

LOOK DEEPER

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Devarim

Look Deeper

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Today's Learning:
Chagigah 1:8-2:1
O.C. 530:4-6
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yoma 52
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Ma'asrot 26

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 words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael . . ." (1:1)

R' Shlomo Ephraim z"l (rabbi of Prague; died 1619) asks: How was it possible for Moshe Rabbeinu to address all of the Jewish People? He answers:

The word "Yisrael" does not have the same meaning as "Bnei Yisrael." The latter term refers to all of the Jewish People. In contrast, "Yisrael" refers to the leadership alone.

Our Sages understand the opening verses of our parashah as a rebuke for various sins that Bnei Yisrael had committed during the 40 years in the desert. Because it would be incumbent on the leaders to rebuke their flocks after Moshe's passing, Moshe spoke to the leaders in verses 1-2 about the people's sins. However, he only alluded to the sins, rather than mentioning them directly, because he wanted to teach the leaders how to give rebuke. Rebuke must be subtle. A direct attack is never successful.

In verse 3 we read: "It was in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first of the month, when Moshe spoke to Bnei Yisrael, according to everything that Hashem commanded him to them." Here, Moshe begins to rebuke the nation at large. [Note that the verse does not say that he spoke to the entire nation at once. Perhaps he walked around the camp and spoke to small groups one at a time.] In light of the foregoing explanation we can understand why only verse 3 says that "It was in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month." The timing of Moshe's address to the leaders is not mentioned. Our Sages learn from verse 3 that rebuke is most effective when offered shortly before the death of the one giving it. Otherwise, as time passes, the one who was rebuked may find fault with the actions of the one who gave rebuke and may disregard the original rebuke. This, says R' Shlomo Ephraim, is only a concern vis-a-vis rebuke given to the common person. Moshe did not have to worry about this when he addressed those in leadership positions.

(Kli Yakar)

". . . on the other side of the Jordan, in the desert, in the Aravah / Wilderness, opposite the Sea of Reeds, between Paran and Tophel, and Lavan, and Chazerot, and Di-zahav." (1:1)

R' Chaim ben Attar z"l (1696-1743; Italy and Eretz Yisrael) observes that the name each of these place

may allude to a character trait that Moshe wanted to teach. For example, "the desert" alludes to the trait of humility, as our Sages have said, "A person should always behave like a desert" [i.e., humbly, in contrast to a majestic mountain or a mighty river].

However, R' ben Attar continues, humility should not be taken to an extreme. For example, a person must not say, "Who am I to give rebuke to others?" Rather, one must be like the Aravah. The root "ayin-resh-vet" means pleasant. One must behave in a way that is pleasing to society. Also, it alludes to "areivut" / "responsibility." One must feel a responsibility for, and to, others.

(Ohr Ha'chaim)

Tisha B'Av

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l asks: To what end are we still mourning more than 1900 years after the Bet Hamikdash was destroyed? What do we want from G-d? Is it the Temple? The building? The structure?

R' Soloveitchik answers: We do ask for all of this, but it is not our main concern. Rather, what is much more important than the physical Bet Hamikdash is the closeness to G-d that the Bet Hamikdash represented. Currently, there is an iron curtain separating us from Hashem, and we seek its removal.

He continues: If a father and a son do not have a good relationship, if there is tension between them and they do not communicate with each other, the father may say, "I want my son back." The uninitiated observer may ask, "What do you mean? Your son is right here." However, the father understands that his son can be right next to him and still be far away.

Similarly, it would be meaningless to us to go to the Bet Hamikdash and perform the service there if G-d remained distant from us. Tisha B'Av is the day when we mourn the tragic separation between G-d and ourselves.

(The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways p. 18)

R' Zalman Rotberg shlita (rosh yeshiva of Yeshiva Bet Meir in Bnei Brak) writes: The Book of Eichah, in which the prophet Yirmiyah poured out his heart over the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash and the exile, teaches us not only about the past, but about the future. Our Sages teach that prophecy can be attained only when one is in a state of joy. This means that Yirmiyah wrote Eichah, which is prophetic, in a state of joy! How is this possible? Because the mere fact that, in the midst of the destruction, Hashem spoke to Yirmiyah was a hopeful sign, a sign that He had not abandoned His people, that there is a future to Hashem's relationship with us.

There is also another reason that Hashem wanted Yirmiyah to view the destruction through the prism of prophecy. The truth is that man cannot fully grasp the significance of either the Bet

Hamikdash or its destruction. The Bet Hamikdash was the "residence" of the Shechinah, but just as we cannot fathom the essence of the Shechinah, so we cannot fully comprehend what it means for the Shechinah to have a "residence." It follows from this, too, that we cannot grasp the great loss of the Shechinah's "home" was destroyed. Through prophecy, however, Yirmiyah could put some of the loss in perspective for us.

We can learn from this, too, adds R' Rotberg, that it takes a great person to appreciate the depth of the losses that the Jewish people have suffered. Indeed, the authors of the kinot / lamentations which we recite were all great scholars and righteous men.

R' Rotberg relates: All of us sigh or groan when we hear of a person who is ill or who died tragically. However, we do not feel another's pain the way great people do. The Chazon Ish's sister (R' Rotberg's aunt) used to beg visitors not to enter the Chazon Ish's study before he had eaten breakfast, because, as soon a visitor asked the Chazon Ish to pray for a seriously-ill relative, the Chazon Ish immediately lost his appetite and became very pained. This is an emulation of Hashem's own behavior; Chazal say that He appeared to Moshe from a thorn-bush as if to say, "I am suffering with Bnei Yisrael."

(Tuv Da'at Vol. III, p. 329)

"Alas -- she sits in solitude! The city that is great with people . . ." (Eichah 1:1)

R' Chaim ben Attar z"l (the Ohr Ha'chaim Ha'kadosh; see facing page) comments: The prophet points out that even when Yerushalayim was teeming with people, it was already sitting in solitude. This is because the Shechinah left the city long before the Temple's and the city's destruction. It does not concern the prophet whether Yerushalayim is inhabited so long as the Shechinah is absent.

(Rishon Le'tzion)

From the same work:

"She [the nation of Yehuda] dwelt among the nations, but found no rest." (Eichah 1:3)

Why? R' ben Attar explains: Prior to the exile, the nation of Yehuda wanted to assimilate among the nations. Measure-for-measure, it was punished that even when it was exiled among the nations, it would find no rest.

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