



**Partners In Torah**

**San Diego-Los Angeles**

**Study Guide**

***תשפ"ג Devarim***

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***Partners Detroit***

*7/18/2023*

## *Partners In Torah*

### *Mission Statement:*

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant. Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.**

*Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.*

**Welcome.**

**Thank you for coming!**

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.**

This Shabbat we begin the fifth book of the Torah, דברים - *Devarim*. Otherwise known as משנה תורה - *Mishne Torah* - which means “a review of the Torah,” this book is unlike the other four. When Hashem made Moshe the leader of the Jewish people, his job was to relay Hashem’s mitzvot – commandments -- to them, and in the other books of the Torah, many times we find the famous words, “וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר” or “ויאמר ה' אל משה” – “And Hashem spoke to Moshe to tell the Jewish people.” In this book *Devarim*, these words do not appear even once. (Although twice we do find the phrase “And Hashem spoke to Moshe” - both times it was a personal message to Moshe having to do with Moshe’s leaving this world, not a message that he was to convey to the Jewish people.)

This book begins:

(א) אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל

1) *These are the words **that Moshe spoke** to all of Israel...*

Moshe himself composed the book of *Devarim* based on Hashem’s divine spirit, which dwelled within him. This was different than the manner in which Moshe conveyed the mitzvot in the other four books. As to them, Hashem used Moshe as His mouthpiece, like a megaphone, and the Jewish people heard Hashem’s very words spoken by Moshe. Not so in this book, *Devarim*. Here, Hashem first taught these things to Moshe, and, after that, Moshe told those ideas to the Bnai Yisrael. For Sefer *Devarim*, Moshe was like a tape recorder, who first received Hashem’s words and then transmitted - “played them” - to the Jewish people.

The Malbim (d. 1879) adds that some of the communications in Sefer Devarim were actually messages that Moshe on his own had earlier given to the Jewish people, but had not been incorporated into the Torah. Here, Hashem told Moshe to include some of those speeches in the Torah.

Moshe delivered the entire book of Devarim to the Jewish people during the last 36 days of his life, from the first of Shevat until the seventh of Adar, the day Moshe passed away.

Although called *Mishne Torah*, the book actually reviews only some of the mitzvot in the previous books. What determined which ones are mentioned in Devarim?

Upon entering the Land of Israel, life for the Jewish people would change drastically. Until now, as they travelled through the wilderness, they were pampered and taken care of miraculously by Hashem. The Clouds of Glory had surrounded them, protecting them from the sun's dangerous rays, as well as from the dangerous animals in their path and the enemies around them. The manna took care of their need for food, and Miriam's Well took care of their thirst. But this would all cease upon their entering Israel. The people would now need to plow, plant, water, harvest, and store their food like any other nation. They would need to give a portion of their bounty to the Kohen, to the Levi, and to the poor. They would have to set aside the fruits that needed to be eaten in Yerushalayim.

They would need to set up a court system, and a support system for the poor and needy. They would need strong faith in Hashem to resist the temptations of the pagan nations around them so they may remain true to Hashem's Torah and mitzvot.

These would all become mandatory after the fourteen years that it would take to conquer and settle the land. That alone was extremely difficult and daunting. The idea of having to go to war with the several nations occupying Israel was a very scary prospect. And they had to do it without Moshe, their beloved and holy leader who could get them out of any difficulty. Moshe had to steel and inspire them not to fear their enemies; Hashem would take good care of them.

According to Rabbi Shamshon Rephael Hirsch (d. 1888), this was the goal of this book: To prepare the Jewish people for the new life they would live in the Holy Land.

The complete first verse in this book says:

(א) אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בַּמִּדְבָּר  
בְּעֵרְבָה מִזֶּלְ סוּף בֵּין פָּאֲרָן וּבֵין תּוֹפֵל וּלְבֵן וְחִצְרֹת וְדֵי זָהָב:

*1) These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel, on the other side of the Jordan, concerning the Wilderness, concerning the Arabah, opposite the Sea of Reeds, between Paran and Tophel and Lavan, and Hazerot, and Di-Zahav.*

Wow! What a list of place names! Where exactly was this place from which Moshe was addressing the entire Jewish nation?

Our Sages teach us that some of these were not the names of places at all, but were rather hints to sins that the Jewish people had committed during their journey. Rashi goes through the list.

Concerning the Wilderness: This refers to the time the Jewish people complained to Hashem for bringing them into the Wilderness. In Exodus 16 the Jewish people complained that Hashem took them out of Egypt where things were so good just to kill them in the Wilderness.

Concerning the Arabah: This refers to when they worshipped the idol Peor in Shittim, in Arvot Moav.

Opposite the Sea of Reeds: This refers to when the Jewish people approached the Reed Sea they said, "Aren't there enough graves in Egypt that You had to bring us here to kill us?"

Between Paran and Tophel and Lavan: Rabbi Yochanan said: "I have searched the entire Torah, and there is no mention of a place called Tophel or Lavan. Rather, this refers to when the Jewish people complained about the manna (which was white, "lavan"), and they said to Hashem, "We are sick of the insubstantial food, the manna."

The Desert of Paran is also the place where the sin of the spies occurred.

And Hazerot: Here Korach waged his rebellion against Moshe.

And Di-Zahav: Zahav means gold. This is a reference to the sin of the golden calf.

What was the outcome of these sins? Moshe tells them in the next verse: These sins are why it had taken forty years to travel a distance that should have taken eleven days.

(ב) אֶחָד עָשָׂר יוֹם מִחֹרֵב דֶּרֶךְ הַר שֵׁעִיר עַד קָדֵשׁ בַּרְנֵעַ

2) *Eleven days from Horeb, by way of Mount Seir, to Kadesh Barnea.*

Rashi explains that Moshe said to them, “Even the *eleven-day journey* from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea via Mount Seir took you only three days. This is how eager Hashem was to bring you into the Land of Israel. But because of your sins, it took you 40 years.”

Why was Moshe telling the people this now? Why was it important to know this information before entering the Land of Israel?

The Malbim explains that, by this time, the people who accepted the false testimony of the spies and rejected the land of Israel had died. Anyone twenty years and older was subject to the decree that “your corpse will fall in this desert.” Hence, when one of those people reached his sixtieth birthday, he dug himself a grave, lay in it, and simply didn’t wake up in the morning. Moshe is now addressing the new generation, some of whom were less than twenty years old when the spies returned, and most of whom were born in the forty years of travel through the wilderness. They did not experience many of the sins that their parents had committed:

## מלבים על דברים פרק א פסוק ו

לכן קודם שהתחיל בבאור המצות ובזכרון שכרם חשש שאחר שכבר תמו דור המדבר אשר ראו הדברים וידעו סבותיהם, אולי בניהם אשר יקומו מאחריהם יסתפקו בהם ולא יאמינו בהשגחת ה' הפרטית, כי ישאלו למה הניעם ארבעים שנה במדבר ולא הביאם אל הארץ תיכף, וגם אחרי שבאו אל גבול הארץ סבבו את ארץ אדום ואת ארץ מואב ויראו מלהלחם עמהם, שמזה נראה שהיה ענינם ענין טבעי

*Since receiving possession of the Land of Israel was the ultimate prize, before giving it to them, Moshe was concerned that since the generation that left Egypt who saw all these events (the sins) and understood the consequences had already died, perhaps their children will rise up after them and have doubts about it. They may not believe in Hashem's Divine Providence because of a question they have as to why did Hashem move them about in the wilderness for forty years, instead of bringing them directly into Israel? Moreover, when they reached the border of Israel, they circumvented the lands of Edom and Moav without attacking them! Must be they were afraid of them and couldn't depend on their might to defeat them.*

Therefore, Moshe told them the history of why they wandered in the Wilderness for forty years and did not go directly into Israel after receiving the Torah on Sinai. It was because of the golden calf, which set them back almost a whole year, and because of the spies who came back with a false report about Israel. They did not attack Edom and Moav because they were afraid of them; rather, it was because Hashem had promised them their land and commanded the Jewish people not to bother them.



Perhaps, though, there is another reason why Moshe is telling the entire Jewish nation this information before entering Israel.

As noted earlier, this is a very daunting time for the Jewish people. Yes, they had Yehoshua as their able leader, but he did not compare to Moshe. The Talmud says, “Moshe is compared to the sun, and Yehoshua is compared to the moon.” What a great difference there is between the powerful always-on, steady, and reliable sun, and the small, dark, waxing and waning moon!

While traveling through the wilderness, even with Moshe as their leader and miracles occurring every minute of every day, the Jews were far from perfect, having sinned there ten times! Indeed, had Moshe *not* intervened, they would have been erased from the face of the earth numerous times. So, how would they exist in Israel, where there would be no Moshe and there would be no daily miracles to constantly remind them of Hashem and keep them in line? They were afraid that they would be annihilated after the first infraction.

To this Moshe said, “You did all those sins, yet, you are still here, whole and secure. Hashem wants you alive and He will take care of you.”

This lesson applies to us as well. Even though our behavior may be less than optimal, Hashem wants us alive and He will take care of us. Of course, we must do the best we can, but if we fail, we can always come back to Hashem, apologize sincerely, and start over. He will always be there for us.

Moshe continues to reassure them that Hashem will fight for them by citing the miraculous victory over the two giants, Sihon king of Cheshbon and Og king of Bashan. Moshe relates how Hashem has promised (Deuteronomy 2:25):

(כה) הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֶחַל תַּת פַּחַדְךָ וַיִּרְאֲתְךָ עַל פְּנֵי הָעַמִּים תַּחַת כָּל הַשָּׁמַיִם  
אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמְעוּן שְׁמֶעְךָ וְרָגְזוּ וְחָלוּ מִפְּנֶיךָ

*25) This day I shall begin to place dread and fear of you on the peoples under the entire heaven, when they hear of your reputation they will tremble and be anxious before you.*

Why was it so important that the Jewish people go into Israel and assume a new life without the miraculous presence of Hashem? Why couldn't they continue this extremely close relationship with Hashem?

The reality is that this is really the relationship Hashem wanted to have with the Jewish people. And, had the Jewish people not sinned with the golden calf, they actually would have had it. However, after the sin of the golden calf, this no longer was possible. How is that?

We need to go back to the very beginning, viz, to Adam prior to the sin.

Adam was created completely good with no evil in him whatsoever. The force of evil was an entity outside of him, the snake, whose job it was to try to entice Adam to transgress Hashem's commandment. (Which he did successfully.) If Adam would have resisted the snake's temptation, his service to Hashem would have been on a much higher spiritual level, one of a person

with no evil inside of him. He would have had Torah and mitzvot, but they would have been of a totally different nature since Adam would not have been an earthly, physical being, rather a holy spiritual one. Once he sinned, and brought the evil (from the Tree of Knowledge of Good **and Bad**) into himself, he fell to the level of an earthly human being with a holy soul that are always at odds with one another. This is the condition of the human being today, and, because of it, we struggle to overcome our physical desires in favor of our spiritual obligations.

This all changed when Hashem gave the Jewish people the Torah at Mount Sinai. Our Sages teach us that the Jewish people there achieved such a high spiritual level that they actually returned to where Adam was before his sin. This being the case, had they remained at that level, they would have been worthy having a “*revealed*” relationship with Hashem and live in the Holy Land on a level where Hashem is revealed and out in the open. Not only that, but they would have had Moshe and Aharon with them as their leaders, holy men on a level worthy of an open relationship with Hashem.

Unfortunately, when they committed the sin of the golden calf, they fell back to their previous condition - earthly human beings - and were no longer worthy of having a “*revealed*” relationship with Hashem.

While travelling through the wilderness, Hashem had no choice but to provide for His people miraculously. How else would they survive in a desolate uninhabitable desert? Once they entered the

land of Israel, things would normalize and life would go back to what it was before Sinai.

The “revealed” relationship with Hashem throughout their Wilderness travels is actually why their sins were considered so grave. Here they are in the presence of Hashem, and they can still sin? What an affront to Hashem!

Imagine you tell your child, “I don’t want you hitting your younger brother! Is that clear?” A while later, the little brother comes crying, “He hit me!!!” The older brother lost it and hit the twerp. How much worse would it be if the little brother was standing there when the father told him not to hit him, and right there, in front of his father, he gives the kid a wallop? This would be a clear slap in the face to his father, a crime far greater than doing it later in private! He is telling his father, “I can do what I want to, and you have no say in the matter.”

This is what it was like travelling though the wilderness with Hashem’s intimate presence. Anything you do wrong is magnified many times because it is being done in Hashem’s immediate presence. This is why what ordinarily would have been a very minimal sin, in the wilderness was treated as a great sin.

No, the Jewish people were not equipped to live life on such a high spiritual level, a revealed relationship with Hashem. They therefore they had to lose Moshe and Aharon and enter the Land of Israel to work the land and receive its bounty through their own sweat and toil.

We live in the Diaspora at a time when Hashem is in His hidden mode. He brilliantly camouflages Himself in nature, such that there are actually those who say “There is no Hashem, only nature.” Our goal in this life is to “blow Hashem’s cover,” so to speak, and see Him clearly everywhere. We do this by learning His magnificent Torah, doing His deep and meaningful mitzvot, and by being sensitive to the cues and clues that He sends us to inform us of His love and concern for us.

The more we see of Hashem, the greater a relationship we can have with him. May we all merit to have a close, loving relationship with Hashem!