

# GUARANTEED ETERNITY

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

We are five Parshios from the end of Sefer Divarim (Deuteronomy). We are five Parshios away from Moshe's death. Moshe's final words were becoming more and more precious to the generation poised to enter and inherit the Promised Land. Why did the Torah turn its attention at this critical juncture to the cases of the captive maidservant, the hated and loved wives, and the rebellious son?

Among Moshe's primary concerns for the transition of the Jews from the desert to Israel was the continuity of the Mesora (The transmission of G-d's Law - the Torah - from Moses to all subsequent generations). While the Jews were in the desert, the concept of, "Torah coming from Heaven" was fact not belief. The nation had witnessed Revelation. They had seen the continuous transmission of G-d's word to Moshe when Moshe was summoned and the cloud descended over the Ohel Moed (Meeting Tent). However, more impacting than all that was the fact that they heard G-d's wishes directly from the unveiled radiance of Moshe's divine designation. That was further reinforced by the teachings of Aharon, Pinchas, Yehoshua and the Elders under Moshe's direct supervision.

Following the transition from the desert into the land of Israel all that would end. Some of the people would merit learning at the feet of Yehoshua and the other great teachers. Some of the people would merit learning from the students who had studied at the feet of the great teachers. However most of the people would only have daily contact with local teachers, some who would be great, most who would be well intentioned. The concern was that the direct connection between student - teacher - Moshe - and G-d would be compromised.

First of all, there was a basic concern for mistakes in the accurate transmission of information from generation to generation. However, that was expected and workable. There would always be a Sanhedrin (Supreme Court) and great teachers whose accuracy would guard the authenticity of the transmission. Regardless of individual mistakes and inaccuracies, eventually they would be adjusted and corrected. However, of greater concern to Moshe was the fear that individuals would lose sight of the Torah's divinity, both Written and Oral.

The method of Torah transmission was chosen by G-d. He selected Moshe at the Burning Bush and introduced a human component into the equation of Revelation. As we have explained many times, Moshe's primary argument with G-d was over this one point. Moshe thought that it would be far better if G-d Himself did it all, miraculous justice, redemptive exodus, and Revelation, without the benefit of any human intermediary. Human intermediaries introduced human egos, agendas, and failings into the equation. Moshe felt that accuracy and authenticity would be far better served if G-d

Himself did it without human intervention. However, G-d decided differently and included Moshe and all future teachers of His Torah in the Mesora formula. Nevertheless, Moshe was 100% correct in thinking that the human ego would seek avenues to escape divine imperative and retain a human option.

The human desire for independence results in two approaches. There are those who completely deny G-d's existence and assume the independent role of moral arbitrator and lawgiver. On the other hand, much safer and less conflicting are those who believe in divine Revelation but retain the individual right to interpret and apply G-d's intentions by denying the divinity of the Oral Law and Moshe's designation as the teacher of that Law. Moshe's fear was focused on this concern. Given the decentralization of the nation upon settling the Land and the inevitable physical distances between the great teachers and most of the community, individuals would arise who would attempt to recreate G-d in their own images and teachings. What methods or systems did G-d put in place to avert this proven danger?

G-d put in place three basic systems: 1. Eretz Yisroel = environment; 2. Torah = education; 3. History = pride, with Family as the delivery system for assuring the three systems.

The Parsha begins with the laws of the captive maidservant. (21:10-14) When you will go out to war and you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form you shall bring her into the midst of your house and she shall weep for her mother and father for a full month, thereafter she shall be a wife to you."

Rashi references the Sifri that defines the "war" as a "optional war," rather than an "obligatory war." An example of an obligatory war was the war waged against the Seven Nations. As commanded by G-d and Moshe, Yehoshua led the nation in battle to take the promised inheritance of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yakov. The optional war was like the wars waged by King David to increase the borders of Israel. Such wars were sanctioned by G-d through the Kohain Gadol and the Sanhedrin but were nevertheless considered optional.

The "leniency" of the captive maidservant was only allowed in an optional war. If the war were obligatory it was assumed that the soldiers would be entirely focused on doing G-d's will and all other hormonal interests would be suppressed and controlled. Furthermore, "capturing the Promised Land" was an act of purification. The intention was to remove all idolatrous practices and traces from the land that would manifest G-d's presence within the world. Therefore, there was no possibility of allowing any remnants of the Seven Nations to remain in the land. In such a circumstance the captive maidservant was not an option. (See Rashi)

However, in an optional war, the intent was motivated by humans and then sanctioned by G-d. Human intent colored the entire war effort and did not provide the same built in containments of personal motives and desires as the obligatory war would have done. Therefore, the Torah allowed for the leniencies of the captive maidservant, but with concern and trepidation.

As the Chosen People we claim a unique pride that no other nation can share. We are the Chosen People! Our sense of chosenness demands responsibility and restrictions; however, we are still the Chosen! If a non-Jew desires to share in that chosenness he or she must undergo a conversion. The process of conversion both tests and teaches. It tests the resolve of the candidate to assume the responsibilities and restrictions of being Chosen and it teaches the convert-to-be how to act Chosen.

However, we do not seek converts. We do not engage in missionary work. We only engage those who desire on their own to embrace G-d, His Torah, and His People. The captive maidservant was not such a candidate. Her situation had been forced upon her. Therefore, although the Torah allowed her to become a part of the people it was with great trepidation and concern. Would she introduce into the purity of the Jewish family and land a chord of ill content, resentment, and idolatry?

We are the Chosen! We have Yichus (lineage)! We are the children of Avraham and Sarah. Our forefathers suffered the indignities of Egypt and the hardships of slavery. It was our parents who were chosen to accept G-d's word on behalf of humanity! That is our pride. That is our protection! If we should falter or stray the "Merits of our Fathers" will anchor us. Like Yoseph Hatzadik, the memories of our parent's faces protect us from sin!

(Rashi In Bereishis 39:11 quotes the Talmud in Sotah that at the time that Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce Joseph, he recalled the face of his father Jacob and the memory strengthened Joseph's resolve not to compromise who and what he was by becoming involved with another man's wife.)

On the other hand, the captive maidservant has none of that. Instead, she must "cry for her mother and father." She must mourn her ignoble past and consider the option of becoming Jewish. Can she honestly "leave her mother and father" and become a true daughter of Avraham and Sarah?

The above process involved more than long fingernails and tears. It involved relearning the meaning of life. It meant a total change of appearance, behavior, and attitude. To do so she would have to study the ways of the Jewish family and Torah. Otherwise she would prove to be a source of ill content, resentment, and idolatry. Otherwise the beauty and purity of the Jewish family would be perverted.

The Jewish family is the building blocks of our personal and national eternity. The Jewish family is the programming system for all of Judaism. Within the context of family each member is imbued with pride of family and nation, devotion and commitment to Torah and Mitzvos, and the appreciation for the importance and purity of a land and environment that supports the ideals and values of G-d and Torah.

The family is the training ground for a nation that must retain its single-minded focus on the process of Mesora. As the Talmud in Kedushin 30a states in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Layvie, "A grandfather who learns Torah with his grandson, it is as if the grandson received the Torah from Mt. Sinai. As it states in the verse, "Teach your children and the children of your children" the day that

you stood before Me at Mt. Sinai." Family is defined by continuity of generations. A grandfather who teaches his grandchild Torah imbues in him a sense of history and continuity. He becomes a link in the ongoing chain of transmission - Mesora of Torah from parent to child, teacher to student, from Moshe Rabbeinu until today. Therefore, the family must be protected above all else. The family was Moshe's guarantee that G-d would not be lost in the equation of history.

The hated and loved wives, and the rebellious sons are examples of the breakdown in the Jewish family. If family and society did not take special care when introducing the captive maidservant into their midst, the end result would be discord and despair within the family. The security and purity of the Jewish family would be compromised. The end result is a son raised without a moral compass or conscience. The end result is a child who has no commitment or devotion to family, nation, land, or G-d.

Of course, the Talmud in Sanhedrin 71a states that the case of the rebellious son never occurred. Rather, the Torah's intention was to focus us on the process of family disintegration so that we could do something about it before it was too late.

Moshe's concern was for the Jewish family. More so than any other system, the Jewish family was and is our strength. To the extent that the family is strong and devoted to G-d, Moshe, the land of Israel and each other there will not be discord and destruction. We will have peace in our households and nachas (pleasure, pride, and joy) from our children.

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