

REVIEW, REVIEW, REVIEW!

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The final book of the Chumash, Dvarim, is also known as Mishneh Torah - the restatement and review of the Torah. Though the book of Dvarim does contain within it descriptions of mitzvot/commandments there were not previously mentioned in the Torah, it nevertheless remains mainly a review of the previous books of the Chumash.

It rarely breaks new ground except for the prophetic portions of the book which mark its concluding chapters. The question may arise as to what the purpose and importance of the book might be. Repetitive works hardly hold the attention of the reader or student. Yet Jewish tradition and traditional Jewish educational methods emphasize clearly the requirement of constant review of Torah topics.

As an example, shochem, Jewish ritual slaughterers of animals and poultry, are required to review the halachic rules that are pertinent to their craft at least once every thirty days. The Talmud emphasizes the importance of reviewing Torah study, even sharply differentiating between the students who review one's Torah lesson one hundred times to the ones who review it one hundred and one times!

Perhaps in times when individual powers of memory were so essential to success in Torah study, this idea of review was certainly pertinent and necessary educational methodology. But what of our current age, when all the knowledge of previous generations is available almost effortlessly with the press of a button on our computer keyboard? Is review of already stated laws and events truly necessary any longer? The answer of course is a resounding "yes" but why is this true. The matter has occupied my thoughts for some time.

I think that the review is always necessary for even though the words of the Torah are the same and are unchangeable, the person studying those words is constantly undergoing change. Human life never stands still. The words of Moshe to the Jewish people at the end of the period of the desert have taken on a different dimension and meaning than when he first taught those laws decades earlier.

Life shapes our appreciation of knowledge gained. It makes us wiser and more foolish all at one and the same time. Things that we thought we knew and understood are now mysteries to us and what we did not understand and appreciate at an earlier stage of life now become relevant and essential.

The Book of Dvarim comes to teach us, according to the Talmud, that we really cannot appreciate

knowledge learned and studied from our Torah teachers until "forty years" has passed. It is the review of the past learned knowledge that makes that knowledge truly meaningful to us. My teachers in the yeshiva always emphasized the importance of constant review of topics already studied and seemingly mastered.

"Forty years" has passed for me since those holy days of intensive Torah study in the yeshiva and only now do I begin to appreciate and understand those lessons learned and the knowledge then gained. The lesson of Dvarim therefore lies in its other title - Mishneh Torah - an ongoing review and restatement of Torah throughout our years of life.

Shabat shalom.
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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