

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Devarim

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לע"נ פעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

MAINTAINING THEIR DIGNITY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel, across the Jordan, in the wilderness..." (1:1)

Rashi writes: "Because these are words of criticism, and [because Moshe] intended to list here all the places where the Jews angered the Holy One, he therefore coded his words and mentioned them [only] with allusions, due to the honor of Yisrael."

Moshe was so careful not to disgrace or embarrass Klal Yisrael, that even when he criticized them for their sins, he did so with honor and respect.

A chassan who had a severe stammer came to the famed Shinover Rebbe, R' Yechezkel Halberstam zt'l, to ask for a blessing on his upcoming wedding. The Rebbe conferred his blessing and then asked the young man the time and place of his aufruf, when he would be called up to the public Torah reading.

A few weeks later, the Shinover Rav informed his chassidim that he would be spending Shabbos in a neighboring town. Many chassidim arranged to go along with the Rebbe. Once there, he told his entourage that he wished to pray at the minyan where the aufruf was taking place.

Shabbos morning, the chassan was called up to the Torah for an aliyah, but he stammered so badly that he had difficulty saying the words. However, no one could hear him, since the Shinover Rav said the response "*Baruch Hu u'baruch Shemo*" in a loud voice, drawing it out until the blessing was finished. When the young man said the second blessing after the Torah reading, the Shinover drowned out his words again by repeating loudly, "*Emes Toraseinu ha'kedoshah* (our holy Torah is true)!" In this way, the chassan was able to recite his blessings in public without being embarrassed.

It then became clear that the Shinover Rav had come to this town for the sole purpose of saving the chassan from embarrassment.

TO EACH THEIR OWN

Sifsei Kohen

"These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel, across the Jordan, in the wilderness..." (1:1)

One who is administering rebuke must speak to each individual in a manner appropriate for him. One cannot offer one piece of reproof that will encompass and relate to everyone. Therefore, when Moshe began his words of rebuke to Bnei Yisrael, he turned first to one segment of the populace, the *Eirev Rav*, who joined Bnei Yisrael in Egypt and were particularly stiff-necked, and spoke to them "*bamidbar*." The word *bamidbar* is a combination of two words: *b'dibur mar* - in a sharp, critical tone. To the rest of the people, however, he spoke *b'aravah* - pleasantly. Moshe rebuked the rest of the nation in a gentle and pleasant manner, so that it may enter their hearts and bring about the desired commitment and devotion.

DEPENDENT ON THE LISTENER

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel, across the Jordan, in the wilderness..." (1:1)

Rashi states that these referred to words of rebuke. Only when Moshe spoke to the nation were they words of rebuke. However, when he spoke to Hashem he always found words of praise and spoke favorably of the Jewish people.

HEARD BY ALL

Rebbe Nachman

"These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel, across the Jordan, in the wilderness..." (1:1)

When an exceedingly great tzaddik speaks, his words are apropos to all of Yisrael, and each individual can find himself in his words.

BEFITTING TIMING

Reb Noson of Nemirov

"These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel, across the Jordan, in the wilderness..." (1:1)

Parashat Devarim is always read on the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av, since it speaks of the rebuke that Moshe gave the Jews for their blemished faith, which caused them to believe the spies and bemoan their entry into the Holy Land, creating the "day of weeping for generations" (Taanis 29a).

The next Torah portion, Parashat Va'etchanan, is always read on the Shabbat after Tisha B'Av, since it speaks of G-d's Treasury of Unearned Gifts (see Rashi on Devarim 3:23), through which He gives us the merit to enter the Holy Land (see Rashi on Bereishis 1:1). (Likutei Halakhot VIII, p. 157b)

THIS IS ALSO FOR THE BEST

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel, across the Jordan, in the wilderness... and Di Zahav." (1:1)

The names that the Torah presents detailing where the Jewish People encamped come to hint to us what transpired there. Rashi notes that the name "Di Zahav" which literally means "enough gold" tells us that this is the place where the Jewish People built the Golden Calf "because of the abundance of gold which they had." Meaning that due to their wealth, they carried out this heinous sin.

Based on Rashi's words, the Chofetz Chaim expounded that we often feel that we want or need more wealth. We pray and ask to be able to support our family in a better way, or to help others who require it, but we should know that the fact that Hashem has limited our finances means that we are not meant to have more at this time. The Chofetz Chaim would often show dismay at those who begrudgingly say, "*Gam zu letovah* - This is also for the best" (Taanis 21a). He would tell people that the meaning is not, "It should have been better, but this will also work out okay," the meaning of these words are, "This, as well as everything else that happens to me, is the best possible thing that could have happened to me right now!"

(It is beyond the scope of this short vort to discuss the fact that personal growth and prayer are not in any way a contradiction to this way of living. The fundamental precept is that although we should always aspire for greater things, we should realize that whatever we experience at every given moment is tailor-made for our current situation.)

The Chofetz Chaim further exemplified this point with a parable of a young boy starting a new school. The boy's father was friends with the owner of the candy store close to the school, and he told his friend, "Whenever my son passes your store, please give him a treat. I'll settle up with you at the end of the month."

After several weeks, the boy complained of terrible toothache and was promptly taken to the dentist. His once immaculate teeth were rotting away and the parents couldn't understand why, until the end of the month when the candy bill arrived. The father took the bill and ran to the candy store demanding an explanation. "How could your candies be so expensive?" he asked. "It's not that my candies cost a lot of money," explained the store owner, "it's because I gave your son so many of them! It adds up to a lot, you know. You told me to give your son every time he walked past the store. Sometimes it was more than twenty times a day!"

The Chofetz Chaim concludes that first, if you were to ask the boy as he was sitting in the dentist's chair with a drill in his mouth, "Were the sweets worth all the agony you're facing now?" you can be assured that he would say no. This demonstrates that there can be very real negative consequences to "abundant wealth."

Moreover, if we continue the story between the father and the storekeeper, we would find that if the father claimed the dentist fee from the store owner for his complacency the father would certainly win the claim, explained the Chofetz Chaim, because the storeowner should not have simply listened to the words of his friend, but he should have understood that the father only meant to benefit his son, not to cause him pain and damage. So too, concludes the Chofetz Chaim, if Hashem would concede to everything we asked for, He would be held accountable for the negative consequences. Instead, Hashem listens to the fact that we want what is best for us, and He answers that request positively - even if it is not in the way we envisioned. Accordingly, *gam zu letovah* should certainly not be said with resentment but with immense joy that Hashem is protecting us from harm and providing us with everything we need at the precise time we need it.

ABRACADABRA

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"These are the words that Moses spoke..." (1:1)

In this pasuk, the word דבר is used in two different ways. The word דברים means "things," whereas the verb דבר means "speak." In the Hebrew language, the word for "thing" is also the word for "speech."

This is not coincidental. When we speak, we create things. Sometimes those things are fruitful and beneficial, and other times, they are harmful and destructive. Words are especially powerful; they are the tools we use to build and to destroy. High-ranking officials can cause markets to crash or to soar by making statements. Even ordinary citizens can get a person fired, or ruin his marriage, by spreading unflattering information. But we can also lift a person's spirits and repair a broken soul by speaking words of encouragement and motivation. We can ruin a person's day with words of criticism or an insult; and we can give him a beautiful day with a kind word or a compliment.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the term “abracadabra” as a magical declaration was first introduced in the 2nd century. I sense, however, that it is actually older than that. The words אברא כדברא mean, “creating through speaking” - and this concept is taught to us already in the Torah.

We are all magicians. We all create or destroy by the words we speak.

Later in Parshas Devarim, we read Moshe’s account of חטא המרגלים, the sin of the spies. The ten spies wrought such devastation - the effects of which we still suffer even today - without doing anything other than speaking. By the way they spoke of Eretz Yisrael and its inhabitants, they destroyed everything. The people heard what they said, panicked, and decided they would not proceed into the land. Hashem punished them, and Chazal teach that it was at that point when the decree of the *churban* was issued. All this because of speech.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe zt”l was especially sensitive to the effects of one’s choice of words. For example, he refused to use the word “deadline,” which warns of “death,” and spoke instead of a “due date,” which has an association of birth and the creation of new life. When he was asked to give an endorsement to a hospital in Israel, he insisted that the hospital call itself בית רפואה (“place of healing”) as opposed to the accepted Hebrew term for hospital, בית חולים (literally, “place of ill”). He felt it was imperative that patients feel that they are there not because there is something wrong with them, but because they are convalescing. The Rebbe understood the notion of אברא כדברא, the subtle but significant power of our choice of words.

During this time of year, when we focus our attention on curing the ill of שנאת חנם (baseless hatred) on account of which the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, we must recognize the importance of discretion when speaking. It is through the words we use when speaking or posting that we create either אהבה or שנאה, that we create conflict and hostility, or create love and respect among Am Yisrael.

MAN OF WORDS

Koznitzer Maggid

“These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel, across the Jordan, in the wilderness...” (1:1)

When Hashem commanded Moshe to take the Israelites out of Egypt, Moshe wavered and said, “I am not a man of words” (Shemos 4:10).

However, after years of being their leader, dealing with the people, hearing their constant complaints and disputes, and withstanding their constant grumbling, he had become a man of words.

INCENTIVIZED REBUKE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“...after he had smitten Sichon, king of the Amorites... and Og, king of Bashan.” (1:4)

People accept rebuke more readily after having received some material benefit from the person giving the rebuke. By rebuking someone, we are doing them a spiritual favor, so by preceding this spiritual favor with a material favor, we ensure that both parties relate to the rebuke in the proper light - rather than considering it an act of ill will.

By his example, Moshe showed us that this principle applies even when the individual or group is in need of rebuke for a sin as grave as that of making the Golden Calf. From Moshe’s example, we learn that we should extend others our fullest help - both material and spiritual - in order to put them back on the proper path in life.

By helping others in this way, we earn G-d’s help in finding our own proper path in life, as well as His assistance in providing for the material needs of ourselves and our loved ones. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 133-134) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

AVAILABLE TO ALL

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“And Moshe began clarifying this Torah...” (1:5)

See Rashi, who comments that the term “clarifying” implies that Moshe translated the Torah into seventy languages. Now, what possessed Moshe to translate the Torah into seventy languages?

One explanation is as follows: The language of a nation constitutes its vitality. The holy language, Hebrew, is unique to the Jewish people. Now in reality, the Jewish people heard the Torah at Mount Sinai only in the Holy Tongue (see Berachos 13a; Megillah 17b). But G-d, who foresees all that will occur, realized that the Jewish people would eventually be exiled. For this reason, He inserted foreign words into the Holy Tongue of the Torah so the Jewish people would have some grasp of the vitality of these nations. Thus, the Jewish people would be able to survive exile.

HASHEM IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And Moshe began clarifying this Torah...” (1:5)

The Torah introduces Sefer Devarim by sharing that Moshe was going to explain and clarify the entire Torah. Rashi comments that Moshe proceeded to explain the Torah in seventy languages. Why did Moshe feel the need to teach the Torah in so many different languages instead of just Lashon HaKodesh?

The Chiddushei HaRim offers an amazing insight. He says that the seventy languages represented the seventy nations of the world. Moshe wanted to convey to Klal Yisrael, by explaining the Torah in seventy languages, that no matter what language you speak or what situation you find yourself in, you can be sure that Hashem and the Torah will always be there for you to tap into and follow.

As we continue to find ourselves in the *galus*, it is incumbent upon us to look for and see the hand of Hashem and the Torah that are available to us in our daily lives. If we sensitize ourselves to recognize Hashem's role in our lives, then it will no doubt result in us having a deeper and more tangible relationship with Him.

PREPARED TO DEFEND

Chiddushei HaRim

"And Moshe began clarifying this Torah..." (1:5)

He explained it to them in the world's seventy languages. (Rashi)

Why did Moshe consider it necessary to explain the Torah in all of the ancient world's seventy languages? In every nation, forces oppose the Torah. Knowing that the Jews would have to dwell among the nations, Moshe wanted to enable them to defend and observe the Torah wherever they might be. Wherever they lived, the Jews would have to overcome any resistance to the Torah their environment might offer. It was to equip the Jewish people to assert Judaism's views wherever they may be scattered that Moshe explained the Torah in the languages of the seventy nations of the ancient world.

ALWAYS APPLICABLE

Kesav Sofer

"And Moshe began clarifying this Torah..." (1:5)

He explained it to them in the world's seventy languages. (Rashi)

Some non-believers claim that the Torah was meant to be observed only in the wilderness, far away from the settlements of other groups and nations, or in the Holy Land, where the Jews dwelt among their own and where no one would interfere with their customs. They insist that when the Jews live in the midst of another culture and civilization, they should not keep aloof from their neighbors by clinging to the observance of the Torah and its commandments.

It was to refute this argument that Moshe explained the Torah to the Jews in all the world's seventy languages before they entered the Promised Land. He wanted to impress upon his people that they were duty-bound to observe the Torah regardless of where they lived, because the Torah is always valid, in every country, and is not subject to change.

PERFECT VISION

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And Moshe began clarifying this Torah..." (1:5)

The Maskil L'Dovid says that Moshe could not possibly have waited until now, days before his death, to explain the laws and reasoning of the Torah, leaving the Jewish People to remain unclear for nearly forty years. So what is this clarification referring to?

The Medrash explains that this is the Torah's way of saying that Moshe told the Jewish People the entire Torah in all seventy languages. But why would the Jewish People need to be told the Torah in languages that they did not understand?

The Ksav V'Hakabala answers that the seventy languages are in fact referring to the "seventy faces to Torah" - the complete understanding of the Torah through every different viewpoint.

To illustrate this: When two people view a mountain from different angles, they can each describe the mountain in a totally different way from one another, and both descriptions would be accurate. This is true because neither of their viewpoints allowed them to see the complete mountain. Here, Moshe was giving the Jewish People every possible viewpoint of the Torah so that their appreciation and understanding of it was completely clarified.

This perfect vision is similar to the clarity that we will gain in the World to Come where our physical bodies are no longer distracting us from attaining a true and complete understanding of the Torah.

This is described in the Gemara (Taanis 31a) as follows: "Hashem will have the tzaddikim dance in a circle, with [Hashem] Himself sitting in the middle, in the Garden of Eden."

A deeper understanding of dancing in the circle is that each tzaddik will get to stand in the place of his fellow and be able to "see Hashem" at the angle at which the others in the circle viewed Him in their lifetime. Having completed the circle, each person would have developed an overall picture - as much as possible - of Hashem, and this itself would be a cause of great celebration and dancing.

This is an amazing idea, and one we need to take to heart. We live in a polarized society where, all too often, we do not accept another community's way of serving Hashem. However, we must realize that as long as the "other way" is fully consistent with the tenets of Judaism and uncompromising in Halachah then they too are part of the circle.

If that is the case, perhaps there is no need to wait until we reach the Garden of Eden to hold hands and dance together in celebration over our unique ways of serving Hashem.

HOLINESS FAR AND WIDE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“And Moshe began clarifying this Torah...” (1:5)

As Moshe Rabbeinu nears the end of his life, he begins to elucidate the words of the Torah before the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael. Rashi tells us that not merely did Moshe explain the Torah in its original language, but he did so in seventy other languages as well.

Was this necessary? Why would the Jews require the Torah to be interpreted into any other language other than their mother tongue, Lashon HaKodesh, the language that they were taught by their parents and grandparents, and the language that the Torah was written in?

The Gerer Rebbe, R' Yitzchak Meir Alter zt'l (Chiddushei Harim), provides a fascinating understanding of the words of Rashi. After Har Sinai, where the nations of the world turned their collective backs on the Torah, and Klal Yisrael gladly reaped the benefits, every country and nationality made it its business to denigrate the importance of the Torah and the Jewish People - the “Chosen Nation” - who withstood the challenges to uphold the tenets of its wisdom. Each of the seventy languages, in effect, was employed by its respective nation to belittle and malign the Torah, which continues to this day.

As a means to counteract this pervasive negativity, Moshe Rabbeinu, who was aware of the future exiles that his people would be forced to endure by being dispersed throughout the world, understood the necessity of teaching the Torah in the language of the countries where his people would find themselves. This would ensure a spark of holiness in every land and strike a balance against the enveloping impurity.

SCALING MOUNTAINS

Chernobyler Rebbe

“Hashem, our G-d, spoke to us in Chorev, saying, ‘You have dwelt long enough by this mountain...’” (1:6)

The Israelites were told by Hashem that they should not consider every obstacle and hurdle as an unconquerable mountain; rather, they should overcome them and consider them as hair that is easy to handle.

The righteous can overcome every obstacle in Judaism even when it is as big as a mountain, for to them it is like a hair. However, the wicked withdraw from the smallest obstacle that is like a hair, because to them it is like a mountain.

The Talmud (Succah 52a) states, “In the future Hashem will show the righteous ones the evil inclination as a mountain, and to the wicked it will appear as a hair - and both will cry. The righteous will cry, ‘How were we able to conquer such a mountain?’ and the wicked will cry, ‘Why couldn’t we have overcome such a piece of hair?’” Therefore, in the future it will be measure for measure;

the righteous will notice that what they thought was a hair was really as big as a mountain, and the wicked will notice that what they thought was a mountain was really as easy to overcome as a hair.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Ma’or VaShamesh

“Hashem, our G-d, spoke to us in Chorev, saying, ‘You have dwelt long enough by this mountain...’” (1:6)

Moshe said to the Jews: When you were on the mountain of Chorev, G-d told you not to look on every obstacle and hindrance as an unconquerable mountain; you must surmount any obstacles that may stand in the way of your worship of G-d.

NEVER STAGNANT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Hashem, our G-d, spoke to us in Chorev, saying, ‘You have dwelt long enough by this mountain...’” (1:6)

G-d here is alluding to the lesson that we should never remain too long on the same level in our relationship with Him, without advancing and ascending.

This idea is also articulated in the Prophets (Zechariah 3:7), where the human potential to progress in Divine consciousness is contrasted with the angels’ lack of this potential: “If you go in My ways... I will make you into those who walk [i.e., constantly move forward] in contrast to these [angels], who [merely] stand here.”

Angels, being personified emotional states of involvement with G-d, are static, whereas human beings can progress from one level to another in their emotional involvement with G-d. In fact, we should strive to reach the next level of spirituality as soon as we become aware of its existence. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 24, p. 18)

Furthermore, this verse teaches us not to cloister ourselves in the study hall, devoting ourselves exclusively to our own self-refinement. Rather, G-d challenges us to leave this pristine and holy environment, traveling to a place far from “His mountain,” to illuminate even these distant places with the Divine light of the Torah. (Ibid., vol. 2, p. 695) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

UNITY VS SEPARATION

Afikei Yehudah

“I [Moshe] said to you at the time, saying, ‘I cannot carry you alone. Hashem, your G-d, has multiplied you, and behold, you are today as the stars of the heavens in abundance...’” (1:9-10)

The Jews have been compared to sand as well as to the stars. Sand grains tend to cling together. Stars, on the other hand, are separated from one another by vast areas of space so that each star is a separate world to itself.

As long as the Jews are like the sand, united, clinging together, they won't place an undue burden on those who guide them. However, once they are scattered and distant from one another - like the stars in the sky are worlds apart from one another - their leaders will be faced with an almost impossible task.

Accordingly, Moshe says here: "I cannot carry you myself" - I can no longer lead you by myself because, "Hashem, your G-d, has multiplied you"; besides, "you are this day like the stars of heaven," scattered, and worlds apart from one another, so that no one person will be equal to the task of leading you. "How," then, "can I bear your cumbrance, and your burdens, and your strife, all by myself?" (1:12).

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"I [Moshe] said to you at the time, saying, 'I cannot carry you alone. Hashem, your G-d, has multiplied you, and behold, you are today as the stars of the heavens in abundance...'" (1:9-10)

Moshe begins his final monologue and tells the people, "I said to you at the time, saying, 'I cannot carry you alone. G-d has multiplied you, and behold, you are today as the stars of the heavens in abundance'" (1:9-10). Why does Moshe specifically reference G-d's monumental promise to Avraham in comparing the number of people to the stars in heaven when there are surely more stars than people? Additionally, Rashi explains that Moshe inserted the word "saying" in his first sentence, indicating that he was told that he could not carry the burden of leading the nation alone. Why was he not able to do this?

Rav Hirsch suggests that it's not the collective nation being compared to the entirety of the stars, but the individuals in their independent uniqueness, where each person is a world unto themselves. Although Moshe exhibited greatness in his unique ability to lead the people, a singular leader cannot adequately provide each person with the personal and individualized attention necessary to address their varied needs. Understanding and addressing the differing needs of the people in our midst is a valuable quality not just in a leader but in all of us.

FUTURE BLESSINGS

Binyan Ariel

"May Hashem, the G-d of your fathers, add to you a thousand times as many more as you are [now], and bless you as He has spoken to you." (1:11)

Why hasn't this blessing come true? Because it wasn't intended for the present but for that future day of which the prophet Yeshayahu says: "The smallest shall become a thousand, and the least a mighty nation" (Yeshayahu 60:22).

On that day the Jewish people, who are now "small" and insignificant, will grow a thousandfold in stature and importance, just as Moshe foretold it in the blessing he gave the Jews.

ENCOURAGING PRAYER

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"May Hashem, the G-d of your fathers, add to you a thousand times as many more as you are [now], and bless you as He has spoken to you." (1:11)

G-d had promised Avraham that He would multiply his offspring without limit. Why, then, did Moshe seemingly impose a thousand-fold limit to G-d's blessing?

The answer is that Moshe knew that G-d desires our prayers and that our prayers and fervent desire are what elicits Divine beneficence. Moshe therefore spoke this way in order to spur the people to ask for what they knew they had been promised, teaching them the power of prayer.

Similarly, we should never underestimate the power of our prayers. Moreover, like Moshe, we should remind others of the power of their prayers, encouraging them to request G-d's blessings whenever they are needed. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

CHANNEL FOR BLESSINGS

Rebbe Nachman

"May Hashem bless you as He has spoken to you." (1:11)

Vivarekh etkhem ka'asher diber lakhem (May He bless you as He has spoken to you) may also be translated as "He will bless you as your speech is."

Even though G-d knows our thoughts, we need to pray to Him, because words are the vessels of bounty. The more perfected our vessels - i.e., prayer and speech - the more blessing we can draw down. (See Likutey Moharan I, 34:3)

WELL EQUIPPED

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"How can I alone carry your cumbrance, your burdens, and your strife?" (1:12)

We are all charged with the same mission as Moshe: to educate and lead ourselves - as well as those over whom we have influence - in the ways of the Torah. If we wonder how we can bear such a heavy responsibility, we should recall that when Moshe asked G-d the same question, G-d immediately provided him with a practical solution, an organized judicial system.

Just as G-d gave Moshe the means to fulfill his mission, G-d gives us the means and resources to fulfill our Divine mission, regardless of how difficult or overwhelming our responsibilities may appear to be. (Sichot Kodesh 5741, vol. 4, pp. 325-326) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

THE TASKS OF THE LEADER

Ramban

"How can I alone carry your cumbrance, your burdens, and your strife?" (1:12)

These terms - cumbrance, burdens, and strife - refer to the three tasks of leadership that Moshe had to fulfill.

"Your cumbrance" alludes to the responsibility given to Moshe to study Torah with the Jews, as he himself described it to his father-in-law Yisro: "And I make known to them the statutes of G-d and His laws" (Shemos 18:16).

"Your burdens" refers to the duty devolving on Moshe to pray for any Jew who might be in trouble; as he put it to Yisro: "...the people come to me to seek G-d" (Shemos 18:15).

"Your strife" refers to Moshe's role of arbitrator and judge in disputes arising among the people: "...and I judge between a man and his neighbor" (Shemos 18:16).

These three are the principal responsibilities of a Jewish leader.

TACKLING ADVERSITY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"How can I alone carry your cumbrance, your burdens, and your strife?" (1:12)

On Tishah B'Av, 1492, one of history's most infamous deadlines arrived. On that day, the Jews of Spain had to either convert to Christianity or leave the country. Only one Jew was officially spared from the decree: Rabbeinu Don Yitzchak Abarbanel zt'l, a leading Sephardic Torah sage who served as the Finance Minister of Spain, and who had rescued King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella from bankruptcy. He was too valuable to the kingdom to be confronted with a choice that would have forced him to leave the country. But the sage spurned the generosity of the monarchs and he joined his people by leaving Spain.

The Jews traveled in groups toward the Spanish border during the three weeks before Tishah B'Av. On the final day, the ninth of Av, 300,000 Jewish men, women, and children left the borders of Spain, the country of their birthplace.

Although this time period is designated for mourning the destruction of the Temple and the exile from the Land of Israel and it is forbidden to play music at this time, the Sages of that unfortunate generation granted special permission to the tired and harried people to march to the music of orchestras. The musicians were told to play their instruments in order to strengthen the spirit of the people, to cheer them up and infuse them with hope and trust in Hashem.

Through permitting the playing of instruments on the march, the Sages also wished to teach the people that we do not weep over a departure from a place of exile; we weep only over our departure from Jerusalem.

The Abarbanel quotes the words we recite in *Hoshanos*, to describe the people who had gathered on that infamous day: "The nation that declares, 'I am a wall!' Brilliant as the sun - yet exiled and displaced; likened to a palm tree - yet murdered for Your sake and regarded like sheep for slaughter. Scattered among her enemies, she cleaves to You and bears Your yoke."

BELIEF = TRANQUILITY

Rebbe Nachman

"How can I alone carry your cumbrance, your burdens, and your strife?" (1:12)

As Rashi explains, the "burdens" referred to by Moshe were the heretics among the Jewish people. The heaviest burden a person can bear is apostasy.

The heart of a Jew who believes in Hashem is calm and tranquil, while the heretic must constantly contend with the weight of his doubts and troubling thoughts.

BALANCING PAIN AND HOPE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"How can I alone carry your cumbrance, your burdens, and your strife?" (1:12)

In Lev Eliyahu, Rav Eliyahu Lopian zt'l quotes from Sefer Toras HaOlah by the Rema, Rav Moshe Isserles zt'l, who relates the following encounter: After the destruction of the first Beis HaMikdash, Plato went up to the Temple Mount and met Yirmiyahu weeping bitterly over the ruins. He asked him, "How is it proper for a sage of such intellectual stature to cry over a building, which is really no more than a pile of sticks and stones? Moreover, the building is already in ruins; what good will your tears do now? Why cry over the past?"

Yirmiyahu responded by asking Plato if, as a renowned philosopher, he had any perplexing questions. Plato responded with a long list of complicated questions. Yirmiyahu, humbly and quietly, answered them in a few succinct sentences. Plato couldn't believe that any mortal man could be so wise.

Yirmiyahu then said, "All of this profound wisdom I derived from those 'sticks and stones' and that is why I'm crying. As for why I'm crying over the past, this I can't tell you because you won't be able to understand the answer."

R' Elya relates the explanation of Rav Simchah Zissel zt'l (Alter of Kelm): When we mourn the loss of the Beis HaMikdash, our tears are not for the past, rather we cry and pray for the future. As Chazal teach us (Brachos 32b), at the time of the Churban, although all the gateways to Heaven were sealed, the gateway of tears remained open. Even today, every prayer that is recited with a yearning heart and every tear that is shed is collected in Heaven and contributes to the reconstruction of the Beis HaMikdash.

This concept, which is so simple for any Jew to understand, is beyond the comprehension of a “rational” philosopher like Plato.

When Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld zt'l came to Jerusalem for the first time as a young man with his rebbi, Rav Avraham Shaag zt'l he related that on the first Friday night, they went to daven Kabbalas Shabbos at the Kosel. Overcome with emotion at the sight of the sole remnant of the Temple, R' Shaag cried out, “*Mikdash Melech ir meluchah... - the King's Temple, His royal city, arise, come forth from your ruins, too long have you dwelt in the valley of tears...*” He lifted his eyes to Heaven and wept from the depths of his soul until it seemed that his emotional reaction might harm his health. Suddenly, his face changed from one of pure agony to one of incredible joy as he recited the final words: “*...v'Hu yachamol alayich chemlah - and He will have compassion on you!*”

This portrays the dual avodah which is the essence of a Yid, especially during these days of *Bein HaMetzarim*. On the one hand, we are supposed to feel real anguish over the *Churban* and the pain of the Holy One, blessed be He, over the long and bitter galus that we are in. But on the other hand, we must be filled with optimism and enthusiastic hope that Mashiach will arrive any day and bring back all that we have lost.

May this year's Tishah B'Av turn into a real Yom Tov, and may we all meet together at the Beis HaMikdash, speedily in our days.

REMOVING BIASIS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“Hear [disputes] between your brothers and judge righteously between a man and his brother.” (1:16)

As Moshe addresses the nation, he recalls having ordered them to appoint a hierarchy of judges to preside over the nation. Moshe says, “I charged your judges at that time, saying, ‘Hear out your fellow men and decide justly between any man and his brother or stranger’” (1:16). Ohr HaChaim questions why we need to be told to listen to both arguments when that seems the minimum requirement for a fair ruling.

Ohr HaChaim suggests two nuances that apply not only to court proceedings but also to our daily lives.

First and foremost, we should always be willing to hear renewed arguments and perspectives. Likewise, a judge should give equal floor and consideration to both sides and not even look at one litigant more than another. Even if there is no obvious bias for or against someone and even if hearing someone out a second or third time does not change one's mind, it not only minimizes any perceived partiality but also validates multiple viewpoints.

Fighting our tendencies to jump to conclusions and being sensitive toward perceived biases will help us avoid misunderstandings and minimize arguments among us.

HEARING HASHEM'S LOVE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“I [Moshe] commanded your judges at that time, saying, ‘Hear [disputes] between your brothers...’ (1:16)

The Hebrew word for “between” (*bein*) is related to the word for “understanding” (*binah*). Based on this, the Baal Shem Tov interpreted this phrase allegorically:

If you have refined spiritual senses, then you can “hear” G-d articulate His great love for every Jew. You will then be “between” your brothers, i.e., you will understand the true, great worth of every Jew.

Thus, if you can “hear,” you will delight in the company of any Jew, and you will make it a point to be between your brothers - to associate with them and socialize with them.

The reverse is also true: If you want to “hear,” i.e., to develop your spiritual sensitivity so that you can “hear” G-d articulating His love for every Jew, then be between your brothers, i.e., make it a point to associate with them and socialize with them, even the simplest among them. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

DON'T JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

“I [Moshe] commanded your judges at that time, saying, ‘Hear [disputes] between your brothers...’ (1:16)

Moshe Rabbeinu recalls the time when he appointed judges and gave them instructions for how to preside over cases. He commanded them, שמוע בין אחיכם - that they should listen to the litigants when they present their arguments (1:16).

The Gemara in Maseches Sanhedrin (7b) infers that it is forbidden for a Beis Din to hear one litigant's arguments before the other litigant arrives. This halacha is binding even today. I once participated in a din Torah (having been asked to speak on behalf of a litigant), and the dayanim refused to begin the proceedings when the first litigant was present, before the other arrived. Of course, this is very inefficient. It would save everybody time if Beis Din began hearing a litigant's argument while they wait for the other litigant. But the Torah commands שמוע בין אחיכם - that the Beis Din must hear the case when both parties are present in the room.

The Maharal of Prague, in Nesivos Olam, explains that the Torah introduced this law because first impressions are exceedingly powerful. When the dayanim hear one person's version of the story, it leaves an imprint in their minds, which the other party now has the challenge of erasing. Of course, the dayanim cannot hear both parties simultaneously, and one needs to speak first. The Torah therefore demanded that the first litigant speak only when the other litigant is present, as a litigant is less likely to lie and deceive in the presence of the other party. This helps ensure the judges' objectivity and prevent unfair bias toward the first litigant.

The vast majority of us, of course, are not formal judges, but we quite frequently sit in judgment. We are always making assessments in our minds about people, organizations, institutions, and all kinds of things. And so the Torah's command of שמוע בין אחיכם is directly relevant to all of us. We must be careful not to rush to judgment, not to blindly follow our first impression, not to assume we see the whole picture and have a clear understanding of what's happening before carefully and objectively considering both sides.

The great Rabbi Akiva Eiger, the legendary late-18th-early-19th-century sage, whose teshuvos and chiddushim are studied in all yeshivos throughout the world, said that whenever he disagreed with somebody, he first assumed that the person was correct. Whether he dealt with a Torah matter or a general life question, he first assumed the other party's viewpoint, and then thought if there was a compelling argument to challenge it. Before dismissing an opinion, he first thought about it honestly, seeing its merits, and only then proceeded to refute it.

The academies of Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel had numerous arguments regarding important halachic matters. The Gemara teaches in Maseches Eiruvim (13b) that halacha follows Beis Hillel despite the fact that the scholars of Beis Shammai were sharper, because the scholars of Beis Hillel would first cite and analyze Beis Shammai's opinions, before their own. Our opinion about anything is more informed when we objectively consider the other side, when we approach the subject with an open mind, when we try to see the issue from the other's person's perspective. This is the right way to "judge."

שמוע בין אחיכם. Whatever it is that we're "judging" or forming an opinion about, we need to have both "parties" present, we need to hear both sides, so we can reach the most correct conclusion.

BROTHERLY LOVE

Baal Shem Tov

"Hear [disputes] between your brothers and judge righteously between a man and his brother." (1:16)

This command lends itself to three spiritual interpretations:

1. *Shamo'a*, hear, refers to a person blessed with a spiritual sense of hearing. He "hears between his brothers," meaning that he perceives the magnitude of G-d's love towards each and every Jew. He perceives the preciousness of each Jew in G-d's eyes. A Jew with such sensitivity can be described as *bein acheichem*, between your brothers. The word *bein* (between) is related to *binah*, understanding. He understands the greatness of his brethren.

2. A person endowed with this spiritual sense of hearing is between your brothers - he is literally within his fellow Jews. He is connected with his fellow Jews to the point that he feels the spiritual pleasure that is within and that emanates from each Jew individually.

3. The method by which to acquire this spiritual sense of hearing is *bein acheichem*, through genuinely connecting with your brethren. All Jews, even the most simple, are truly your siblings. Such an approach is the only way to gain this inner appreciation.

UNBIASED TRUTH

Baal Shem Tov / Sefas Emes

"...and any matter that is too difficult for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it." (1:17)

The Ramban said that if one is in a quandary concerning a problem, it's best to try and dissociate one's emotions from it as if it were of no personal concern at all. Only once this is done will it be possible to arrive at the truth and know how to proceed in accordance with G-d's will.

This is the explanation of the present pasuk: "Any matter that is too difficult for you" - the problem in connection with which you have difficulty in deciding what to do - "you shall bring to Me," so that you may be able to consider it with detachment, to see it from a distance and regard it solely from the viewpoint of G-d's will. If you proceed like this you will be able to arrive at the truth.

EQUALITY FOR ALL

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Do not show favoritism in judgment; small and great alike will you hear out; do not fear any man, for judgement belongs to G-d..." (1:17)

The lesson that Moshe Rabbeinu is teaching the Jewish people is one that he himself was careful to adhere to. In the eyes of a judge, no petitioner, claimant, defendant or litigant is deemed "small" or "big." Each person is valued for who he is, and no amount of money, stature or social advances can make him greater than another.

This, says Rav Eizik'l of Komarno zt'l, is why Moshe used the words בקטן בגדל תשמעון (small and great alike will you hear). The prefix letter כ compares one word to another. Similarly, every person is comparable to the next; every man shall be heard, no matter how small or big others think he may be.

The Bobover Rebbe, Rav Shlomo Halberstam zt'l, was once about to leave his house to attend a major function when someone came to see him. The visitor told the gabbai he had a simple question to ask the rebbe and promised he would not be more than a minute or two.

After five minutes had passed, the gabbai began to get edgy. After ten minutes, he politely opened the door. The rebbe told him to close the door. This repeated itself numerous times, until finally the rebbe asked him to please stop opening the door; he would come out when he was ready. After forty-five minutes, the man emerged.

The gabbai was furious. "You promised no more than a minute or two; how could you lie like that?"

“Believe me,” the man replied, “it was the rebbe who held me up!”

When the rebbe later emerged, he told the gabbai, “He did not lie. He truly planned to take no more than a minute or two. But how could I answer him so quickly? When one comes to ask my advice, I can’t just answer on the spot. What if it were my own child? Would I make a decision in such haste? To me, each person is like my own child, and I give everyone the same attention I would give to my own children!”

NO NEED FOR WORDS

Gerrer Rebbe

“...and any matter that is too difficult for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.” (1:17)

The verse says, “And I shall hear it,” but does not say that He will answer. It seems to imply that there are times that one needs only to listen and that a reply is not necessary, for listening may be enough.

ONLY HASHEM CAN TRULY JUDGE

Rebbe Nachman

“Do not show favoritism in judgment; small and great alike will you hear out; do not fear any man, for judgement belongs to G-d. Any matter that is too difficult for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.” (1:17)

G-d is the Only One Who knows how to judge each individual for his deeds, in the context of his intentions and circumstances. We must take great care never to judge others, for we do not know everything there is to know about a person’s reason for his deeds. (See Likutey Moharan I, 1:14)

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“I commanded you at that time all the things that you are to do.” (1:18)

Mashal: It was late afternoon, and the Egged bus was packed with Jerusalemites heading home. One could tell that the passengers were tired after a long day, because there was little talking or laughing on the bus. The bus was particularly quiet, with everyone just calmly sitting or standing, waiting for the bus to arrive at their bus stop, so they could finally get home.

At one stop, an expectant woman boarded the bus. Perhaps it was because everyone was so tired that they didn’t notice her. Or perhaps everyone was so tired that they just decided to “skip it” this time. But whatever it was, no one on the bus stood up to give the expectant woman a seat.

As the bus continued on its way, the bus driver noticed that the pregnant woman was still standing. Bringing his bus to a halt on the side of the road, the bus driver stood up and said in a voice that was loud enough for all the passengers to hear: “Please, *geveret* (Ma’am), take my seat!”

Nimshal: The most effective way to teach is by example. When Moshe Rabbeinu criticized Klal Yisrael, he did so only in order to make them better. Thus, he pointed out their flaws, and encouraged them at the same time. This is the sign of a true leader.

PROPER PRESENTATION

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“You all approached me, all of you, and said, ‘Let us send men ahead of us and let them spy out the land for us...’” (1:22)

Parashas Devarim includes Moshe’s review of the Jewish people’s history, including admonitions and rebukes for past misdeeds. Among the transgressions mentioned is the people’s insistence on sending spies into the land that was promised to them. Moshe says, “All of you approached me and told me that we should send spies to research the land” (1:22). Why did Moshe reference the fact that “all of you” approached him? Also, since the generation that perpetrated the sin had already passed, why was Moshe addressing his audience as if they had been the guilty ones?

Rashi explains that “all of you” references how the people approached Moshe asking for spies - they were disorderly, pushing each other out of the way to be heard. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky holds that this explains why the list of tribes sent to spy is not in genealogical order: people pushed others out of their way to be heard out of order. As Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky explains, we all have valuable ideas and opinions, but it is how they are presented that impacts their success.

The experience is being mentioned for the benefit of the generation that followed the offenders as well as for ours. Our ideas and opinions are only as good as the respect with which we convey them.

APPROACHING TRUTH

Sefas Emes

“You approached me, all of you...” (1:22)

Moshe said to the Jewish People that if they found something difficult to understand, such as whether something should be performed, then “approach me,” for then you should be able to understand from Hashem’s view rather than from your personal reasons. In this way you will know the true path.

ASK THE TZADDIK

Rebbe Nachman

“You all approached me, all of you, and said, ‘Let us send men ahead of us and let them spy out the land for us and bring word back to us regarding the road we should ascend upon and the cities we should come to.’” (1:22)

The spies did not ask Moshe for advice (see Rashi on 1:23). This was their principal error. Before proceeding on a serious task, a person should always ask advice from many people. And asking advice of a tzaddik is considered the equivalent of asking many advisers. (See Likutey Moharan I, 143)

IMPACTFUL WORDS

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“You all approached me, all of you, and said, ‘Let us send men ahead of us and let them spy out the land for us and bring word back to us regarding the road we should ascend upon and the cities we should come to.’” (1:22)

Rashi comments that when Bnei Yisrael asked for the spies to “bring word back to us,” they were requesting that the spies find out what language the inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael spoke.

The Maharal (Gur Aryeh) asks why Klal Yisrael was interested in what language the people of Eretz Yisrael spoke. Why did they care? What insight did it provide to them?

The Maharal explains that each of the seventy nations of the world was assigned a different language by Hashem that corresponded to the level of holiness that they were on. Therefore, Bnei Yisrael wanted to know what the level of sanctity of each of those nations was; this could be determined by the language they spoke.

The Maharal is teaching us a very powerful lesson. Our speech highlights and helps to identify who we are. The manner in which we express ourselves tells a lot about the type of person or community we are. One who is careful to speak with refinement and with positivity is likely to be viewed and perceived differently than one who is less mindful and sensitive to the words which depart from their mouths. Let us ensure that through cautious and attentive speech we are who we say we are.

NATURAL MIRACLES

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“The matter was good in my eyes; I took twelve men from you, one man for every tribe.” (1:23)

Moshe knew that despite the fact that G-d had promised His supernatural assistance in conquering the Land of Israel, it was proper to approach the entry into the land in a natural way, for we are not meant to rely on miracles (Pesachim 64b).

By preparing ourselves maximally in a natural way, we make it possible for G-d to bless our efforts in a miraculous way, and even elicit Divine favor. This is why Moshe approved of sending out spies to see how the land could be conquered naturally. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 23, pp. 92-95) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

CONSTANT LOVE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“You slandered G-d in your tents, saying ‘G-d took us out of Egypt out of His hatred of us.’” (1:27)

Until the final Redemption, when there will no longer be any obstacles impeding the full revelation of G-d’s goodness, opportunities will unfortunately remain to mistake G-d’s love for us for cruelty. Our challenge, until the Messianic Era, is to remain fully aware that G-d is at all times manifesting His love for us, even if it occasionally appears exactly the opposite.

Remaining conscious of this love will inspire us to reciprocate it by fulfilling His will to our utmost ability. This, in turn, will eliminate the last remaining impediments to the final Redemption. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 34, p. 23) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

EMUNAH MOMENTS

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

“You slandered G-d in your tents, saying ‘G-d took us out of Egypt out of His hatred of us.’” (1:27)

Moshe recalls חטא המרגלים, the sin of the spies, how Bnei Yisrael reacted with fear and trepidation upon hearing the spies describe the powerful armies of Canaan. Despite all the miracles they had witnessed in Egypt and in the desert, they doubted whether Hashem would lead them to victory in Eretz Yisrael. Moshe at the time criticized the people, reminding them of the miracles that Hashem had performed for them, and noting בדבר הזה אינכם מאמינים - but in regard to this matter, you do not believe in Hashem your G-d” (1:32).

Rav Mordechai Zuckerman, in Leiv Mordechai, offers an important insight into the phrase “בדבר הזה” - “in regard to this matter.” A person can spend a great deal of time learning about emunah and talking about emunah, but then turn out not to actually have emunah when a challenging situation arises. There are people who talk frequently about their belief in Hashem, but then lose their faith when they find themselves struggling financially, or face a health issue, or encounter some other kind of problem. Bnei Yisrael stood at Mount Sinai, received the Torah, built the Mishkan, and learned from Moshe Rabbeinu, but בדבר הזה, when their emunah was put to the test, they failed.

We are all going to have our “emunah moments,” times when we need to rise to the occasion and show that our faith is real, that our emunah is firm and resolute.

A person can say “*baruch Hashem*” and “*im yirtzeh Hashem*” all day long, but then display a lack of faith בדבר הזה, when a challenge arises. All our tefillos, all the shiurim we attend, all the articles we read, all the chizuk we receive - they must all be geared to help us בדבר הזה, when our faith is tested.

It is then, when we confront a difficult challenge, that we are called upon to muster our emunah, to take all we have learned and spoken about, and remain strong, trusting that Hashem is helping us during our period of hardship.

JOY FROM HIS CHILDREN

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And as for your young ones, of whom you said, ‘They will be prey’... they will come there; to them shall I give it and they shall take possession of it.” (1:39)

Both the spies (in their complaint) and G-d (in His response) referred specifically to the “young ones.” One of the ways the Torah characterizes young children is that they “crumble more bread than they eat” (Pesachim 10b).

Spiritually, our “bread,” our staple, is the Torah. It is “consumed” differently by different people: The spiritually mature among us (the “adults”) devote the majority of their time and effort to studying the Torah for its own sake, therefore absorbing whatever they learn. In contrast, the less spiritually mature among us (the “children”) devote the majority of their time and energy on mundane matters, therefore absorbing very little of what they learn.

The spies were concerned that the Jewish people would become “children” when faced with the realities of the physical world, thereby becoming “prey” to its negative influences.

G-d, however, replied that His primary satisfaction is seeing the “children” resist the pull of materiality. He values whatever focus they can muster for their Divine mission more than the accomplishments of the spiritually mature. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 2, pp. 581-582; Ibid., vol. 13, pp. 195-197) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

STICK TO THE PLAN

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“You rebelled against G-d’s command and willfully ascended to the mountain.” (1:43)

These Jews had repented from the sin of the spies and now wanted to ascend to the Holy Land. Why was this wrong? We are taught that nothing ever stands in the way of repentance.

The answer is that the Land of Israel could only be conquered with the ark’s presence and Moshe’s leadership. Repentance could erase the sins of the people, but it could not change the procedure necessary to acquire the land.

Since these people were unwilling to submit to Moshe’s leadership and wanted to conquer the land on their own, G-d rejected their initiative.

The same is true in our day. The Torah has prescribed a precise procedure for the Messianic Redemption - as well as for all forms of personal redemption. Any attempt to bypass steps in the redemptive process is doomed to failure. Hastening the Redemption, just like success in any endeavor, is possible only when our approach conforms with G-d’s plan. Hence the importance of studying the Torah ourselves (our “ark”) and seeking out the guidance of qualified Torah scholars (our “Moshe”) in all aspects of our lives. (Igrot Kodesh, vol. 7, p. 280) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

NO TEARS ARE EVER LOST

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And you retreated and wept before Hashem, but Hashem did not listen to your voice and did not pay attention to you. You dwelt in Kadesh for many days.” (1:45-46)

This verse recounts the time when some of the Jewish People did not listen to Hashem’s command not to wage war against the Amorites. As a result, they were “struck down in Seir until Chormah” (Devarim 1:44). After this, Moshe relates that they “wept before Hashem” but Hashem did not listen to their voice and they stayed in Kadesh for a long time - nineteen years, according to Rashi.

The Netziv writes that even though “Hashem did not listen” to the Jewish People, nevertheless, He allowed them to stay in one place for a very long time despite the decree against them to wander the desert for forty years. This, explains the Netziv, is to “teach future generations not to despair because of unanswered prayers, for if things do not turn out according to what they have prayed for, the effects of a prayer nevertheless still have enormous benefit.”

This message is demonstrated in the following story involving Rav Aryeh Levine.

A distraught woman once approached Rav Aryeh at his home in Jerusalem. She had recently lost her husband after he had endured a long and painful illness, and she came to hear words of comfort from the great Tzaddik.

“Please” she begged, “tell me what happened to the streams of tears that I shed. Did they all go to waste? Were they all for nothing?”

With great compassion, Rav Aryeh replied, “When the time comes for you to finally leave this world and ascend to the Heavenly Throne, you will be shown how precious your tears were. You will be told that Hashem Himself gathered every teardrop and treasured them like precious gems. And you will be shown that whenever there was a harsh decree hovering over the Jewish People, Hashem took one of your tears and washed the evil decree away.”

(In fact, this is what we cry out to Hashem in the final moments of Neilah on Yom Kippur: “May it be Your will, He Who hears the sound of weeping, that You place our tears in Your flask to be stored, and that You rescue us from all cruel decrees” (Slichos). This idea is also expressed by the Malbim in Tehillim when King David asks Hashem to store his tears in a flask after all of his suffering (Tehillim 56:6).)

In light of this, Rav Pincus explains that there are times in our personal lives, unbeknown to us, when we are in serious trouble and we are in desperate need of prayers, but because we are completely unaware of the danger we are in, we consequently do not even think to pray. It is those times when Hashem will take out a tear from our own “treasury” of prayers and use them for the times when we need them most.

MODEST PRIDE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“You have circled this mountain long enough; turn yourselves northward.” (2:3)

Parashas Devarim records Moshe’s recounting of the events that transpired, including the time we had camped at Har Seir for a while before G-d instructed us to move on. The pasuk says, “You have circled this mountain a lot, now turn northbound” (2:3). Actually, the words literally mean “a lot for you, circle the mountain, turn northbound.” Why does the directive include circling the mountain?

The Kli Yakar explains that Moshe was conveying a separate message. Moshe was saying that when you have a lot, hide it. (*Tzafon* means “north,” but *tzafun* means “hidden.”) As the Jews prepared to enter a land of “plenty,” it became time to anticipate and verbalize the challenges they had never faced before. Staying low-key and avoiding provocations and conflict doesn’t mean being ashamed of who we are and what we represent.

As we passed the mountain of Seir, where Eisav lived, and as we pass by those different from us today, we are guided to maintain a balance between modesty in what we have and pride in who we are.

TURNING NORTHWARD

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“You have circled this mountain long enough; turn yourselves northward.” (2:3)

On the one hand, the north is allegorically associated with menacing evil, as the prophet Yirmiyahu warns (Yirmiyahu 1:14), “evil will break forth from the north upon all the inhabitants of the land.” On the other hand, the north is also allegorically associated with the Torah. Shlomo HaMelech, in Mishlei (2:7), says, “The eternal Torah was hidden” - the word for “hidden” (יִצְפוֹן) being related to the word for “north” (צָפוֹן).

In addition, the north alludes to the coming of Mashiach, as indicated in King David’s words (Tehillim 31:20), “How great is the goodness that You have hidden [צִפְנוֹת] for those who fear You.”

The reason for this paradox is that the Torah teaches us how to reveal the inner core of good within everything, including elements of reality that appear to be evil, and this process will be completed with the coming of Mashiach.

Thus, in this verse, G-d is telling each of us: Now that you have received the Torah, My instruction manual for refining yourselves and the world at large, it is time to turn “northward” - to engage the world, even confronting evil when necessary, applying the Torah’s lessons to life. In this way, you will do your part toward bringing the world to its purpose and hastening the advent of the Messianic redemption. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 17, pp. 514-518) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SOURCE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

[G-d instructed Moshe to tell the Jewish people,] “I have given Mount Sei’ir to Esav as an inheritance.” (2:5)

G-d states here that Esav is an heir of his father, Yitzchak. In contrast, the Torah (Bereishis 21:10) states that Yishmael is not an heir of his father, Avraham.

This difference between Yishmael and Esav stems from the difference between Avraham and Yitzchak. Avraham imposed Divine consciousness on his audience, regardless of whether they were ready for it. Yitzchak, in contrast, inspired others to refine themselves in order to attain Divine consciousness on their own. The advantage of Avraham’s method over Yitzchak’s was that he could reach a wider audience; the advantage of Yitzchak’s method over Avraham’s was that he could effect a lasting change in his disciples.

For the same reason, Avraham did not transfer his holiness to Yishmael sufficiently for Yishmael to be considered his heir, whereas Yitzchak did transfer his holiness to Esav sufficiently for Esav to be considered his heir. This is why Yitzchak wanted to bless Esav, whereas Avraham did not bless Yishmael.

From this we learn that we must encourage all Jews to participate fully in their Jewish heritage - even if they appear to be as estranged from Jewish values as was Esav. Just as Yitzchak sought to bless Esav, we must inspire our fellows to enhance their spiritual lives, thereby opening themselves up to G-d’s blessings. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, pp. 191-199) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

UNITY PREVAILS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“There was not even one communal city that was too strong for us.” (2:36)

Social unity protects a society from danger. The Amorite kings were aware of this and therefore took steps to unify their subjects against the threat of invasion by the Jewish people.

Nonetheless, a society's ability to achieve unity is limited to the extent to which its members can negate their individual egos in order to submit to a common goal. G-d expects the Jewish people to surrender themselves totally to their Divine mission - and He therefore gives us the ability to do so. Therefore, the unity that the Amorites could achieve could not compare to that of the Jews. As a result, the Jewish people were able to overcome the united front presented by the Amorite cities.

We see here the tremendous power inherent in Jewish unity and the need to foster it to the greatest extent possible - especially since, as we are taught by the sages of the Talmud, our present exile is a result of baseless hatred and disunity among the Jewish people. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 29, pp. 1-8) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

EXTENDING ERETZ YISRAEL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"We captured all his cities at that time; there was no city that we did not take from them - sixty cities, the entire region of the royal palace - the kingdom of Og in Bashan." (3:4)

The Land of Israel, relative to the rest of the world, is "the royal palace," i.e., G-d's home on earth. This means that the Land of Israel is more conducive to cultivating Divine consciousness than is anywhere else.

Whenever Divine providence leads us to "conquer" some place outside the borders of the Land of Israel - whether through military conquest, purchasing real estate, or even simply living there - it is in order that we spread Divine consciousness there. We thereby transform that part of the world into a spiritual extension of the Land of Israel.

Thus, when the Jewish people conquered King Og's royal palace, they transformed it from "the territory of the non-Jewish king's palace" into part of the true "royal palace," the Land of Israel.

Only with the final Redemption will "the [whole] world be filled with the knowledge of G-d as water covers the seabed" (Yeshayahu 11:9). Until then, the Divine consciousness we can achieve outside the Land of Israel cannot compare to what we can reach within its borders. Nonetheless, if we are sufficiently devoted to our Divine mission, we can indeed achieve an "extension" of the Divine consciousness available to us in the Holy Land. This, in turn, will pave the way for the final Redemption and hasten its advent. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 24, pp. 20-27) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

INFLUENTIAL ENVIRONMENTS

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"Half of the mountain of Gilad and its cities I gave to the Reubenite and to the Gadite..." (3:12)

The Torah (3:12-20) reviews the agreement that Moshe had with the shevatim of Reuven, Gad and half of Menashe.

It is interesting to note that while Reuven and Gad approached Moshe about their desire to remain on the other side of the Yarden River, Menashe was not part of this initial proposal. It was only later on that half of Menashe became part of the negotiations of the agreement.

The Netziv (Ha'emek Davar) quotes Maseches Bikkurim in the Talmud Yerushalmi that states that Moshe was the one who decided to include Menashe as part of the agreement. Why did Moshe decide to have part of Menashe live with Reuven and Gad?

The Netziv explains that Moshe saw that Shevet Menashe had many *bnei Torah* and *gedolei Yisrael*. Moshe wanted to ensure that the environment Reuven and Gad would be in would facilitate growth in Torah and mitzvos. It is for this reason that Moshe incorporated Menashe's residence alongside Reuven and Gad as part of the deal.

The Netziv is teaching us a very powerful lesson. No matter where we find ourselves in our lives, we must ensure we create environments that will further our growth. We must assert ourselves and orchestrate surroundings that will help establish and encourage our development as *ovdei Hashem*.

Let us make sure to create those opportunities for our families, communities and ourselves so that we are both impacted by others and inspire those around us in a way that will make Hashem proud.

SOURCING DIVINE INSIGHT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Ya'ir son of Menashe took all the territory of [Og's] royal palace as far as the boundaries of Geshurites and the Ma'achitites. He called Bashan after his own name, 'the villages of Ya'ir,' to this day." (3:14)

The Talmud informs us that the first choice of olives to produce oil for the Temple was those grown in the region of Tekoa, in the central mountains of the Land of Israel.

The second choice was those grown near the location of the former royal palace Bashan, part of the area outside the Land of Israel proper that was conquered by Ya'ir before the Jewish people crossed the Jordan River into the land.

Allegorically, oil - the source of light - signifies Divine insight. The primary source of Divine insight is the Torah, G-d's wisdom. Studying the Torah affords us a constant flow of new insight into reality, enabling us to progressively better understand the world and our role in it. This knowledge is allegorically represented by the olives from Tekoa, i.e., from the intrinsically holy Land of Israel.

However, indirect knowledge of G-d's ways, gleaned by observing His providence in nature and history, can also serve as a source of Divine insight, provided we observe it through the lens of the Torah. This knowledge is allegorically represented by the olives from the region outside the Holy Land that was conquered and annexed to the Land of Israel proper. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 24, pp. 20-24) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

ADVOCATING AND VALIDATING

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"I commanded you at that time, saying, 'Hashem, your G-d, gave you this land to take possession of it, armed shall you cross over before your brothers, the Children of Israel, all the men of the legion.'" (3:18)

Moshe addresses the tribes of Reuven and Gad, imploring them to fight for their brothers in Israel before settling down across the Jordan (3:18). However, Moshe does not address just the two tribes in question but uses the word "eschem," which includes all the tribes.

Rabbeinu Bachya points out that although this particular mandate was directed at Reuven and Gad to help the rest of the tribes conquer and settle in Israel, the notion of fighting for your brothers is a more universal concept meant for all people.

Birkas Asher extends this logic to ideological or philosophical conflicts, where advocating for another person's perspective is just as important as fighting for your own. Validating others' perspectives will bring us closer to each other and advance harmony among all people.

SPIRITUAL INDULGENCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

[Moshe told the tribes of Reuven and Gad,] "I know that you have much livestock..." (3:19)

The tribes of Reuven and Gad wanted to remain on the east side of the Jordan River because they had an abundance of cattle, sheep, and goats, and this territory was well-suited for pasture. The reason why these tribes had more animals than the others is because they appreciated the spiritual value of the manna, and therefore made it the chief staple of their diet. The other tribes, in contrast, also ate animals from their herds and flocks.

Their appreciation of spirituality was also a direct reason why the tribes of Reuven and Gad wished to remain on the east side of the Jordan River. By opting for the shepherd's life rather than the farmer's, they hoped to have more time to commune with G-d.

Praiseworthy as their appreciation seems, these tribes missed the point. The purpose of spirituality is to refine and elevate the material world; it is our ability to make spirituality affect materiality that we should appreciate, not the abstract experience of spirituality itself. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 9, pp. 14-23) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

GUARANTEED SUCCESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"I commanded Yehoshua at that time, saying, 'You have seen with your own eyes all that Hashem, your G-d, has done to these two kings. So will G-d do to all the kingdoms through which you will pass.'" (3:21)

Moshe changed his chief disciple's name from Hoshea to Yehoshua when he sent him, along with the other spies, to scout out the Land of Israel. Moshe sensed that the other spies (except for Calev) would use this expedition to discourage the people from entering the land. Moshe therefore named him Yehoshua, which means "May G-d save you [from the schemes of the other spies]."

We are all G-d's agents to "conquer" the material world, revealing its Divine dimension and thereby transforming it into His true home. At times we are plagued by voices that try to dissuade us from rising to fulfill our Divine destiny, trying to convince us that it is safer to focus exclusively on openly spiritual pursuits, such as prayer and the study of the Torah, than to compromise our Divine consciousness by engaging the material world.

In such cases, we should recall G-d's message to Yehoshua: Do not fear, G-d has promised His assistance in this struggle; you are assured of victory. (Hitva'aduyot 5744, vol. 4, p. 2322) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

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