Jews' tents.

In any case, the *Shulchan Aruch* follows the stringent opinion, which prohibits food cooked by a non-Jew even if it was prepared in the home of a Jew. Ashkenazic custom permits it if a Jew is involved in some way in the food preparation. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

#### **RABBI DAVID LEVIN**

## **Moshe, A Man of Words**

**O**ur parasha begins with the words, "These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Yisrael across

the Jordan in the desert, in the Plain, opposite the Sea of Reeds, between Paran and Tofel and Lavan and Chatzeirot and Di-Zahav. Eleven days from Horeb, by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-Barnea. It was in the fortieth year in the eleventh month on the first of the month when Moshe spoke to the Children of Israel according to everything that Hashem commanded him to them. After he had struck Sichon the king of the Amorite who lived in Cheshbon and Og the king of the Bashan who lived in Ashtarot in Edre'i. On the other side of the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moshe began clarifying this Torah...."

It is in this "separate" Book of the Torah, Devarim, that Moshe chooses to clarify Hashem's commandments to the people as well as to teach them several Laws which he had not spoken of before. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin deals with the idea of devarim, words. Moshe begins with the statement "these are the words." HaRav Sorotzkin emphasizes the "words" since Moshe had spoken with Hashem at the Burning Bush and declared, "I am not a man of words." The Midrash in Sefer D'varim tells us that one who learns Torah and speaks words of Torah, the Torah will heal his speech. Our Rabbis ask if this is figurative or real, and HaRav Sorotzkin explains two interpretations of this argument: (1) the one who studies Torah and teaches it to others is blessed with the milk and honey of the Torah, which enables him to bring others closer to Hashem, since his words touch the hearts of his listeners, and (2) since the words of the Torah are soothing and promise the final redemption of souls, the one who teaches these words to others will be heard whether the speaker is stuttering or not. It is the words of the Torah which will be heard, not the limitations of the speaker.

Our Rabbis explain that retelling the laws of the Torah required all of the people to be present. Rashi explains that the people who were not present would have complained to those who had attended and said "why did you not argue with Moshe about all of these Laws? Had we been there we would have disputed them directly." HaRav Sorotzkin explains that, just as the Torah was given to Moshe at Har Sinai in the presence of all of the B'nei Yisrael, so here the retelling of those commandments also had to be in the presence of all of the people. The Ramban tells us that Moshe had explained to the people that one may not add or subtract from the commandments of the Torah, yet here Moshe would introduce several Laws that were not as yet spoken of to the B'nei Yisrael. Here also the words which normally preceded as Law ("and Hashem spoke to Moshe saying") are not to be found. Moshe gathered all of the people together so that he could explain to them that these laws were also given to him directly from Hashem, from the time of Har Sinai, even though Moshe had chosen not to teach them until now.

Two figures of time are also spoken of in this

section. The Torah tells us that the place where Moshe spoke was "eleven days from Horeb, by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-Barnea." The Ramban says this quote is to show us the vastness of the wilderness, but others disagree. Others, like Rashi, demonstrate that the people are criticized for sending in the spies, for the B'nei Yisrael would have already been at this point and not been in the desert for forty years. The second time-frame is the pasuk, "It was in the fortieth year in the eleventh month on the first of the month when Moshe spoke to the Children of Israel according to everything that Hashem commanded him to them." This pasuk gives us the time of this speech in relation to the death of Moshe. The eleventh month is Adar and the day of this speech was the first of the month. We know from tradition that Moshe lived exactly one hundred and twenty years which would place his death on his birthday, the seventh of Adar. This speech is given in the last week of his life.

The Or HaChaim asks why Moshe chastised the people about the complaints that were made at the Yam Suf, the Red Sea, when none of these people were old enough at that time to be held accountable. Those who were over the age of twenty had been punished during the forty years in the wilderness, and a new generation had taken their place. Moshe had been their shepherd for forty years, yet he knew that his own sins would prevent him from leading the people into the Land. His words were intended as a warning and a reminder that the B'nei Yisrael were a stiff-necked people. Moshe had not seriously rebuked the people during the forty years in the desert because he knew that his words would be harsh and difficult for them to hear. He was also concerned with publicly embarrassing them, an even greater sin than what they had done. At this point, Moshe wished to recommit the people to the Laws of the Torah which he gave them in his parting speech.

The Ramban's introduction to the Sefer speaks about one of the unusual aspects of this repetition of the law. When Moshe retells the Law to the people, "he does not mention anything relative to the law of the priests (Kohanim), neither about their performance of the offerings nor the ritual purity of the priests and their functions [in the Sanctuary], having already explained these matters to them. The priests, being diligent in their duties, do not require repeated admonitions. The Israelites, [the non-priests], however, are admonished time and again about the commandments that apply to them, sometimes to add further clarification and sometimes only to caution the Israelites with multiple warnings." The priests had their daily responsibilities in the Mishkan and they knew they had to be careful under penalty of Divine retribution. For the people, this constant fear was non-existent. Many of the laws for which they would be held responsible involved mitzvot which only came into effect once they had conquered

the Land that they were promised. Up until now these laws were theoretical. Now that the B'nei Yisrael would enter the land and begin their conquest, these laws suddenly took on new importance. Many of the other laws were also laws which were not relevant to many because they did not deal with them on a regular basis and these laws were also reviewed at this time.

This parasha is a fitting tribute to Moshe, "a man of uncircumcised lips." Moshe will be remembered for the words that he spoke, both words of his own and the commandments which Hashem spoke to the people through Moshe's lips, those same lips which he had assumed would hinder his mission. Though it is true that there is no visible marker of his death, the Torah which is delivered through Moshe to the B'nei Yisrael is a living testimony to his legacy, a testimony to his words. © 2022 Rabbi D. Levin

### YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

## Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA  
SICHA OF HARAV BARUCH GIGI TANAKH

*Summarized by Shmuel Fuchs*

*Translated by David Strauss*

**T**he book of Devarim consists of two main orations delivered by Moshe: the oration of the commandments, and the historical review that precedes it.

Connections between the commandments and their historical background and context are made in many places over the course of the book; for example, in the song of Ha'azinu: "Give ear, you heavens, and I will speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distill as the dew; as the small rain upon the tender grass, and as the showers upon the herb. For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe you greatness to our God. Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will declare to you, your elders, and they will tell you." (Devarim 32:1-3, 7)

This is also the case regarding the earlier section that contains the passage recited when bringing first-fruits: "And it shall be, when you come in to the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, and you possess it, and dwell in it; that you shall take of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you shall bring in from your land that the Lord your God gives you; and you shall put it in a basket and shall go to the place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there. And you shall speak and say before the Lord your God: A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the land, which You, O Lord, have given me. And you shall set it

down before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God." (Devarim 26:1-2, 5, 10)

This passage strongly emphasizes the connection between commandments and their historical background. First-fruits are a personal matter, the first fruits that grow in each individual's own field. However, when a person comes to express his gratitude to God for this fruit, he opens by reviewing the entire historical process that brought him to this point -- the story of the entire nation of Israel, who by God's grace came out of Egypt and conquered the land.

Why is it necessary to repeatedly emphasize the connection between God's commandments and the historical process?

One explanation is that this emphasis negates the perception of despair and fixedness presented in the book of Kohelet, a perspective that sees the world as not changing at all: "Vanity of vanities, says Kohelet; vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit has man of all his labor wherein he labors under the sun?. All things toil to weariness; man cannot utter it, the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. That which has been is that which shall be, and that which has been done is that which shall be done; and there is nothing new under the sun." (Kohelet 1:2-3, 8-9)

When we come to serve God, we must remember that God rests His providence on the course of history: the world does not run without a goal or purpose, but rather it is directed and overseen by God.

We can, however, add another point that pertains specifically to Sefer Devarim, the whole of which constitutes preparation for the people of Israel as they are about to enter the Land of Israel. A most significant difference between life in the land and life outside of it is that in the land, we must live before God with our entire being, and not merely observe the Torah and its commandments.

This requirement is expressed in the repeated mention of the duties of the heart in Devarim -- the demand that we must worship God and fulfill His commandments not only through actions but with our entire being, with all our heart and soul.

This requirement is particularly evident in the passages of Shema: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And it shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently to My commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul." (Devarim 6:5; 11:13)

The same can be seen in the section dealing with repentance later in the book: "Then the Lord your God will turn your captivity, and have compassion upon you, and will return and gather you from all the peoples, where the Lord your God has scattered you. If any of yours that are dispersed be in the uttermost parts of

heaven, from there will the Lord your God gather you, and from there will He fetch you. And the Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will do you good, and multiply you above your fathers. And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live." (Devarim 30:3-6)

This demand presents the people with a new challenge: from now on, keeping the Torah and observing the commandments in and of themselves will not suffice, because in the Land of Israel, more inclusive and total service of God is required. This change must be emphasized along with its historical context. Until now, we were in the wilderness, but now we must enter the land and fulfill the new role that God has placed before us: to serve Him with all our heart and all our soul. *[This sicha was delivered by Harav Gigi on Shabbat Parashat Devarim 5780.]*

### RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

## Migdal Ohr

"**[Y**ou all came asking to send agents...] and they shall bring back a report of the path we shall go up in... and the matter was good in my eyes..." (Devarim 1:22-23) The sin of the spies who frightened the Jewish People, and the Jews' response, was the catalyst for the tragedies that took place on Tisha B'Av and all the suffering we've gone through during our long and often bitter exile. And yet, when Moshe heard the original request, he thought it was a good idea to send them. What was it about the plan that Moshe appreciated?

In a sense, it seemed that the Jews were excited to go into Eretz Yisrael, and they wanted scouts to go first so they could find the best and fastest way to conquer it. They wanted to know which paths were the straightest, and which cities might be a good place for them to settle the women and children as the men pressed on to capture the land. This is why they wanted spies; not to see if it was a good land, but to identify the ideal way of inheriting it.

Alas, the spies came back with a negative report, one that undermined the desire of the people to conquer it. They didn't explain how to conquer it, but instead argued that it was unconquerable. The Jews listened to these arguments and began lamenting their fates that they'd come to such a place where they would be unable to settle.

Moshe was wise and astute. Why did he not anticipate such a potential response? Especially since he knew Hashem wasn't commanding that spies be sent and had only acquiesced to let Moshe send them on his own recognizance, how could the plan had gained favor in Moshe's eyes?

The answer lies in Moshe's recounting of the

events. What swayed him was the people's desire for, "which path shall we ascend upon?" This phrase is reminiscent of what Yisro told Moshe, "and you shall let them know the path in which they should go," (Shmos 18:20) which described Moshe teaching Klal Yisrael the Torah and how to live.

In his mind, the Jews were asking to be guided; to be given leaders to show them how to apply the laws of Hashem to their own lives. This was a great thing. However, when the spies came back, and they denigrated the land, they were not doing what Moshe expected them to. Worse, the Jewish People were unable to discern this, even though the negative spies were contradicted by Yehoshua and Kaleiv, so there was another angle they could have viewed it from.

They should have been able to identify the right approach and listened to those who promoted the position of Hashem, who would guide them in fulfilling His will. Instead, they chose to listen to the Satan and his minyan, bringing calamity upon millions of people throughout history.

The Haftorah of Shabbos Chazon this week ends with the promise that Hashem will restore our judges and advisors like in the beginning (when we listened to Moshe) and then we will reclaim our status as trusted followers of Hashem.

*R' Aharon Kotler, z"tl, the Rosh Yeshivah of Lakewood, was preparing to travel to Eretz Yisrael for a visit. Meanwhile, R' Aharon's talmidim made their own preparations to accompany him to the airport. When R' Aharon found out about their plans, he made known to them that he preferred that they remain in the yeshivah and adhere to their normal learning schedule.*

*R' Aharon's talmidim were in a quandary about what to do. They brought the question to R' Moshe Feinstein, zt'l. R' Moshe's answer left no room for doubt. "Accompany the Rosh Yeshivah. Honoring R' Aharon is like honoring the Torah itself!" \**

*\*Obviously, it takes a R' Moshe to rule that not honoring R' Aharon's wishes was the correct way to honor him. May Hashem return our advisors as in the past! © 2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

### RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

## Starry, Starry Night

**I**t's rare for city dwellers to truly see the night sky. Only once, many years ago, driving on a moonless night in West Virginia, did I fully perceive the vast number of stars -- nearby planets and distant suns -- that were a regular part of people's lives before the advent of electrical lights.

Although I also (to my shock and delight) saw the Milky Way, the galaxy of which our solar system is part, the billions of individual stars within it cannot be differentiated by the naked eye.

How many stars can be seen with the unaided eye? Hundreds, for certain, maybe even thousands.

Which leads me to a puzzle. Why are the "stars of the heavens" used by the Torah to mean truly huge numbers? Like in Beraishis 22:17 and Devarim 28:62 and in our parshah (1:10)?

Rashi makes the puzzle even more puzzling: "But were they [the Jewish people] on that day as [many as] the stars of the heavens? Were they not only six hundred thousand?"

In fact, including women and children, they were at least two million. Certainly many more than the stars that our eyes can make out on the starriest of nights.

There are midrashim and commentaries that see the Torah's star/Jewish People comparisons as indicating something qualitative, not quantitative, like the midrash cited by Rashi on the pasuk in our parshah, which sees the reference indicating Klal Yisrael's eternal nature. Or Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook's suggestion that, just as stars are used for navigation, so are the Jews to live lives to guide other nations, to be a "light unto" them. Perhaps he saw the word *larov*, "in abundance," as implying *larav*, "as a teacher." But the word's simple sense cannot be ignored.

I don't have an answer to the puzzle, only an observation. Namely, that today we know the Milky Way isn't a "heavenly river," as might be the meaning of *Nehar Dinur* (the "river of light" referenced in Chagigah 14a), some undifferentiated band of light, but rather a collection of billions of stars. And that science, most recently the Webb space telescope, has already revealed unimaginable numbers of stars in untold numbers of galaxies far, far beyond our own. ©2022 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

### SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayan

**T**he Gemara (Ta'anit 29a) teaches: "When the month of Av enters, we lessen our Simcha / happiness." This lessening of Simcha is reflected in the restrictions we observe during this period, such as not making weddings. However, asks R' Menachem Boruch Yaveh shlita (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Chayei Torah-Lublin in Yerushalayim), why doesn't the Gemara say, "When the month of Av enters, we mourn for the Temple"? What is the "Simcha" that we are lessening?

He explains: King David instructs us (Tehilim 100:2), "Serve Hashem with Simcha." That is Hashem's Will. Indeed, the Torah (Devarim 28:47) attributes the suffering of the exile to the fact that "you did not serve Hashem, your Elokim, with Simcha and goodness of heart." Furthermore, the prophet tells us that we will be redeemed in the merit of Simcha, as it says (Yeshayah 55:12), "For you will go out with Simcha." Thus, the Gemara is reminding us that we must always be in a state of Simcha--just, a little less so during this time period.

Having Simcha does not negate the need to mourn for the Bet Hamikdash. The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 1:3) states: "It is appropriate for every G-d-fearing person to mourn for the Bet Hamikdash [on a daily basis]." Even so, cautions the Mishnah Berurah: "Torah study and prayer should be with Simcha."

R' Yaveh continues: Indeed, our Simcha increases when we realize that, every day, we are that much closer to the ultimate redemption. Then we will see the fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah (8:19) that the four fast days we observe to commemorate the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash will themselves become days of Simcha. (Metikut Ha'moadim: Purim p.13) ©2022 S. Katz and torah.org

### RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

## Lelamed Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat Devarim records Moshe's recounting of the events that transpired, including the time we had camped at Har Seir for a while before G-d instructed us to move on. The Passuk says, "you have circled this mountain a lot, now turn northbound" (2:3). Actually, the words literally mean "a lot for you, circle the mountain, turn northbound." Why does the directive include circling the mountain?

The Kli Yakar explains that Moshe was conveying a separate message. Moshe was saying that when you have a lot, hide it ("tzafon" means north, but "tzafun" means hidden.) As the Jews prepared to enter a land of "plenty," it became time to anticipate and verbalize the challenges we had never faced before. Staying low-key and avoiding provocations and conflict doesn't mean being ashamed of who we are and what we represent. As we passed the mountain of Seir, where Esav lived, and as we pass those different from us today, we are guided to maintain a balance between modesty in what we have and pride in who we are. ©2022 Rabbi S. Ressler and Lelamed, Inc.



## Tisha B'Av