

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת דברים

בעבר הירדן בארץ מואב הואיל משה באר את התורה הזאת לאמר
“On the other side of the Jordan in the land of Moav, Moshe began explaining this Torah, saying” (1:5)

Sefer Devarim opens with Moshe's rebuke of the nation. However, at the same time that he delivered his rebuke, he was also explaining the Torah. That is why Sefer Devarim is also called Mishne Torah, a repetition of Torah. Why did these two go together? R' Nissan Alpert writes that when a person hears words of rebuke and wants to change, it will not be sustainable unless it is accompanied by Torah study. If rebuke is not given in conjunction with words of Torah, the effects of the rebuke will not last. This is why the navi Yeshaya said that Eretz Yisrael was destroyed because the people abandoned the Torah. If they would have learned Torah after hearing the prophet's rebuke, perhaps they would have changed their ways.

ותענו אתי ותאמרו טוב הדבר אשר דברת לעשות
“You answered me and said: The thing that you have proposed to do is good” (1:14)

Rashi explains that Moshe was rebuking them. They should have requested that Moshe should judge for them rather than his students since he was the one who suffered for Torah. The Sifri says that this suffering refers to the forty days that Moshe spent on Har Sinai without eating or drinking. R' Moshe Feinstein asks: Why was it necessary to mention that he pained himself for Torah? Why would that make Moshe a better teacher? He answers that a true teacher is someone who goes through pain and suffering in order to know Torah as well as he can. He does not rely on his wisdom or his memory or any other innate talents. He works hard to penetrate the depths of Torah and constantly toils to understand the truth. That is the type of teacher that one should strive to learn from. Without this dedication, one can make mistakes. That is why Moshe said that they should have asked for a teacher who endured suffering in order to learn Torah.

There is a story told about R' Eliezer Silver when he was hired as the rabbi of a small community in America in the early 1900's before he arrived in Cincinnati, which is where he became famous. Early on in his tenure, his congregants noticed that their new rabbi always stayed up late every night in order to learn. They were very confused by this behavior. They asked each other: "Why does he study? We thought we hired a rabbi who knew his stuff?" This attitude is incorrect. No matter how learned a person may be, one must always put in the effort necessary to study Torah.

ויקחו בידם מפרי הארץ ויורדו אלינו וישבו אתנו דבר ויאמרו טובה הארץ אשר ה' אלקינו נתן לנו

“They took in their hands from the fruit of the land and brought it down to us; they brought word back to us and said: Good is the land that Hashem, our G-d, gives us” (1:25)

Rashi says that ones who spoke about the goodness of the land were Kalev and Yehoshua. Ramban writes that Rashi's understanding of the posuk is difficult to understand. If Moshe was quoting Kalev and Yehoshua, who were the righteous ones of the spies, why is this a rebuke to Klal Yisrael?

R' Nissan Alpert answers this question in the following manner: When should one believe the words of a large group of people? When he has not seen any evidence to the contrary with his own eyes. But if one sees something himself, he would not believe even thousands of people trying to tell him otherwise. When Kalev and Yehoshua told the people that Eretz Yisrael was a good land and that Hashem would help them conquer it, they were not telling the people anything new. They were only reinforcing what every person had seen with their own eyes. They had clearly seen Hashem's special protection manifest itself many times in Egypt and in the wilderness. They already knew the truth of Hashem's providence. They knew that Kalev and Yehoshua were right and still went along with the majority. This is why Moshe, in later pesukim, countered the claim of the spies by telling the people that they had seen what Hashem did for them with their own eyes. They had witnessed evidence that contradicted the claims of the spies and should not have believed anything that they said. Moshe rebuked the people by reminding them what Kalev and Yehoshua had said and why they should have listened to them.

The fact that we, as a nation, are a minority in the world and that our faith is not accepted by the world should not impact our trust in Hashem. We and our ancestors have seen with our own eyes how Hashem takes care of us and that our beliefs are correct. We should not be lured into following the majority opinion because we know the truth and we know what we have to do.

רַב לָכֶם סָב אֶת הַהָר הַזֶּה פָּנוּ לָכֶם צַפְנָה

“Enough of your circling this mountain; turn yourselves northward” (2:3)

The Kli Yakar explains the posuk allegorically and writes that it contains an important message for all generations. When we are going around and around, when we are in exile and are not settled, we should go to "tzafon." This word, which in the literal context of this posuk means "north," can also mean "hidden." Whenever we are in exile and surrounded by gentiles, we should keep our successes hidden and not flaunt them in front of the other nations. If the gentiles see that we have good fortune, they will be jealous. This will arouse their anger and hatred and can have terrible consequences for our people. It is best to remain modest and keep any successes private so that the gentiles remain unaware. This is why Yaakov Avinu told his sons to enter Egypt through different gates and this is a practice that we should continue today. The Kli Yakar concludes by saying that this problem has caused all the trouble that has befallen us in exile.

There are opinions that the letter "samach" in this posuk should have a crown written on the letter in the sefer torah. The Baal HaTurim suggests that the crown on the "samach," which has a numerical value of sixty, alludes to the fact that Eisav honored his father, who was sixty years old when Eisav was born. Because of this, Eisav's descendants were able to destroy the Beis HaMikdash which was sixty amos long (Midos 4:7). The midrash adds that the Jews left Edom and did not fight them because they would not have been able to overcome the merit of the mitzvah of kibud av that Eisav did. We see how many generations the merit of this mitzvah stood for Eisav and his descendants. When we honor our parents, we should recognize how much reward we and our future generations will receive.

Tisha B'Av

The Yerushalmi in Berachos says that all the prophets concluded their books on a good note. The Gemara asks: What about the book of Eicha, which ends with "For if you have rejected us, you have raged sufficiently against us?" Rabbi Friedman suggests, based on the

interpretation of the Ibn Ezra, that this posuk does not refer to something bad. Rather, it is a reason why Hashem should take us back as in days of old. We tell Hashem that we have already been punished, we have suffered enough. We have served our time and now deserve to be taken back to Eretz Yisrael and redeemed from our exile. Indeed, the navi did not conclude with words of tragedy.

The first four chapters are Eicha are written in an alphabetic pattern, with the third chapter containing a three-fold alphabetic pattern. The fifth chapter contains 22 verses, corresponding to the number of letters. Thus the Alef Bais is alluded to seven times in Eicha. The number seven represents that which is written in the tochacha that Hashem will repay seven times the nation's sins. This reminds us that Hashem warned the people many years earlier about what would happen to them if they sinned and he was now merely carrying out that which he had promised before. The people had been forewarned that they would be punished if they veered away from the path of the Torah and they suffered the consequences for their actions.

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