



Parashat Devarim 5770

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On the Parashah...

“Mishneh Torah: Moshe’s Concluding Speech”

[Tal Chermon]

The entire book of Devarim is one long speech given by Moshe Rabbenu before his death and before Israel enters the Promised Land. In his humility, he had protested to being appointed, saying: “I am not a man of many words” (Shemot 4:10). Forty years later, at the age of 120, he encompasses the whole history and geography of Israel in his final speech - addressing both the individual and the Nation as a whole.

What is so special about the book of Devarim? The Ramban (in his introduction) explains that it is directed to those who will inherit the Land, as is written: “See, I have taught you statutes and laws as Hashem, my G-d has commanded me, so that you should follow them in the Land which you are going to inherit” (Devarim 4:5). Devarim is not a book of abstractions but of the fulfillment of the Torah on earth, in Eretz Israel. It is not a repetition of the rest of the Torah, neither is it completely new. It is an explanation or expansion, showing the old in a new light - the light of the practical application of Torah principles to our Nation in our Land.

Moshe’s closing speech is delivered “after he had slain Sichon, the King of Emori, who dwelt in Cheshbon and Og, the King of Bashan, who dwelt in Ashtarot in Edrei” (Devarim 1:4). These two wars are the prerequisite for understanding Moshe’s words.

What connection can there be between war and Torah? We are the connection. Fulfillment of Torah in Israel necessitates military action at times. Abstract religion, separated from any connection to territory, needs no military defense. A national entity in its own land, however, must have sovereignty, and a military arm with it. It is up to us to bring all aspects of Torah "down to earth," with all that that entails, even war. This is what the Spies could not fathom. Now, "after he had slain Sichon," it is conceivable. We have experienced our power to defeat two mighty kings, as the parashah ends: "And I commanded Yehoshua at that time, saying, 'Your eyes have seen all that Hashem, your G-d did to those two kings, and so shall G-d do to all the empires where you pass. You shall not fear them, for Hashem, your G-d is the One fighting for you'" (ibid. 3:21-22). Today too, great and mighty nations surround us. The situation is no different than it was in Yehoshua's time, in David's time or in the Maccabees' time. We know that G-d is on our side, it is He Who will make us victorious.

Long before Rashi and Ramban composed their commentaries on the Torah, "Moshe began to explain this Torah" (Devarim 1:5). Certainly, Moshe, G-d's most loyal servant, provided the truest explanation, and this is how he began: "Hashem, our G-d, spoke to us at Chorev, saying, 'You have dwelt long enough at the mountain...'" (ibid. v. 6). The Torah could not be properly fulfilled in the desert. "Turn, and start your journey, and go to the mountain of the Emori and to all its neighbors in the lowland, in the mountains, in the plains, and the desert, and along the coast, the land of the Canaanite and the Lebanon up to the great river of Perat" (ibid. v. 7). The Torah's directive is to take possession of and settle the Land. "Who is like Your nation Israel, one people in the Land" (Amidah prayer of Shabbat afternoon). Complete fulfillment of the Torah is only possible in Eretz Israel.

Throughout the past century, a great debate has been going on regarding whether it is up to us to conquer and settle the land, or whether we should sit and wait for G-d's promise to be fulfilled. This week's parashah contains the promise: "See, I have presented you with the Land" (ibid. 1:8). Although this seems to imply that G-d will ensure that we get the Land, we are immediately commanded: "Come and possess the Land which Hashem swore to your fathers, to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, to give to them and to their descendants after them" (ibid.). "Hashem swore," but it is up to us to ensure that His word be done. It is both a promise and a command. We must not rationalize that if Hashem swore, there is nothing for us to do but sit and wait. It is precisely because He swore that we know that our efforts are meaningful, and that they will bear fruit. We must conquer and settle the Land.

Rav Aviner on... We will be Back in Gush Katif

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Matot-Masei 5770 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Gush Katif is an important way-station in the course of our Redemption. It started as a place full of light and joy and building and creation. Then it was one of breakdown

and destruction, darkness and betrayal. Yet it was still a way-station. By the same token, our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook counted even the heinous episode of the Altalena, of brother killing brother, amongst the way-stations of the Redemption. The cure is to open up the emergency store houses of love for our fellow Jew in order to melt the hatred (Mi-Maamakim, Li-Netivot Yisrael vol. 1 p. 128). And that's what happened at the Altalena: Those who were hurt and wounded maintained their restraint and prevented a civil war.

And at Gush Katif, as well, a large population behaved with restraint, and by such means a terrible war between Jews was prevented. This great merit is connected to the other sources of goodness: Self-sacrifice for the rebuilding of the Land as emissaries of the entire Nation under difficult economic, agricultural and security conditions. Thanks to G-d's mercy, the Land responded and generously provided its bounty; and its people lived lives of Torah and labor, lives of kind deeds – to those around us and to others, and there was great unity between different sorts of people and great faith. Indeed, the test of faith comes in times of crises, as is explained in Mesilat Yesharim (Chapter 19) regarding love of G-d. Here, the righteous of Gush Katif are passing their test. They don't spend their time heaping calumny on those who didn't join them in their struggle. They don't recite, day and night: "We won't forget." They are not stuck in the past. Rather, they look ahead to the future. As Rambam wrote in one of his letters: A person should look inward at himself and not outward at others.

Yes, the most important thing is not what was but what will be: How can we return to Gush Katif? How can another, similar destruction be prevented from occurring in Judea and Samaria? And yes! From then until today a debate has raged among lovers of Eretz Yisrael. Some say that only the language of force works, and that had we exerted enough force, as, for example, the Charedim do, or – not to be compared – the Arabs, we could have saved our beloved Gush Katif. Others say that force only works with minor matters, but not with such politically and militarily crucial issues as this. Rather, there is only one way for Judea, Samaria and Gaza to remain ours: For the Nation to want it!

The reality proves that the second approach is the right one. Whoever looks at Jewish history with open eyes, starting with the awakening of the return to Zion during the past 150 years, will see that nothing happened through the use of threats or force, but because people wanted it. Our wonderful Land was rebuilt – because they wanted it. In the return to Zion, whoever wanted to come, came. In the War of Independence, only volunteers enlisted. In all of Israel's wars, only those who believed in it fought devotedly. In the whole settlement program in Judea and Samaria and Gaza, only those who wanted to settle, came and settled. Also with all the Torah learning which has so increased in our Land, nobody learns Torah unless he wants to. Quite the contrary, using force pushes people away. As we said, the largest issues depend on will, since they are bound up with suffering. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said, "G-d gave three gifts to His Nation, and they come about only through suffering, and they are, Torah, the World-to-Come and Eretz Yisrael" (Berachot 5a). They all require self-sacrifice, and one cannot force self-sacrifice. Such was the approach of the righteous of Gush Katif, that it is impossible to coerce. Marriage, as well, cannot be coerced. You cannot command love, and Eretz Yisrael is likened to marriage (see Yeshayahu 62:4-5). According to the Sefat Emet at the beginning of Parashat Shelach, Eretz Yisrael is likened to Talmud study. That, too, is hard, therefore it depends on desire and will: "Eretz Yisrael contains the aspect of the Oral Torah, that a person must attain it by way of his own toil. Hence, conquering Eretz Yisrael depends on the will of the Jews themselves... Therefore, when the Jews refused the

Land, they could no longer enter it.” Likewise, Rabbi Yosef Karo in his book, “Maggid Mesharim,” explained that the goal of sending out the spies, who were Torah scholars, was to arouse their desire for Eretz Yisrael (Parashat Shelach). Rabbi Yehoshua of Kutna wrote the same thing: “Now that we have seen the great repentance [for Eretz Yisrael], among the people of lesser worth, amongst the medium level people and amongst the upright of heart, it is almost certain that the spirit of Redemption is shining forth” (Shut Yeshuot Malko, Yoreh Deah #66). And Rabbi Yehuda Ha-Levi similarly wrote that the redemption will come when the Jews long for Jerusalem with the very greatest desire (from the end of “the Kuzari”).

True, there is a theory in history called “Historic Materialism,” that what determines history is political or economic facts on the ground, as in the writings of Marx or Engels. Yet the main approach is “Historic Idealism,” that what determines history are beliefs and opinions and ideas, as in Hegel, and as in Maran Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook’s famous article, “The Course of Ideas in Israel” (Orot). Therefore, we have to multiply the number of Jews who want the full extent of the Land. The more they increase, the better off our Nation will be. Indeed, in Gush Katif, as I said, there were a lot of righteous people of different stripes, but the entire Jewish People were not AT Gush Katif, nor were they WITH Gush Katif. The cure is the knowledge and awareness that this is our Land, as our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, wrote in his famous placard “Lema’an Da’at” [In order that they should know]: “This entire Land is ours... hence once and for all, these matters are clear and absolute, that there are no ‘territories’ or ‘[Palestinian] Arabs’ or ‘Arab Lands’. Rather, it is all Jewish lands, our eternal, ancestral inheritance” (quoted in Le-Hilchot Tzibbur).

And then, even to Gush Katif, we will return. For a long time, already, Gush Katif has been destroyed and gone, but that same faith of Gush Katif is hovering over the world, flittering around among people, causing sorrow and sadness, joy and hope. It is penetrating the hearts and minds of the simple people, of profound thinkers, of men and of women, of young boys and girls, without people noticing it. That faith is beating in their hearts, without their knowing where that fortitude, that sweetness, is coming from. It is that faith which will save all of Judea and Samaria and Gaza, and it is that which will bring us home to Gush Katif.

Stories about Leaving the Land of Israel - #6

A young man from a non-Orthodox family in America, made Aliyah, became religious and began learning in yeshiva. His sister, who remained in the Exile, began dating a non-Jew. He said to his sister: "If you get married to a non-Jew, I won't come to your wedding. I'll only come if you marry a Jew." These words touched her heart. She broke up with the non-Jew and later became engaged to a Jewish man. The yeshiva student was a Cohain, and he heard that El Al planes sometimes transport the deceased to be buried in Israel. He turned to Ha-Rav Yosef Shlomo Elyashiv and asked: Is it preferable to fly on a different airline where there is no problem of impurity from the dead or on El Al where it is more secure? Ha-Rav Elyashiv was surprised and said: Before you ask me about transporting the dead, ask me about yourself." The student asked: "Isn't there permission to travel outside of Israel to go to one's sister's wedding?!" Ha-Rav answered: "I have a problem, don't ask me. While there are Rabbis who permit it, I am not one of them."

Kitzur Tefilat Amecha

[adapted for middle-schoolers by Rabbi Shmuel Jablon from Rav Aviner's three-volume commentary on the siddur "Tefilat Amecha"]

When we learn Torah, we have the opportunity to listen to Hashem. When we daven, it is our opportunity to speak to Hashem. This is an amazing gift. Even though Hashem is the Creator and King of the Universe, He wants each and every one of us to talk to Him. We get to ask Him for what we want and we need. We do this by using the Siddur that was given to us by the Anshei Knesset haGedolah - the Men of the Great Assembly - that included the greatest Prophets and Sages of thousands of years ago. This is a great thing as most people would not know how to write their own proper Tefillot to say three times a day. We also would not know what to say, and focus too much on our individual needs and not enough on what all of Klal Yisrael needs. But we also cannot forget that we are also expected to add our own thoughts and feelings to our tefillot. Sometimes that means bringing new feelings or emotions to what's written in the Siddur. We can best do that when we know what is in the Siddur and what it means. It also means adding our own Tefillot at the end of the Amida or at other times in the day.

Text Message Responsa

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah" and "Olam Ha-Katan." Here's a sample:

Collecting a Debt

Q: I lent someone a lot of money. When I asked for it back, I found out that he has everything in his wife's name, and he therefore has nothing. Should I take pity of him?

A: You should certainly demand it. He has plenty and is being deceitful.

Tattoos

Q: If a Baal Teshuva has his entire body tattooed can he serve as the Shaliach Tzibur?

A: Yes, but he should cover himself with clothing or a Talit (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 53:5. See Shut Minchat Yitzchak 3:11).

Troubles

Q: How is it possible to love Hashem if bad things happen in life?

A: It is a complicated issue for a text message. See Mesilat Yesharim chap. 19 regarding loving Hashem with the parable of the doctor and army officer.

Kiddush for a Girl

Q: If a girl was born and her parents did not have a Kiddush for her will it be difficult for her to find a spouse?

A: No.

Prayer for Bad

Q: Is it permissible for me to pray for something bad to happen to another person if he ruined my life and did not apologize?

A: Yes, if it is impossible to remedy it by bringing him to a Bet Din.

Adopted Child and Mourning

Q: Is it permissible for an adopted child to sit Shiva for his adopted parents?

A: Is it not obligatory but certainly proper to do so (Sedei Chemed, Avelut 156).

Losing your Beshert

Q: Can a person lose his Beshert?

A: Yes, such as in the case that he is too choosy. There is also free choice in this matter. Shemoneh Perakim chap. 8.

Songs under the Chupah

Q: I heard that the Chief Rabbinate disqualifies Rabbis who sings songs under the Chupah? Why not rejoice?

A: The Chupah is the most joyous occasion and there is no need for additions. On the contrary, there is a need for seriousness and holiness.

A Star is Born (Israel's American Idol)

Q: Is it permissible to watch the TV show "A Star is Born" which presents a singing competition between new talent?

A: It is against all of our education which emphasizes good deals, proper character traits, Torah and mitzvot, justice and integrity, and not external behavior, lacking humility and modesty, which finds favor in other people's eyes.

Killer

Q: How can I comfort a friend who accidentally killed someone? Can he atone?

A: This is too complex an issue for a text message. See my book: "Yemei Teshuvah."

Killing a Non-Jew

Q: Is it permissible to kill innocent non-Jews in order to save a Jewish captive?

A: Forgive me, life and death subject are too complex for text messages.

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