

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“Zion shall be redeemed because of her moral justice and her children shall return to her because of her compassionate righteousness” (Isaiah 1:27).

The Shabbat before the bleak day of Tisha Be'Av, the fast commemorating the destruction of both Holy Temples, is called Shabbat Hazon, the Shabbat of Vision. This title is based on the prophetic reading of that day which starts: "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz which he saw concerning Judea and Jerusalem..." (Isaiah 1:1).

But a "vision" usually refers to a positive sight intensified with a Divine revelation, a manifestation of the Divine presence as when "the elite youth of Israel... envisaged the Almighty" (Exodus 24:11). Likewise, in our liturgy, we pray in the Amida: "May our eyes envisage Your return to Zion in compassion." Isaiah's vision, however, is one of moral turpitude and religious hypocrisy: "Woe to the sinning nation, people heavy with transgression... My soul despises your festivals... your hands are filled with blood...." Where is the positive "vision" of Divine grace?

The answer may be found in last week's portion, where we read about the journeys of the Israelites through the desert - perhaps a metaphor for the journeys of the Israelites through history. "And Moses transcribed the places of origin toward their places of destinations and these are the places of destinations toward their places of origin" (Numbers 33:2).

This verse contains an internal contradiction: Where do we ever find a point of destination leading to a point of origin?

If your point of origin is the place where you discovered your personal or national destiny, you must always return to it, no matter how many places you settle along the way, in pursuit of your original destiny.

Israel began her historic journey with Abraham in Hebron, where G-d charged the first Hebrew with our universal mission: "Through you shall be blessed all the families of the earth" (Genesis 12:13). G-d, likewise,

revealed what it was that Abraham was to teach the world: "I have known him in order that he command his children ... to observe the path of the Lord, to do compassionate righteousness and moral justice" (Gen. 18:19). This is the Abrahamic mission and destiny, and so wherever Israel may travel, she must always return to her roots and purpose - being in Hebron, where her journey began.

It is fascinating that in Hebrew past and future tenses are inextricably bound together; a single letter, vav, can transform a verb in the past tense into the future tense, and vice versa. Similarly, when used in the context of time, the word "lifnei" means "before" (as in "Simeon was born one year before [lifnei] Reuben"), whereas, when used in the context of space the same word means "ahead" (as in "Simeon is walking one step ahead of [lifnei] Reuben").

Temporally, the Hebron experience came before our Babylonian experience, but Hebron and its message - as well as its geographic locus - was always in Israel's future; the Cave of the Patriarchs is both the fount of Israel's mission and the guide-post for Israel's ultimate destiny. It serves both as a burial site (kever) and a womb (rehem) - and both of these words are used interchangeably by the Talmudic Sages.

Hence when Moses makes reference to G-d's command that we inherit and conquer the land of Israel (Deuteronomy 1:8), it is immediately followed by the necessity to establish a proper moral, judicial system; and when Moses deals with the rebellion of the scouts, he excludes Caleb from punishment, since he was in favor of conquering the Land of Israel. What made him stand virtually alone with G-d, Moses and Joshua? Our Sages explain that he began the reconnaissance journey with a side trip to Hebron to garner inspiration from the patriarch who established the mission in the first place. Caleb went back in order to properly forge ahead.

The true vision in the first chapter of Isaiah is not the tragedy of Israel's backsliding or the reality of Israel's hypocritical sacrifices; the inspiring prophetic vision - from which this tragic Shabbat is named - is the vision which concludes the prophetic reading, "Zion shall be redeemed because of her moral justice, and her children shall return to her because of her compassionate righteousness" (Isaiah 1:27).

G-d guarantees that Israel will return to her Abrahamic mission and that she will ultimately arrive at her point of origin. At that time, with the Third Temple,

Please keep in mind
Mordechai Asher ben Miriam
for a refuah shelaima

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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Sefer Devarim begins with Moshe's recap of what happened from the time the nation left Sinai (Devarim 1:6-3:22), including the conquering of Sichon and Og (2:24-38). Both of those kings attacked, but there are differences. Sichon refused Moshe's peaceful overtures (2:26-32), whereas no such attempt was made with Og. (Moshe had asked Sichon for permission to peacefully pass through his land; there was no reason ask such permission from Og.) Additionally, G-d told Moshe not to be afraid of Og (3:2), a reassurance that was not made (and therefore understood to not be needed) regarding Sichon. Rashi explains why Moshe was afraid of Og (but not of Sichon): "he was afraid that his (Og's) merit of having served Avraham will not stand up (remain) for him," as Og was the one who informed Avraham that his nephew Lot had been captured (Beraishis 14:13).

Rashi's wording is quite strange. For one thing, "serving" Avraham implies being his student, employee or servant, not just giving him information once. This term would fit according to the opinion (Pirkay d'Rebbi Eliezer 16 and Sofrim 21:9) that Og was Eliezer, Avraham's servant. However, if Rashi agreed, he should have ascribed Og's merit to having served Avraham as his servant (or for the "kindness" Eliezer did bringing Rivka to Yitzchos, as Pirkay d'Rebbe Eliezer says), not to having informed Avraham of Lot's capture. (It is possible that by using this term, Rashi is hinting to this opinion, see Maskil L'Dovid.)

It is not only Rashi's wording here (in Devarim) that the commentators discuss. The Torah uses a very similar description when Og attacked (Bamidbar 21:34), and there too Rashi explains why Moshe was afraid of Og (but not of Sichon): "for he was afraid to wage war (with Og), lest the merit of Avraham stands up (remains) for him," as Og had informed Avraham that Lot had been captured. B'er BaSadeh asks why it is "the merit of Avraham" that is mentioned, rather than Og's merit. He references the Zohar, which says that Og's merit was being circumcised as part of "the people of

[Avraham's] house" (Beraishis 17:27), a merit that Og lost when he acted licentiously. B'er BaSadeh therefore explains Beraishis 14:13 to read, "and the refugee (referring to Og) came and told Avram the Hebrew (about Lot's capture), and he (Og) was living in the Plains of Mamray the Emorite, the brother of Eshkol and the brother of Aner, and they (Aner, Eshkol, Mamray and Og) had joined in the covenant with Avram" by also becoming circumcised. According to B'er BaSadeh, it is referred to as "the merit of Avraham" because Avraham was the one who circumcised him; it was "Avraham's mitzvah" that Moshe feared would protect Og. If Og was part of Avraham's "inner circle," learning from him and trying to emulate him, he could be considered Avraham's "student," making Rashi's term (in Devarim) appropriate.

Another aspect of Rashi's wording (in Devarim) that seems out of place is the word "not" (Moshe was afraid that Og's merit was "not" still there). Wasn't Moshe afraid that Og's merit would still protect him, not that it wouldn't? The word "not" does not appear in Rashi's commentary in Bamidbar, nor is it in the Talmud (Nidah 61a). Why does Rashi switch from saying that Moshe feared that Og's merit would remain (in Bamidbar), to saying that he feared it would not remain (in Devarim)? (According to Sefer Yosef Hallel, the word "not" doesn't appear in the first printing of Rashi.)

Finally, why did Moshe repeat this aspect to the nation (in Devarim)? Although it makes sense for the Torah's narrative to include G-d reassuring Moshe that he shouldn't be afraid of Og, why did Moshe think it was important to share his initial fear with everyone else?

The Hebrew word for fear (yud-raish-alef) can mean "fear" (as in being afraid of what might happen), or it could mean "respect" or "awe." We are commanded to "fear" our parents (Vayikra 19:3), referring to treating them with dignity and respect (see Sefornu). There are different levels of "fearing G-d," i.e. being fearful of the consequences of disobeying Him (whether it be the punishment or the internal damage caused by straying from Him) and being afraid to approach Him because of His greatness and awesomeness.

The common understanding of the "fear" Moshe had for Og is that he was afraid that Og would cause damage in a war. Even though G-d fought for the Children of Israel, if they had sinned, or if Og had special merits, G-d might not take their side in this particular war. Therefore, G-d reassured Moshe that Og's merit had run out. Even though he lived so long and had such a vast kingdom because of his connection with Avraham, those merits were already accounted for, and "I have given him, his people, and his land, over to you" (Bamidbar 21:34 and Devarim 3:2). It is also possible to understand this "fear" as "respect." Just as Moshe was forbidden from smiting the Nile or the ground for the first three plagues in Egypt because they had helped him years earlier (see Rashi

on Shemos 7:19 and on 8:12), would it have been appropriate to kill Og, wipe out his entire nation (including his family), and take his land, after he had helped Avraham?

When Og attacked, Moshe may have experienced both types of fear. He was afraid of losing the war, but was also afraid to treat Og inappropriately. G-d told him not to worry; Og's merits have run their course, and not only will you (Moshe) be victorious, there is also no problem with smiting him completely. When Moshe repeated what had happened to the nation, he was concerned about how they would perceive the war. Would they wonder how they could wipe out someone who had helped their forefather? Would they come away with the (incorrect) message that there is no problem paying back good deeds with bad ones? Would the concept of "ha-karas ha-tov," acknowledging the good someone (or even something) has done (and responding accordingly) be lost? In order to avoid this, Moshe made sure the nation knew G-d had told him that Og's merits had been used up, that he didn't need to "fear" Og (read: "treat him with dignity and respect").

If Rashi is trying to convey this message in Devarim, we can understand why he adds the word "not;" Moshe was afraid the nation would think that Og having helped Avraham didn't matter, that it would not "stand up" and get in the way of what they wanted. Since the point was to protect the value of what Og did for Avraham, the word Rashi used was "serving" him, as it made little difference what the favor was. Whether Og served Avraham as Eliezer, studied under him (with Aner, Eshkol and Mamray), or helped him by telling him of Lot's capture, if G-d hadn't told Moshe not to worry about it, he would have been hesitant to destroy someone who had helped Avraham many years earlier.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Many events in the book of Bereishit (Genesis) repeat themselves in Devarim (Deuteronomy) with one major difference. Whereas Genesis is a narrative which focuses on individuals, Devarim focuses on the nations who have emerged from these individuals.

Consider for example the story in this week's portion of the children of Yaakov (Jacob), Am Yisrael, asking the children of Esav (Esau) for permission to go through their land on their way to Israel. It is a reversal of the story of the confrontation between Esav and Yaakov as found in the Genesis narrative.

In Bereishit Esau comes from the field tired and buys food from Yaakov. (Genesis 25:34) Here in Devarim, it is the Jews weary from years of wandering in the desert, who try to buy food and water from the children of Esav. (Devarim 2:6)

In Bereishit, Yaakov rejects traveling with Esav, but promises to rendezvous with him one day in Seir. That promise is never fulfilled in their lifetime. (Genesis 33:14) Yet, here in Devarim, the Israelites finally connect with the children of Esav in Seir, and are rejected. (Numbers 20:21; Devarim 2:8)

Note also the similarity in language. In preparation for his meeting with Esav, Jacob wrestles with a mysterious stranger and is struck in the hollow (kaf) of his thigh (Genesis 32:26). In Devarim, G-d tells the Jews not to antagonize the children of Esav, "For I shall not give you of their land, even the right to set foot (kaf) there." (Deuteronomy 2:5) Rabbi Yitzhak Twersky notes that the use of the uncommon term kaf in both places point; the reader to a similarity between these episodes.

Indeed, both stories also intersect in that they deal with fear. In Genesis it is Yaakov who is afraid before meeting Esav. In the words of the Torah, "Yaakov became very frightened." (Bereishit 32:8) Here, in Devarim it's the children of Esav who are frightened as the Israelites draw near. As the Torah states: "The Lord said to me (Moshe)...command the people saying 'you are passing through the boundary of your brothers, the children of Esav, who dwell in Seir; they will fear you.'" (Devarim 2:4, 5)

One can't help but note that the parallel stories in Devarim are often the reverse of the Bereishit narrative. Thus, events in Devarim could be viewed as a corrective to what unfolded in Bereishit. A real appreciation of feeling the pain of another only comes when one feels that very pain. Perhaps Am Yisrael, the children of Yaakov, had to learn this lesson before entering the land of Israel. © 2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's parsha, Dvarim, is in reality a continuation of last week's parsha of Maasei. This is because it also forms a narrative review of events that occurred to the Jewish people during their forty years of life in the desert of Sinai.

Just as last week's parsha reviewed for us the stations where the Jews encamped during those forty years, so does this week's parsha review for us key events that befell the Jewish people during those decades of supernatural life and wanderings.

But there is a fundamental difference between these two narrative views of past events. The review in parshat Maasei is essentially presented in an objective, even detached manner. It is full of facts, names and

places but it is basically an unemotional and factual report regarding a long forty year journey of the people of Israel.

This week's parsha contains a review of facts and events by Moshe. It is a personal and at times emotional and painful review of those years in the desert. Moshe bares his heart and soul and shares his frustrations and emotions with us.

Parshat Dvarim, in fact all of Chumash Dvarim is a record of how Moshe personally saw things and it records his impressions and feelings regarding the events of the desert of Sinai. In many ways it is one of the most personal and emotional books in the entire canon of the Bible. It is not only Moshe's words that are on display before us in the parsha. It is his viewpoint and assessment of the Jewish people and its relationship to G-d that is reflected clearly and passionately in his words.

Personal opinion and passion are key to the service of G-d according to Jewish tradition. Judaism does not condone "holy rollers" in its midst but the entire idea of the necessity of kavanah/intense intent in prayer and the performance of mitzvot speaks to a personal view of the relationship to G-d and Torah and a necessary passion and viewpoint.

Everyone is different and therefore everyone's view of events also is different one from another. Thus, everyone's service of G-d and Torah, albeit within the parameters of established and recognized halacha, must contain nuances of personal difference.

The importance of the Torah emphasizing to us that the book of Dvarim is Moshe's personal record of events is to stress to us this recognition of individuality that exists within every human being and how that affects one's view of everything, spiritual and physical, in life.

Moshe's recorded personal anguish at witnessing the sins of Israel in the desert is a greater indictment of those sins than just the description and listing of the sins themselves would have been. Life is personal, never objective. Moshe's personal view of the events of the desert makes these events real and tangible to us.

We are also involved in the narrative because of our empathy with Moshe. This is what makes the entire book of Dvarim so real and important to us. People speak to people. Moshe speaks to us. © 2011 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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This final reading goes down on record as the strongest message of reprimand ever delivered to the Jewish people. The prophet Yeshaya depicts

the moral conduct of the Jews as being the most corrupt and wicked one since the days of Sedom and Gemorah. He declares the Jews to be even worse than animals, and says in the name of Hashem, "The ox knows his master and the donkey his owner's feeding tray but My nation doesn't know and doesn't even consider Me. Woe guilty people, heavy with sin, evil and corrupt children who forsook Hashem and disgraced Israel's Holy One." (1:3,4) Yeshaya continues with more harsh words of chastisement, and says, "Why should you continue to be beaten if you just increase your straying? From head to toe there is no clear spot, only stabs, bruises and open wounds. But you have not treated them, not bandaged them or even softened them." (1:5,6) The prophet indicates that after all the beatings they have received the Jewish people haven't even made an attempt to rectify their faults.

Yeshaya then concentrated on the Jewish service in the Bais Hamikdash and attacked them even on that account. He expressed that Hashem was displeased with their sacrifices and lacked interest in their service. Hashem says, "When you come to see Me who asked you to trample on My courtyard? Don't continue bringing useless offerings; your incense is disgusting to Me. I cannot tolerate your gatherings on Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh, and I despise your festivals and celebrations; they're too much bother for Me." (1:12,13) The Jewish people were going through the motions of Judaism but lacked any level of sincerity. They assembled in the Bais Hamikdash during the holiday seasons but did not dedicate their efforts to Hashem, rather to themselves. Even their prayers, their direct line to Hashem, were being rejected. Yeshaya said in the name of Hashem, "When you stretch out your hands in supplication I will ignore you; even when you increase your prayers I won't listen because your hands are full of blood." (1:15) These last words refer to the increasing number of murders and crimes that were taking place amongst the Jewish people, even in the Bais Hamikdash proper. Yeshaya said that Hashem had literally closed the door on His people and was not interested in seeing or hearing from them anymore.

Suddenly, we discover a complete change of nature and the prophet extends the Jewish people an open invitation. Hashem says, "Please go and reconcile; if your sins are likened to scarlet they will be whitened like snow and if they are like deep red crimson they will be like white wool. If you consent and listen then you will eat the goodness of the land." (1:18,19) This seems to indicate a total reversal of direction. Moments earlier, the prophet proclaimed that Hashem had absolutely no interest in His people and despised their trampling on His property. Hashem was so angry and disgusted with them that He severed all lines of communication. And now, one passage later Hashem was prepared to brighten and whiten the Jewish people to the extent of glistening snowflakes?!

The answer to this perplexing message is found in the insightful words of Chazal in explanation of a profound statement of the Jewish people in Shir Hashirim. Shlomo Hamelech presents the feelings of the Jewish people during their last moments before their bitter exile from their homeland. They describe themselves in the following succinct manner, "I am asleep but my heart is awake." (Shir Hashirim 5:2) Rashi (ad loc.) quotes the words of Chazal in the Pesikta which explain the Jewish people's message. The Jews stated that although they fell into a deep slumber and basically abandoned Hashem's service, Hashem, the heart of the Jewish people, will always remain awake. The inner contact between Hashem and the Jewish heart can never become disconnected.

The Jewish people's message to Hashem was that He overlook their atrocities and focus on their inner essence. Even if the external expression of the Jewish people displays total disinterest in Hashem the internal bond between Hashem and His people will always remain. Buried beneath the many thick layers of indifference which coat the heart is a pure and sincere feeling for their true beloved father, Hashem. True, their actions do not display any semblance of interest in Hashem, however the fact remains that the Jewish heart can always be motivated. Hashem can always reach the bottom of their hearts and reengage them in His perfect service.

We now understand the sudden change of nature in this week's haftorah. The behavior of the Jewish people was truly abhorrent but this only represented the external layers of their heart. When addressing their actions Hashem stated in the most harsh terms that He had no interest in His people. However there always remains an inner dimension to the Jewish people, the faint call from within them to return to their true source of existence, Hashem. When addressing this inner essence Hashem is always prepared to motivate His people and even invites them to be cleansed and glisten like snowflakes.

This is the hidden secret of the Jewish people's eternal existence. From the vantage point of their actions, the Jews, at times, fall into a deep coma developing the most inconceivable immoral behavior. They do not demonstrate any inner interest to be with Hashem or any sincerity to serve Him. But Hashem, the heart and pulse of the Jewish nation remains connected to His people. His love for them is so boundless that He never gives up on them. And so, when their actions are totally corrupt Hashem dresses that inner dimension of theirs. He beckons them to reconcile their ways and informs them that He is prepared to do virtually any thing for them. If they do return He will cleanse them and even brighten them like glistening snowflakes. This remarkable dialogue reinforces the fact that Hashem always cares about us and is forever awaiting our return. He constantly yearns for that glorious moment when all of His people will reflect the name of our

month, Av, and proclaim, "You are our (Av) father and we are Your sons!" May this day come speedily in our times. © 2011 Rabbi D. Sigel and torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

Who Wrote Sefer Devarim?

I'm always baffled on the differences in style and content that appear in the book of Devarim in contrast to the preceding four books of our Torah. Any serious student of Torah would notice a host of variations between these texts and the obvious question is "Why?"

Let me explain. First the language is different. In Devarim, Moshe our teacher often speaks in the first person something that is not found in the first four books of the Torah. Second, there are blatant disparities when contrasting the book of Devarim to the proceeding books. For example, the differences in the language of the Ten Commandments. The obvious inclusion of additional words in the text in Devarim as well as a host of laws which do not appear in the preceding books. The section dealing with the blessings and rebukes are markedly different. One can therefore ask the question as to why this discrepancy? Was this book written by someone else? Is it G-d driven as the other books or was it written by Moshe?

These questions are indeed the discussion of our sages as well.

When one reads the commandments of Shabbat as it appears in the book of Shmot and Devarim, two divergent languages appear; "Zachor" and "Shamor". Which one appeared on the Ten Commandments? Or did they both appear? Our Rabbis state that these two languages were said at one time, something that no human can achieve. So that each time the Decalogue appeared, the second language was also used.

But the questions still abound? What about all the other dissimilarities in the book of Devarim? The additional laws-the additional curses and blessings- how were they written? Were they written and given by G-D or was it Moshe's words?

Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky author of the book "Emes L'Yaakov" develops an interesting approach. He claims that there are times in the Torah that we see the word written in one way yet we read it in another way. Examples of this can be found in the portion of Ki Tavo, in which the Torah writes one language, yet we vocalize it very differently. This phenomenon is referred to as the axiom of "Kri and Ktiv". He therefore posits the innovative notion that the differences between the text in Dvarim and the conflicting texts in the other sections of the Torah are just an example of this principle of "Kri and Ktiv", in which one time it appears as we should read it and the next time it appears as it is written or visa versa.

I believe that perhaps there is another explanation to these apparent differences.

In defining how the Torah was given to the Jewish people, the Bais Halevi states that on the original Decalogue were written the unwritten Torah as well (The Torah shbeal Peh). When the second set of tablets were given however, the Oral Torah was omitted. This omission made the Jewish people an integral part in the transmission of the Torah. Before they were outsiders looking at the text as it appeared in writing. Now that the Oral law was not written, the Jewish people were charged to be intimately involved in the transmission, and they became the conduit for the receiving and the transmission of the Oral Torah. They fundamentally became the unwritten law!

It is this line of reasoning that I believe explains the blatant disparities from the book of Deuteronomy to the other four preceding books. I would like to offer the theory that the book of Dvarim is the first example of the Oral law as interpreted by our teacher Moses. Its importance and value remains equal to the other books but it represents the beginnings of the elucidation and expounding of the preceding written Torah and the meanings of those words. In essence then, Moshe our teacher in the book of Devarim provided the first example of the exposition of the proceeding books of the Torah; the "Torah Shbeal peh", the unwritten Torah. Using this reasoning we can easily explain the contrast in language, style and content of the book of Devarim when compared to the other books and arrive possibly at the conclusion that one book is an explanation of the others.

When I presented this theory to my esteemed colleague and Rabbi in West Hartford he commented that perhaps this is the intent of the words that appear at the beginning of Devarim that "Hoil Moshe beer et hatorah hazot", Moshe began to explain this Torah.

I believe it is! © 2009 Rabbi M. Weiss. Rabbi Mordechai Weiss is the Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigel Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford. Any comments can be e-mailed to him at ravmordechai@aol.com

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

After forty long years in the desert, the Jewish people stood poised to conquer the Holy Land. But there were complications. Two of their most formidable foes were untouchable. The Torah forbade the Jewish people to attack the nations of Ammon and Moav; they had to circle around to the north even though the direct path of invasion led through the lands of these two nations. The Torah did, however, allow the Jewish invaders to make threaten and intimidate Moav, as long as they stopped short of actual combat.

Why was this special protection granted to these two implacable foes of the Jewish people?

Our Sages find the answer in an incident that took place five centuries earlier. During a period of

famine, the Jewish patriarch Abraham, his beautiful wife Sarah and his nephew Lot went to seek food in Egypt. The pharaoh at that time had a roving eye. Whenever a beautiful woman caught his fancy, he would kill her husband and take her into his harem. Sarah caught his fancy, which led him to focus on Abraham, who had escorted her to Egypt. Had he known Abraham was her husband, he would have killed him on the spot, but Abraham claimed he was her brother and was spared.

Lot was standing there when Abraham represented himself to the pharaoh as Sarah's brother. If Lot had said one word or made one gesture to arouse the pharaoh's suspicions, Abraham would have been doomed. But Lot remained silent, and the pharaoh accepted Abraham's story. The Torah rewarded Lot by forbidding the Jewish people to attack Lot's descendants, the nations of Ammon and Moav.

The question arises: Why does the Torah protect Ammon and Moav only from an actual assault? Why does the Torah permit threats and other intimidating actions Moav? True, the Torah does forbid the Jewish people to threaten and intimidate the nation of Ammon, but that is not a reward for Lot's actions. It is a reward for his daughter's efforts to conceal the shameful paternity of her children (which is a subject for a different discussion). Lot's reward for his silence was limited to a protection from assault against his descendants. Why was this so?

The commentators explain that the deficiencies in Lot's reward were measure for measure for the deficiencies in his act of kindness. Lot was indeed silent when Abraham told the Egyptian pharaoh that he was Sarah's brother. But he did not have the sensitivity and consideration to reassure Abraham that he could count on his silence. He could have told Abraham, "Don't worry. You can count on my silence. I won't give your secret away." But he did not. And so, Abraham's heart must have been beating wildly throughout that tense confrontation with the pharaoh. Therefore, the Torah only protects Lot's descendants from actual harm but not from threats and intimidation.

A rich man caught sight of a pauper sitting on a bench and decided to invite him for dinner. But first he had some business to discuss with an associate. A half-hour later, the business was settled. The rich man offered the pauper a gracious invitation and brought him to his house. He seated the pauper in a place of honor and wined and dined him like a king.

Afterwards, the pauper thanked the rich man and prepared to leave. "Tell me, did I treat you kindly?" said the rich man,

"Oh, yes," said the pauper.

"Could you have been any kinder to you than I was?"

The pauper fidgeted. "Do you want me to be honest?"

"Certainly," said the rich man.

"Well, you could have invited me before you discussed business with your friend. For that half hour I was afraid that I might have to go to sleep hungry tonight."

In our own lives, we need to pay close attention not only to what we do but also to how we do it. The full value and quality of a kind deed is determined by considering it in its full context. Indeed, sometimes the manner in which a kind deed is done is more important than the deed itself. © 2011 Rabbi N. Reich and torah.org

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

“Do not recognize faces in judgement...Hear the small as the big...Do not be fearful of a man because the ultimate judgement is G-d's...The matters that are difficult for you bring to me and I will hear them." (Devarim 1:17) And you shall discern from among the entire people, men of accomplishment, G-d fearing people, men of truth, people who despise money, and you shall appoint them leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, and leaders of tens. They (the district courts) will judge the will judge the nation at all times and the all the big matters they will bring to you and all the small matters they will judge... and they will lighten the burden from upon you and carry it with you. (Shemos 18:21-22)

When Moshe reviews the account of his father in-law Yisro's advice in the last of the five books the language of that excellent council was slightly altered. Yisro spoke about matters "big" and "small" as determining whether they would be dealt with by a lower court or Moshe himself. Moshe speaks about "hard" and "easy" as the factors to be considered. What's the big difference?

A Yeshiva Rebbe was faced with two boys fighting over a dollar. Each claimant seemed to have validity in his claim and yet it was unclear to whom the dollar should go. The Rebbe decided to teach his students a real lesson. He called the "Gadol HaDor" the great mind of the generation to help decide the case.

Reb Moshe Feinstein received three visitors one afternoon, the two contending boys and their teacher. The boys presented their case before the greatest living legal authority of the generation. He heard each side with great care and questioned each with precision. After a thorough review of the facts of the case, Reb Moshe consulted his books for a conclusion. A clear but difficult decision was arrived at. Reb Moshe decided in favor of one of the boys and awarded him the dollar. Everyone was thrilled for having had the opportunity to spend time with such a great man. They had a sense that ultimate justice had been served but, even still, the fellow who lost his legal grip on the dollar he had claimed still felt the sting of the final judgment. As they were leaving, in an act of superlative

sensitivity and magnanimity, Reb Moshe reached into his pocket and gave the one who had lost the case a dollar from his own pocket. Everyone left with a dollar and a pocket full of lessons.

When Yisro gave his famous and wise advice, he spoke about easing Moshe's burden by letting only the "big" cases through to Moshe. Only if a case involved large claims should Moshe be bothered. Multi-national corporations' claims, large mergers, major acquisitions, giant chapter eleven cases, anti-monopoly suits would all go to the "big" man of the generation according to Yisro's thinking.

Later when Moshe reviews the subject, he makes a subtle and real adjustment. "Big" and "small" are non-entities when determining the role of the "great" man. It matters only if the situation is "hard". If the truth is discernable in a huge court case and the law is clear then let the lower court make its own decision. However, if the law is unclear, and a new precedent needs to be set or a creative application of law then let the Gadol HaDor make that determination even if it's a case of "small claims". Only when the truth is hard to arrive at do we call in "the big gun".

The main focus of a judge should be truth. It matters not whether a case involves big bucks or high profile personalities. The judges need to be blind to all external factors. There is only one bottom line. Don't think for a moment that Reb Moshe deliberated lightly because of the age of the boys or the minuscule quantity of money at stake. The pursuit of truth on any scale or at any age is no child's game! © 2000 Rabbi L. Lam and Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI YAAKOV HABER

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The annual cycle of parsha readings from the Torah is arranged in such a way that this week's parsha (Devarim) is always read on the Shabbos before Tisha be-Av. Those of you who were listening to the Baal Kore might have noticed that there is one verse in it which he chanted differently—to the melody of the Lamentations of Jeremiah ("Eicha") which is read on Tisha be-Av. That is the verse (Deut. 1:12): "How can I alone bear your troubles and burdens and strife?" An obvious connection with the Lamentations is in the first word of this verse, "Eicha" ("How"), which is used repeatedly in the Lamentations. But the Vilna Gaon finds a deeper connection, in the third word of this verse: "Eicha esa LEVADI ...", ("How can I bear ALONE ..."), since a form of that word also occurs at the beginning of the Lamentations: "Eicha yashva BADAD ha-ir ..." ("How the city sits SOLITARY ..."). This gives a clue to the essence of the tragedy which we are now commemorating.

Last week I spoke about the cause of the destruction of our Temple -- "sinas chinam", causeless or irrational hate. The consequence of all this hate is

aloneness or solitude. In the first chapter of Eicha, there occurs four times some variant of the phrase: "Ein menachem lah" ("There is none to comfort her [Jerusalem]"). That gives, in a nutshell, the tragedy which we mourn—Jerusalem is alone, without any comforter.

People often ask me how they are supposed to behave in a house of mourning, and in particular, what they are supposed to say to a mourner—or, for that matter, to anyone who has suffered a tragedy. In fact, it is impossible to say anything which will nullify a tragedy. And that is not even wanted. All that is wanted by the sufferer is a sharing of his or her burden.

Moses, in his statement to the Jewish people, was not complaining about having to bear the burdens of leadership—he could certainly do that—but having to bear them alone. Now, in the Nine Days leading up to the fast of Tisha be-Av, let us look around us and see whose burdens we can share. In that way we might be able to reverse, to some extent, the trend of solitude, resulting from the sin of sinas chinam, under which our people have been suffering for thousands of years.

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SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Rabbenu Yonah introduces his commentary to Parashat Devarim with the verse (Mishlei 24:23), "Also these are for the wise; showing favoritism in judgement is not good." He explains that while much of Sefer Devarim appears, at first glance, to be repetitive, there is good reason for this repetition. Although Moshe had rebuked Bnei Yisrael throughout the 40 years in which he lead them, they were eager to hear more reproof in order to constantly improve themselves. As King Shlomo wrote elsewhere (Mishlei 9:8), "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you."

"Showing favoritism in judgement is not good." Many people use their last days to appease their opponents. Moshe, however, did not do so; until the very end he fulfilled his obligation as a leader to rebuke his people for their wrongdoings.

Two of the Torah's 613 mitzvot appear in Parashat Devarim. (Sefer Hachinuch). Sefer Hachinuch introduces the Book of Devarim as follows: Ramban writes that this Book is the Mishneh Torah/review of the Torah. In it, Moshe repeats the mitzvot which are most necessary for the generation that will enter the Land. He warns them repeatedly regarding these mitzvot and scares them with threats of punishment. In some cases he offers additional explanations of the mitzvot.

Regarding the mitzvot which apply to the kohanim, however, Moshe does not say a word. This is because kohanim are zerizim/alert regarding their obligations. There are also some knew mitzvot in this Book—for example the laws of yibum, one who

defames his bride, divorce and false witnesses. There is no doubt, however, that all of these laws were taught to Moshe either at Har Sinai or in the Tabernacle during the first year after the Torah was given. The only part of the Torah which was given for the first time in the Wilderness of Moav (on the border of Eretz Yisrael) was the covenant described in Parashat Ki Tavo. This is why it does not say, "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, 'Command Bnei Yisrael...'" or a similar expression in this Book.

Do not be amazed, however, that these mitzvot are not mentioned earlier, for Chazal have said in several places that the Torah does not necessarily follow chronological order. The reason for this is that the Torah includes all knowledge in addition to its peshat/plain meaning and the mitzvot. It could be that for this reason certain sections or letters have to be where they are. In any case, it was all planned by the Master of All Wisdom, Blesses is He, and that is explanation enough.

"You are passing through the boundary of your brothers, the children of Esav, who dwell in Seir... You shall not provoke them... for as an inheritance to the children of Esav I have given Mount Seir." (2:4-5)

In the book of Yehoshua (24:4) we read, "I gave Mount Seir to Esav to inherit it, and Yaakov and his sons descended to Egypt." Rav Aharon Bakst z"l asks, "Are the two parts of the verse parallel? Is this a trade that we can be happy about? After all, Esav's children became kings of Seir, while Yaakov's children became slaves in Egypt."

Rav Bakst explains: When an animal is born, it can stand and run and feed itself in a very short time. By the age of one year, animals such as calves and lambs practically are adults. Not so humans—a parent is not free of raising a child for two decades. Why?

The answer, very simply, is that because man has a higher calling in life, his training takes longer. Man must build himself and the world, and he therefore must take the time necessary to gather all of the tools which he will need.

A similar contrast exists between Yaakov and Esav. Esav went off to inherit Mount Seir because G-d had no further mission for Esav. But Yaakov and his sons? They descended to Egypt to begin the long and difficult process of growing up. (Lev Aharon) © 2011 S. Katz

