

IN OTHER WORDS

by Shlomo Katz

Parshat Devarim

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Yechiel Shraga Fievish Tarshish a"h

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Pessel bat Naftali a"h (Peppy Lewin)

Today's Learning:

Machsirin 2:7-8

O.C. 252:4-6

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bechorot 42

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Nazir 11,

In the language of our Sages, the book of Devarim is called "Mishneh Torah." Some commentaries translate this appellation as "the repetition of the Torah" (i.e., "mishneh" from the root "shnei" / "two"). They suggest that every halachah found in Devarim is stated, or at least alluded to, somewhere in the other books of the Torah. R' Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin z"l (1817-1893; known as the "Netziv"; rabbi and rosh yeshiva of Volozhin) offers a different explanation:

"Mishneh" means "review," i.e., the main purpose of Sefer Devarim is to encourage us to delve deeply into, and review, the laws of the Torah. All of the mussar / rebuke found in this Book also boils down to this message: Accept upon yourselves the yoke of studying Torah in depth so that you do not deviate from its laws. True, many laws found in other Books are repeated in Devarim. The purpose of this repetition is to teach us to look beneath the surface of the verse. The peshat / "surface

message" of the repeated pasuk or halachah was already learned elsewhere. Therefore, if you find a verse or law repeated, look deeper.

R' Berlin continues: The Midrash records that when Hashem appeared to Yehoshua, he found that prophet studying Mishneh Torah. This shows the importance of this Book. Similarly, when the Torah commands the king to write a Torah scroll for himself, the language it chooses is (Devarim 17:18), "He shall write for himself this Mishneh Torah." In fact, he is required to write the entire Torah, but the verse emphasizes writing this Book because of its important message. Indeed, our Sages teach that it is only this delving into the Torah, the essence of the Talmud, that serves as the covenant between Hashem and the Jewish People. (He'emek Davar, Intro. to Devarim)

"These are the devarim / words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael." (1:1)

R' Yehuda He'chassid z"l (Germany; died 1217) writes: The word "devarim" / "words" suggests "devorim" / "bees." The words of the Torah are like bees (and bee products). They are sweet to those who keep them, but will sting painfully anyone who mistreats them.

(Ta'amei Mesoret Ha'mikra)

From the same work:

". . . until the nahar ha'gadol / great river, the Euphrates River." (1:7)

R' Yehuda He'chassid z"l notes that the word "gadol" is lacking the letter "vav" (which is usually found in that word). He explains: Although the Euphrates is mentioned in Parashat Bereishit as one of the four great rivers, it is not as great as the others [for example, the Nile]. Why then is it called great? Because it forms the northern border of Eretz Yisrael, and "the servant of a king is himself a king."

"Eichah / How can I alone carry your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels? Provide for yourselves distinguished men, who are wise, understanding, and we known to your tribes, and I shall appoint them as your heads." (Devarim 1:12-13)

Why did each tribe have to have judges from among its own ranks? R' Yitzchak Shmelkes z"l (rabbi of Lvov, Galicia) explains as follows:

When Bnei Yisrael arrived at Har Sinai to receive the Torah, they were, in our Sages' words, "Like one man with one heart." However, that unity was short-lived. By the fortieth year in the desert, Moshe discerned a subtle divide developing between the tribes of Bnei Yisrael, a divide that eventually widened so much that it lead to the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash.

As Tanach records, the disunity among Bnei Yisrael only got worse after they settled in Eretz Yisrael until eventually the kingdom split into two. And, still, the gulf between people widened until the Second Temple was destroyed, specifically as a result of mindless hatred. Only regarding the time of the geulah / redemption are we told (in the words of Yechezkel 37:16-17 & 22):

Now you, son of man, take for yourself one wooden tablet and write upon it, "For Yehuda and Bnei Yisrael, his comrades," and take another wooden tablet and write upon it, "For Yosef, the wooden tablet of Ephraim, and all Bnei Yisrael, his comrades." And bring them close to yourself, one to the other, like a single wooden tablet, and they shall become one in your hand. . . I shall make them into a single nation in the land upon Yisrael's hills, and a single king shall be for them all as a king; and they shall no longer be two nations, no longer divided into two kingdoms again.

R' Shmelkes concludes: In light of the contentious nature of the Jewish People, we can understand the lesson the Torah wants to impart when it uses sand as a metaphor to describe Bnei Yisrael. On the one hand, each grain of sand is free-standing. This represents a Jew's desire for independence from his fellow men. However, the grains of sand on the beach lie side-by-side peacefully; indeed, their strength and their ability to hold back the sea is found only when they lie side-by-side.

(Bet Yitzchak Al Ha'Torah: Parashat Vayishlach)

"For judgment is G-d's." (1:17)

R' Aharon Lewin z"l (rabbi of Rzesow, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) writes:

There is an opinion in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 6a - note that the halachah does not follow this view) that a judge who brings about a compromise between the parties is sinning. That opinion is based on the verse in Tehilim (10:3), "A botzea praises himself that he blasphemes Hashem." Among its many other meanings, the word "botzea" means one who cuts in half, i.e., one who compromises. [The same verb refers to cutting in general, for example, slicing bread.]

Another opinion in the Gemara is that the verse in Tehilim is referring to Yehuda when he suggested selling his brother Yosef as a slave. Yehuda possessed the moral authority in the eyes of his brothers to give Yosef his freedom. Instead, Yehuda compromised; he did not allow Yosef to be killed, but he did not set him free either. By compromising, he caused a desecration of G-d's Name.

A third opinion says that this verse refers to one who steals wheat, grinds it up to make flour, kneads a dough and then separates challah from it. Such a person is a botzea, but he actually blasphemes G-d.

How so? R' Lewin explains: Mitzvot can generally be divided into one of two categories: those between man and his fellow, and those between man and G-d. There are those people who are exceedingly meticulous regarding the mitzvot between man and G-d, yet they neglect horribly those between man and man. About this the prophet spoke in the verse (Yishayah 66:3), "He slaughters an ox, he slays a man." Regarding the laws of shechitah, this person is extremely careful, but he has no qualms about hitting his fellow man. What is this person doing? He is compromising.

Such a person, says R' Lewin, is spiritually bankrupt. Just as a person who declares bankruptcy appeases his creditors with partial payments, so this person tries to appease G-d with partial mitzvah observance. But that is not what the Torah demands. Don't seek compromises. Observe the Torah fully.

(Ha'drash Ve'ha'iyun)

Tishah B'Av

It is customary to refrain from learning most Torah subjects on the afternoon preceding Tishah B'Av. Why?

R' Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam z"l (the Klausenberger Rebbe) explains as follows: Chazal say that the Bet Hamikdash was destroyed because people neglected Torah study. (Although other sins also are mentioned as causes of the destruction, Chazal explain that the only sin which Hashem cannot forgive is the neglect of Torah study. Had Torah been studied, the other sins might not have sufficed to destroy the Temple.) Chazal also say that any generation in which the Bet Hamikdash is not rebuilt is equivalent to the generation in which the Temple was destroyed.

Putting these teachings together, it follows that we are guilty of neglecting Torah study. We are instructed to refrain from learning Torah on the afternoon preceding Tishah B'Av in order to awaken us to the connection between neglecting Torah study and the fact that the Temple site lays desolate. The afternoon before Tishah B'Av is a time to reflect on this sin.

(Shefa Chaim: Michtavei Torah Vol. II, No. 144)

R' Eliyahu Guttmacher z"l

R' Eliyahu Guttmacher was born near Posen (Poznan) in eastern Germany (today, Poland) on Rosh Chodesh Av 5556 / 1796. After studying in the yeshiva of Rawicz, he became, at age 19, a student of R' Akiva Eger, rabbi of Posen. He remained in R' Eger's yeshiva for four years and was a favorite of the teacher.

Even as a youth, R' Guttmacher studied assiduously and remained awake late into the night writing down his Torah insights. A turning point in his life occurred when he discovered a copy of the Zohar with the marginal notes of his teacher, R' Eger. R' Guttmacher had previously believed, as did most people, that R' Eger was opposed to the study of Kabbalah. However, upon realizing that his teacher did, indeed, delve into that subject, the student began his own study of Kabbalah.

As an outgrowth of this study, R' Guttmacher began to reflect upon the causes of our exile and the steps that we can, and must, take to end it. He came to believe that the spiritual state of the Jewish people was declining rapidly and it was necessary to force the arrival of mashiach, something that could be achieved only if the Jewish people strengthened their attachment to Torah and returned to Eretz Yisrael. He strongly encouraged the establishment of both yeshivot and farming communities in the Holy Land, and when most leading rabbis either did not support his call (and many openly opposed it), he declared that the Sattan / the prosecuting angel had blinded them in order to delay the Redemption.

R' Guttmacher's study of Kabbalah also drew him close to the chassidic movement, and he became surrounded by chassidim of his own. He discouraged people from seeking his blessings, saying that he was an ordinary person. He also said that just in case his prayers carried any weight in Heaven, he was already praying for all Jews; thus, there was no need to visit him. But all of his efforts to be left alone were futile.

R' Guttmacher published several pamphlets describing his ideas about the Redemption and the return to Eretz Yisrael. He also left behind many manuscripts on "traditional" Torah subjects, and some of his commentaries are published in the back of the standard Vilna edition of the Talmud. (Some of his larger works were first published in the 1970's and 80's.) He also kept a diary, which he closed with the words: "I am leaving for my world [i.e., Olam Habai] comforted that the Shechinah pines for those who love it. I feel that the three part cord - the Torah, the Holy One, blessed is He, and Yisrael - is in the process of being tied again." (Encyclopedia La'chassidut p.643).

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>.

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