

PARSHAS DEVARIM: EXPLAINED WELL

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

Sefer Devarim begins with Moshe Rabbeinu addressing the B'nei Yisroel before his impending death. Moshe followed the lead of Yakov Avinu (See Rashi, others) who rebuked his children for their misdeeds right before his death. Moshe pointedly referred - often in coded language - to the sins of the Bnei Yisroel in the midbar. (See Rashi, Devarim 1:3, quoting the Sifri, for an explanation of why Yakov waited for the time of his death to rebuke his sons.)

âEXPLAINED WELL' - IN MANY LANGUAGES

The Torah relates at the onset of Parshas Devorim (1:5) how Moshe began explaining the Torah to the Jews in âEver HaYardein' - after defeating the nation of Emori and Og, the King of Bashan. Rashi explains that the word âb'air' (to explain well) in this pasuk means that Moshe translated the Torah to all seventy languages. Sifsei Chachamim explain that Rashi's thoughts on this pasuk are congruent with his comment later in Sefer Devarim (27:8) relating to the incident when Moshe instructed the Bnei Yisroel to inscribe the words of the Torah on stone tablets. There too, the words âb'air heitev' (explained well) are used. Rashi, quoting a gemorah in Meseches Sotah (32a), comments that âexplained well' means that Moshe instructed the Jews to elucidate the words of the Torah on these stones in all languages.

I would like to suggest an additional reasoning for Rashi's contention that âexplained well' refers to translating the Torah to many languages. It would be inconceivable to assume that Moshe did not explain the Torah properly to the Jews during the forty-year sojourn in the Midbar. He surely used every opportunity during that time period to teach the Jews the eternal lessons of the Torah. Therefore, this reference to âexplained well' must have a different meaning. Hence the commentary that âb'air' means that he translated the Torah to many languages.

WHY AT THIS TIME?

The question arises, why would Moshe Rabbeinu pick this particular time to translate the Torah into many languages?

The Peninim Yekarim draws on the very first Rashi in the Torah (Bereishis 1:1) to shed light on this question. Rashi comments that the Torah begins with Bereishis - the narrative regarding the creation and history of the world and not a simple listing of the mitzvos in order to pronounce that the world was created by Hashem. It is therefore His to distribute among the nations at His will. Thus, when the Jews will conquer and banish the âseven nations' upon entering Eretz Yisroel, we can stake our legal

claim to the land on the fact that Hashem gave it to us as our eternal inheritance. It is therefore quite logical that Moshe would begin to translate the Torah to all languages at the time that the nations of âEver HaYardein' were defeated - in order to pronounce in all native tongues that the stewardship of Eretz Yisroel is our birthright.

TWO ALTERNATE VIEWS

The Sfas Emes explains that Moshe translated the Torah as he was nearing death, to prepare his children for all future generations. He wanted to share with them that the eternal lessons of the Torah must be studied in the language with which the people are most comfortable.

In a similar vein, the K'sav Sofer comments that Moshe was informing the Bnei Yisroel of the perpetual nature of the Torah's message. By translating the Torah to all languages he was teaching them that these mitzvos and lessons were not intended merely for the generation of the Midbar, when the Jews were dwelling in close proximity to Hashem's Shechinah (Divine Presence) and exposed to a constant flow of miracles. Moshe was preparing the Jews for the more challenging times when they would be dispersed among the nations of the world.

Moshe Rabbeinu, ever the master rebbi and leader, used his final days to deliver powerful and everlasting lessons. He lovingly and firmly rebuked his children, informing them of the need to improve their lives. He reminded them to elevate themselves and avoid the petty complaints that caused them such heartache during their forty-year trip in the desert.

He also prepared all future generations by translating the Torah, and informing us that its teachings are eternal and meaningful - regardless of the language used to convey its everlasting lessons.

Best wishes for a Gutten Shabbos

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