

THE PURPOSE OF THE FIFTH BOOK

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Parshas Devarim

The Purpose of the Fifth Book

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Today's Learning:
Bava Metzia 4:11-12
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yevamot 79
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Rosh Hashanah 11

The sole purpose of the Book of Devarim, writes R' Yechezkel Sarne z"l (1890-1969; rosh yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim), is to drive home the very same lesson that opens the first chapter of the work Mesilat Yesharim, by R' Moshe Chaim Luzzato (Ramchal; 18th century). That lesson is: "The foundation of piety and the root of perfect [Divine] service is for a person's duty in this world to become clear to him and free of doubt."

Ramchal explains further that man was created in order that he may enjoy the ultimate pleasure, i.e., the pleasure that comes from being close to G-d. All material pleasures were created either to distract man from his task or to be used as tools to further man's spiritual development.

R' Sarne continues: Contrary to his usual style, Ramchal does not cite any verses or Talmudic statements to support the assertion quoted above. Why? Because the Torah is so full of proofs that it is not necessary to single them out. In particular, he writes, this is the message of Sefer Devarim. Throughout the final Book of the Torah, we are reminded to seek G-d out, not to forget Him, etc. We also read (Devarim 29:3), "But Hashem did not give you a heart to know, or eyes to see, or ears to

hear until this day."

The reference to "a heart to know" is reminiscent of the verse (Devarim 4:39), "You shall know this day and take to your heart that Hashem, He is the G-d--in heaven above and on the earth below--there is none other." Taking these two verses together, writes R' Sarne, confirms Ramchal's assertion that true understanding of one's duty--to remain aware of G-d and to cling to Him--does not come easily; rather, one must toil, perhaps even his whole lifetime, until he really reaches the level where he even remembers on a consistent basis why he was placed in this world. (Iyunim Al Mesilat Yescharim)

From the Parashah . . .

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

Midrash Rabbah comments: Before Moshe received the Torah, it says about him (Shmot 4:10), "I am not a man of words." Once he received the Torah, his tongue was healed, and he said, "These are the words . . ."

R' Moshe Shmuel Glasner z"l (1856-1924; rabbi of Klausenberg / Cluj, Romania) asks: What was unique about Moshe's situation? Don't our Sages teach that all ailments were healed at Sinai?

He explains: Why did Moshe originally refuse to lead Bnei Yisrael? Because, being extremely humble, he did not think he would ever be capable of rebuking them if they sinned. "I am not a man of words" meant "I will not be able to speak up."

Receiving the Torah solved that dilemma. The halachah states that a student must rebuke even his teacher if the latter sins. How can one respectfully rebuke his teacher? He can say, "Didn't our master teach us that such and such behavior is not appropriate?" In other words, the Torah itself is a tool that one can use to give polite rebuke.

Moshe, too, found his voice once the Torah was given. No longer would it be necessary for Moshe, the man, to give rebuke. Instead, the Torah, albeit speaking in Moshe's voice, would give any necessary rebuke. (Shevivei Eish)

"Yehoshua son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall come there; strengthen him, for he shall cause Yisrael to inherit it." (Devarim 1:38)

R' Aharon Lewin z"l Hy"d (rabbi of Rzeszow, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) writes: Why did Moshe himself not enter Eretz Yisrael? Some early commentaries (Sefer Ha'ikkarim and Akeidat Yitzchak) explain that Moshe showed weakness on the occasion when Bnei Yisrael thirsted for water, which made him unfit to lead. Specifically, he should not have cried to G-d for help at that time. Rather, he should have known that any decree that he would make would be upheld by G-d. If Moshe had

merely ordered the surrounding rocks to give water, they would have done so.

In contrast, Yehoshua would demonstrate the trait that Moshe lacked. Specifically, when nightfall threatened to deprive Bnei Yisrael of victory in one of their battles with the Canaanites, Yehoshua decreed that the sun and moon should stand still (Yehoshua, ch.10). And they did.

Commenting on a verse in Beha'alotcha, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 17a) says that two men prophesied that Moshe would die and Yehoshua would become the leader. This prophecy occurred on the occasion of the appointment of a sanhedrin after the masses of Bnei Yisrael complained about the quality of the food that Hashem was providing. On that occasion, Moshe actually had complained to Hashem that he (Moshe) was unable to feed the People. This, writes R' Lewin, explains why the two men prophesied at exactly that time--it was the first time that Moshe demonstrated the weakness that ultimately led G-d to replace him as the leader. (Ha'drash Ve'ha'iyun)

From the Haftarah . . .

"The vision of Yeshayah son of Amotz, which he saw concerning Yehuda and Yerushalayim, in the days of Uzziah, Yotam, Achaz and Chizkiyah, kings of Yehuda." (Yeshayah 1:1)

The Gemara (Bava Batra 14b) describes the Book of Yeshayah as consisting entirely of consolation for the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash and the exile. Yet, our haftarah, the first chapter of that book, is full of rebuke and foreboding! Does this not contradict the Gemara?

R' Moshe David Valle z"l (1697-1777; Italian kabbalist) explains:

The name of the prophet Yeshayah is related to the word "yeshuah" which connotes redemption. This similarity indicates that the soul of this prophet came from the "side" of chessed. [In other words, his soul was predisposed to chessed.] Accordingly, his prophecies are full of hope.

True, Yeshayah opened his book with a seemingly negative prophecy. Even his rebuke, however, had its source in chessed. To what may this be compared? To a mother who punishes her child and then embraces him in a tight hug. When we see that, we understand that the punishment originated from the same love from which the hug later came. (Teshuat Olamim)

"An ox knows his owner, and a donkey his master's trough; Yisrael does not know, My people does not perceive." (Yeshayah 1:3)

R' Shmuel Laniado z"l (Ba'al Ha'keilim; rabbi of Aleppo, Syria; died 1605) writes in the name of his son, R' Avraham: The prophet Yeshayah is offering the nation the following rebuke: When two people claim ownership of a certain ox, each can call the ox to himself and we can see to which one it comes. If they fight over a donkey, each can put food in the trough in his barn, and we can see from which the donkey eats. The donkey, it seems, will naturally eat from his master's food rather than eat

food that is not his.

The Jewish People of his generation, Yeshayah complains, were not even as honest as that donkey. Nor were they as understanding as the ox, who knows to leave his fraudulent master and follow his true master. If an ox behaves thus, then certainly you, Yisrael, who possess wisdom from Above, should distance yourselves from theft and follow your Master. (Kli Paz)

Diaries

This week, we present another excerpt from Eleh Masei, subtitled "A Journal of the Journey of the Rabbis, Members of the Committee to Raise the Crown of Judaism in Our Holy Land, Who Toured All the Settlements of Shomron [Samaria] and Galil [Galilee] in the Winter of 5764 [1914]."

We continue with the description of the rabbis' visit to the settlement of Merchaviah, which we began last week:

The manager, Mr. Dick, thanked the rabbis on behalf of the farm for their visit and for the eulogy they delivered for the deceased [i.e., two settlers from nearby villages who had been murdered by Arabs].

One of the assembled, not a worker from the settlement, stood up and rebuked the rabbi of Yaffo [R' Kook] regarding the shemittah / sabbatical year. In this man's view, [R' Kook] was too stringent. [Ed. note: Ironically, R' Kook's halachic decisions regarding the laws of shemittah were considered too lenient by many of his contemporaries. Stay tuned for coverage of shemittah-related issues in these pages during the coming year - 5768 - which is a sabbatical year.] This man continued by heaping scorn on mitzvot in general and on the efforts of the rabbis [to promote Torah-observant agriculture], which he likened to radical socialism. Mr. Dick intervened, saying that he will not permit rudeness, and anyone who wants to speak should first receive permission. . . .

The speeches by the rabbis made a strong impression on the hearts of the listeners, and some of them cried.

One worker, Mr. Friedman, spoke out against the previous speaker who spoke rudely to the rabbis, and he thanks the rabbis on behalf of his friends for the honor that the rabbis showed to the young workers. . . .

After the meal, three workers arrive from the neighboring settlement. They say that they are willing to fulfill the rabbis' requests, but they ask the rabbis to arrange for them a shochet, a teacher, a mikvah, and a shul. The rabbis promise to work on this. [26 Marcheshvan] Mr. Dick gave us his written agreement to our requests.

After breakfast, the rabbi of Yaffo arranged for the cooking staff the details of kashering the kitchen. They promised to do this at the earliest opportunity.

In the tenth hour, we traveled from the settlement in two simple wagons. This was by agreement of all the rabbis, since we could not find a good wagon among our brethren, and we chose to ride on simple wagons owned by Jews rather than a nicer wagon owned by a foreigner.

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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.

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