

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Devarim

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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 Berdichev

"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..." (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. (See Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom # 290)

BEFITTING TIMING

Reb Noson of Breslov

"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 Halakhos 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 בדברא 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 בדברא, 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 חינו (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 שנאה or אהבה, 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.

A DEFENDING CRITIC

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

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

Rabbi Shlomo Kluger notes that usually, when the Torah uses the word אלה, it comes to exclude something else. It is as if the Torah writes, “these, but not those.”

What is being excluded in this opening *pasuk* of Sefer Devarim?

Rabbi Kluger quotes the *pasuk* in Mishlei (28:23) that says: “מוכיח אדם אחרי כן ימצא” - One who reproves someone will find favor.”

On this *pasuk*, the Midrash remarks that Rabbi Yehudah, son of Rabbi Shimon, wondered about the meaning of the word אחרי in the *pasuk*. Hashem says that Moshe reprimanded Me אחרי - on behalf of the *B’nei Yisrael*, and rebuked the *B’nei Yisrael* - concerning their behavior toward Me.

Moshe’s criticizing and reminding *B’nei Yisrael* of their sins was only when he spoke to them. When he spoke to Hashem on their behalf, though, he always fought in their corner, presenting their defense and attempting to gain them the Almighty’s favor.

We can now understand what the word he excludes.

אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל כל ישראל - These are the words of criticism that Moshe spoke, because he was talking to the Children of Israel. However, when he spoke of the people to Hashem, he did not highlight their shortcomings, but rather always emphasized their greatness. (Talelei Oros, p. 8)

With this insight, we can now revisit the *pasuk* in Mishlei. Why is that “מוכיח אדם אחרי כן ימצא” - one who reproves someone will find favor”? People do not usually appreciate being told off or criticized, even if it is meant well and is constructive criticism. So why will they “find favor”?

The answer is that if I know that the person rebuking me always defends me in front of other people, and I know that he would never make an unkind remark about me to others, then I am happy to accept his criticism.

Even constructive criticism is hard to hear from a stranger. Even if the person offering advice means it for my benefit, I will only accept it wholeheartedly if I know that he is my greatest supporter in front of everyone else.

The Jewish People knew that Moshe Rabbeinu sang their praises before Hashem, and as a result, they would accept his criticism.

Before we rush to offer advice and any form of criticism to anyone else, let us first ensure that we are his leading defender and foremost supporter.

UNLIMITED BENEVOLENCE

Rabbi Aryeh Dachs

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

The Ramban explains that Sefer Devarim is also referred to as *Mishneh Torah*, a review of the Torah. This review takes place during the final year in the desert as the Jews prepare to enter the Land of Israel. Throughout Sefer Devarim, Moshe adds, expounds, and elucidates the laws that would be relevant to them.

Devarim begins with a veiled rebuke of the Jewish People by Moshe. Moshe recounts the many instances during the forty-year period in the desert where the Jewish People had tested their relationship with the Almighty. They defied G-d and failed to uphold the Torah correctly. Why, asks the Ramban, was it appropriate to bring these incidents to light at this time, as they were preparing to enter Israel?

The Ramban explains that the Jews were anxious about entering Israel. There was a prevailing sentiment of despair: *"Lo nuchal la resh'es es ha'aretz* - We will not be able to inherit the land." In their hearts they knew that they were bound to sin again, which would certainly jeopardize their right to the holy Land of Israel. Moshe reminded the people of all the times they had sinned in their journey, to give them strength, *chizuk*. In the past they had defied G-d egregiously, yet, our merciful G-d had absolved and granted them the opportunity to forge ahead.

It is the time of year when we focus on the destruction of the Temple and our long station in exile. When we mourn the destruction, we are inspired to yearn for a time when we will have the opportunity to rebuild the Temple and restore the Jewish People and Israel, to their glory. However, the nagging thought persists: How can we, our generation, possibly merit a salvation of this magnitude? We are well aware of the flaws that plague our generation. How can we have the audacity to hope that we will be the generation who will herald Mashiach? The message brought forth at the beginning of Devarim is that there is no limit to the benevolence of the Almighty.

The Ramban ends his introduction to the Book of Devarim by quoting the verse (Tehillim 130:4), *"Ki imcha ha'selichah, le'maan tivarei."* He understands this phrase to mean that G-d pardons our sins so that you will fear Him, which is a curious interpretation. A merciful G-d, a G-d that pardons, should not be an impetus to fear. The Ramban (as well as the Ibn Ezra, ad loc.) explains that without understanding G-d's ability to pardon, we would never be able to have our sights on higher loftier goals such as *yiras Hashem*, fear of Hashem. Like the Jews entering the Land of Israel for the first time, we can be anxious, full of despair, and indifferent to the possibility of achieving greater spiritual heights. Only by understanding the benevolence of Hashem can we rid ourselves of the narcotic of despair, realistically yearn, and do what we can to earn the glory of the Messianic Age.

UNITED REDEMPTION

Rabbi Avi Wiesenfeld

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

We know that there is always a connection between the *Parshah* of the week and the events that follow it. This year, Parshas Devarim precedes Tishah B'Av, as it usually does. What lesson does Parshas Devarim teach us that can give us direction as we head into Tishah B'Av?

It once happened that two girls, friends from back home, bumped into each other on a bus on a scorching hot day in Yerushalayim. They used the long bus ride to catch up on the latest news in their lives. One girl related to the other how their mutual friend, Rivka, got engaged to Yankel.

"Yankel?" the other girl remarked with a look of disdain. "Rivka is a frum, excellent girl! Why would she have settled for Yankel?"

Without even noticing it, they launched into a detailed conversation about the personality traits of the *chasan* and listed all of the derogatory qualities that, in their assessment, would make him undeserving of a bride like Rivka. A few minutes later, a woman sitting in the row behind them tapped one of the girls on the shoulder and said, "I have been listening intently to what the two of you have been discussing. I happen to be the aunt of the *kallah*. I am appalled by the things you've been relating about Yankel, and I will make sure to immediately relay the information to my sister."

The girls suddenly realized the damage that their innocent chatter had caused. They were shocked and deeply embarrassed. They mumbled and stammered as they tried to explain themselves to the *kallah's* aunt, saying that they had exaggerated and that he really is a great boy; it's just that they felt that Rivka was so remarkable and they weren't sure that the *chasan* was really up to par. Their words fell on deaf ears. The aunt was determined to pass on their information.

A short while later, as the woman stood up to leave the bus, she turned to them one last time. "I just wanted you to know that I'm not really the aunt of the *kallah*. But I could have been, so you must watch what you say!"

In this week's *Parshah* the Torah says, *אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל כל ישראל* - "These are the words which Moshe spoke to all of Israel." The Vilna Gaon explains that Moshe Rabbeinu was speaking specifically "to all of Israel" in an attempt to correct the *sinas chinam*, the baseless hatred, that would eventually cause one of history's greatest catastrophes, the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*.

We seem so quick to talk badly about another person. Why is that? Sometimes we are not even aware that we are doing it, and sometimes we are not aware why we are doing it. Moshe speaks *"אל כל ישראל"* to remind us of the *achdus*, the unity, that we must endeavor to feel with one another.

Every Jew is created *b'tzelem Elokim*, in the Divine image, and every Jew deserves to be treated with respect, love, and kindness. As we head into Tishah B'Av, we can put forth effort to love one another, thereby rectifying the breach which brought about the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, and bringing ourselves closer to the final *geulah*.

RESPECT AND SENSITIVITY

Rabbi Aryeh Dachs

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

Sefer Devarim is known as the "Book of Reproof." It earned this name because it starts with a long reproof that Moshe gave to the Jewish People. He took the nation to task for their less than stellar moments in their forty years in the desert.

The problem is that the speech Moshe gave does not mention any of the past misdeeds of the Jewish People. Moshe simply outlines, in vague terms, the events and travels of the people of Israel. Rashi explains that each of these events and places was a sort of veiled admonition. They referenced the various misdeeds of the people throughout their ordeal in the desert.

For example, Moshe says (1:1), "[The nation was] in *Di Zahav*." Rashi explains that this is a reference to the Golden Calf. *Zahav* is gold and *di* refers to excess; Moshe hints that the nation sinned with the Golden Calf because of the excess of gold. Rashi explains that Moshe chooses to reprove them this way, in order to preserve their honor and dignity.

Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch, in his work *Taam VaDaas*, asks: Would it make any difference if Moshe had chosen to give a more explicit and straightforward rebuke? After all, the Jews knew they had committed these sins.

Furthermore, the entire nation was equally guilty. They were still in the desert, with no outsiders around to make them feel embarrassed or ashamed.

Rabbi Sternbuch explains that Moshe did not give his veiled reproof to protect them from outsiders. Rather, Moshe understood that one will only be receptive to criticism if he understands that the person criticizing him also values and respects him. Therefore, to ensure his admonishment would be an effective vehicle for change, Moshe went out of his way to display his sensitivity for the *kavod*, the honor, of the people while he was criticizing them. The lesson for us is that in order to influence others, it is integral that we also be sensitive to their honor.

In anticipation of Tishah B'Av, the focus on being sensitive to the honor of others is all the more relevant. The Midrash on Eichah teaches that our redemption will come in the merit of the sensitivity displayed by Rachel when protecting the honor of her sister, Leah. The trait of being mindful of the dignity of others is what we need to be able to soon return us to the days of our glory!

FEELING THEIR PAIN

Rabbi Avi Wiesenfeld

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

Imagine that you were sitting with all of your children and you had a message to give over to each one of them, according to his or her unique personality and character traits. Wouldn't it be marvelous if you could just say one thing, and each one of your children would receive the unique message that he or she specifically needed to hear?

In this week's *Parshah* there is an interesting deviation from the normal way in which Moshe Rabbeinu communicates teachings from Hashem to *Klal Yisrael*. Normally, the Torah says that Moshe "spoke to the Jewish people," or Hashem commands Moshe to "speak to the Jewish people" (דבר אל בני ישראל), but in this week's *Parshah* (Devarim 1:1) it says that Moshe "spoke to all of the Jewish people" (דבר משה אל כל בני ישראל). What is the significance of the additional word "all" (כל)?

The answer is that every other time Hashem had a message for *Klal Yisrael*, each and every individual would hear the unique message that he needed to hear. No one heard the message that another person needed to hear. However, *Parshas Devarim* is different. *Parshas Devarim* contains Moshe's rebuke of the Jewish people, and it is the *Parshah* always read immediately before Tishah B'Av. The messages contained in *Parshas Devarim* call for a different form of communication. דבר משה אל כל בני ישראל - this was a call to *Klal Yisrael* to hear not only his or her own unique message, but to be attentive to the message of one's fellow members of *Klal Yisrael*. During this time of year, if we would truly focus on becoming attuned to the needs of others, we would not need to have a day of Tishah B'Av.

The year was 1948. There were bombs falling all over the holy city of Yerushalayim, devastating homes and taking the lives of many Jews. No one would leave his home unless it was absolutely necessary. Rav Chaim Shmuelewitz zt"l, the revered Mirrer *Rosh Yeshiva*, was blessed with the birth of his youngest son in the middle of the war. It was a wonderful *simchah*, but there was a very real danger involved in trekking to the hospital. There was even a doubt about whether it would be possible to perform the baby's *bris* on the eighth day. Rav Chaim was determined to ensure that the *mitzvah* of *bris milah* would be fulfilled in its proper time. On the eighth day, he took one of his *talmidim* with him and went to the hospital. As they walked from one building to the next, they would stop and wait for the bombs to stop falling before continuing on their way.

Eventually they reached the hospital and the *bris* was performed. After ensuring that all was well with his wife and baby, the *Rosh Yeshiva* and his *talmid* began to make their way back home. The *talmid* accompanying him was petrified. Every few minutes there was an explosion nearby, and who knew what the next moment would bring?

Suddenly they came across upon a young boy, bandaged up and clearly suffering from a wound from yesterday's bombings, standing on the street wincing in pain. Rav Chaim stopped next to the boy to see if there was anything he could do or say to help the boy, but the *talmid* immediately urged his *rebbe* to keep moving as there could be a bomb at any moment. Rav Chaim, however, had entered a different world. He was crying together with the boy. The *talmid* stood there waiting for his *rebbe* for a few minutes and then insisted again, "*Rebbi*, we must go! It's too dangerous to remain here." He led the *Rosh Yeshiva* and the boy to one of the nearby buildings for shelter. Upon leaving the child, Rav Chaim turned to his *talmid* and told him, "The Torah says that we must feel the pain of another person, which means to really experience pain when seeing a fellow Jew in distress."

This week's Parshah teaches us the message of the Nine Days and Tishah B'Av. Let's look for opportunities to alleviate someone else's suffering through truly feeling his pain and empathizing with him. Let's think about what we can do to make someone feel better. When we do that, we will be considered כל בני ישראל - all of the Jewish people united, and in that *zechus* we will merit to witness the building of the *Beis HaMikdash*, speedily in our days.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 Wisniewsky

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.

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.

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).

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. (Hitva'aduyot 5722, vol. 3, p. 209) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

CHANNEL FOR BLESSINGS

Rebbe Nachman

"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)

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 Wisniefsky

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.

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 Ziv 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 *rebbe*, 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.

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.”

TRANQUIL FAITH

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.

DON'T JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Listen among your brothers and judge righteously between a man and his brother or his disputant.'" (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 *halachah* 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 *halachah* 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.

REMOVING BIASIS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Listen among your brothers and judge righteously between a man and his brother or his disputant.'" (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 commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Listen among your brothers and judge righteously between a man and his brother or his disputant.'" (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. (Igrot Kodesh Admor Mehoraryatz, vol. 4, p. 96) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

BROTHERLY LOVE

Baal Shem Tov

"I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Listen among your brothers and judge righteously between a man and his brother or his disputant.'" (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.

EQUALITY FOR ALL

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Do not show favoritism in judgment; small and great alike shall you hear; you shall 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 *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

"Any matter that is too difficult for you, you shall bring to me, and I shall 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.

UNBIASED TRUTH

Baal Shem Tov / Sefas Emes

“Any matter that is too difficult for you, you shall bring to me, and I shall 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.

ONLY HASHEM CAN TRULY JUDGE

Rebbe Nachman

“Do not show favoritism in judgment; small and great alike shall you hear; you shall 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 shall 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 and bring word back to us; the road on which we should ascend and to which cities we should come.’” (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 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; the road on which we should ascend and to which cities we should come.’” (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; the road on which we should ascend and to which cities we should come.'" (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; the road on which we should ascend and to which cities we should come.'" (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 Wisniefsky

CONSTANT LOVE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"You slandered in your tents, saying, 'Because of Hashem's hatred for us did He take us out of Egypt...'" (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 Wisniefsky

EMUNAH MOMENTS

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"You slandered in your tents, saying, 'Because of Hashem's hatred for us did He take us out of Egypt...'" (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 small children, of whom you said, ‘They will be taken captive,’ and your children who did not know good from evil this day, they shall 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

“So I spoke to you, but you did not listen. 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

“Then you wept again before Hashem, but Hashem did not listen to your voice and did not give ear to you. You dwelt in Kadesh for many days, [as many] days as the days you dwelt.” (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 [56:6] when King David asks Hashem to store his tears in a flask after all of his suffering.)

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.

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” (יִצְפֵּן) 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 Wisniewsky

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.

SOURCE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“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 Wisniewsky

UNITY PREVAILS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"There was no 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 the entire region of [Og's] royal palace... and named them, the Bashan, after himself, '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

"Only your wives, your small children, and your livestock – I know that you have abundant livestock – shall dwell in your cities that I have given you." (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 Hashem do to all the kingdoms through which you will cross over.'" (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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