

Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Devarim
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פרשת דברים
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Torah Reading: *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 1:1-3:22

In this *parasha*, Moshe recounts to the Bnei Yisrael episodes from the 40 years in the wilderness; he gives the Bnei Yisrael encouragement regarding their upcoming conquest of the land of Cana'an.

The Torah is not a history book. Although it does contain much of the early history of the Jewish people, if it were a history text, it would be the worst history text ever written. Volume I (*Bereshit*) spans 2238 years, from the creation of the world to the descent into Egypt by Yaakov and his descendants. Volume II (*Shmot*), after the first introductory chapters about the birth of Moshe, covers a period of between one and two years. Even including the opening chapters, *Shmot* spans only 210 years. Volume III (*Vayikrah*) covers no time at all since it is a compendium of laws. Volume IV (*Bemidbar*) covers 38 years from the second year after the Exodus until the fortieth year in the wilderness. Volume V (*Devarim*) covers five weeks, from Rosh Chodesh Shvat until Moshe's death on the 7th of Adar. Further, there are episodes that the Torah describes in detail, such as the era of the ten plagues in Egypt. However, there are also long periods of time that are totally ignored, such as the 38 years between the second and last year in the wilderness.

The Torah is a series of books, not about history, but about how to live our lives as good people and good Jews. Part of that "teaching" (the literal meaning of the word "Torah") is understanding where we have come from and how we have gotten to where we are today.

Devarim is also known as *Mishneh Torah*, a play on words which means both "Second Torah" and "The Teaching of Torah." It is composed of Moshe's last three speeches to the Israelites as they stand in the plains of Moav ready to cross the

Jordan into Cana'an, a trip that Moshe will not make with them. His speeches include reiterations of earlier events and commandments (hence, "Second Torah") in addition to an explanation of the *mitzvot* which are applicable only in the Land of Israel.

Moshe begins with recounting the early history of the nation. The people who stood before him at this point did not themselves leave Egypt, as the generation of the exodus had died in the wilderness due to the sin of the spies. Moshe recounts for them the episode of the spies in chapter one, verses 21-40. He talks specifically about the punishment and follows that with words of encouragement (34-40):

לֹד וַיִּשְׁמַע ה', אֶת-קוֹל דְּבָרֵיכֶם ; וַיִּקְצַף, וַיִּשָּׁבַע לֵאמֹר. לֹה אִם-
יִרְאֶה אִישׁ בְּאַנְשֵׁים הָאֵלֶּה, הַדּוֹר הַזֶּה--אֵת, הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה,
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי, לָתֵת לְאַבְתֵּיכֶם. לֹו זֹולְתִי כָּלֵב בֶּן-יִפְנֶה, הוּא יִרְאֶנָּה,
וְלֹ-אֶתֶן אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר דָּרַךְ-בָּהּ, וְלִבְנָיו--יַעַן, אֲשֶׁר מָלֵא אַחֲרֵי
ה'. לֹו גַם-בֵּי הַתְּאֲנָף ה', בְּגִלְלַתְכֶם לֵאמֹר : גַּם-אֶתָּה, לֹא-תָבֵא שָׁם.
לֹה יְהוֹשִׁעַ בֶּן-נוּן הַעֲלִיֵּם לְפָנָיִךְ, הוּא יָבֵא שָׁמָּה ; אֲתוּ חִזֵּק, כִּי-הוּא
יִנְחֹלֶנָּה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל. לֹט וְטַפְּכֶם אֲשֶׁר אֲמַרְתֶּם לְבֹו יְהִיָּה, וּבְנֵיכֶם
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדְעוּ הַיּוֹם טוֹב וְרָע--הִמָּה, יָבֵאוּ שָׁמָּה ; וְלָהֶם אֶתְנַנָּה,
וְהֵם יִירְשׁוּהָ. מ וְאַתֶּם, פָּנּוּ לָכֶם ; וַיִּסְעוּ הַמַּדְבָּרָה, דָּרַךְ יַם-סוּף.

34 Hashem heard the voice of your words, and was angry, and swore, saying: **35** 'Surely there shall not one of these men, even this evil generation, see the good land, which I swore to give to your fathers, **36** except for Calev the son of Yephuneh, he shall see it; and to him will I give the land that he has walked upon, and to his children; because he has completely followed Hashem.' **37** Also Hashem was angry with me for your sakes, saying: You also shall not go there; **38** Yehoshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go there; you encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it. **39** Moreover your little ones, that you said would be prey, and your children, that this day have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there, and to them will I give it, and they shall possess it. **40** But as for you, turn you, and take your journey into the wilderness by the way to the Reed Sea.'

Imagine Moshe's angst. According to the midrash, the thing he wanted more than anything else was to be able to enter the Land of Israel, to be within its boundaries and to fulfill the *mitzvot* applicable only within the Land. He knew he would never

accomplish this goal, and yet he stood before the people, dispassionately explained to them why he would not enter the Land, and proceeded to explicate to them the laws of the Land of Israel over the course of the book of *Devarim*.

As noted above, the Torah is a series of books about how to live our lives as good people and as good Jews. It accomplishes this task not only by listing and elaborating on various *mitzvot* which inform all aspects of our lives, but by presenting us with role models such as Moshe, a man with flaws like all of us, but one who rose to become as close to Hashem as anyone and who led the nation from infancy through its adolescence in the wilderness to the cusp of adulthood as it stood poised to enter the Promised Land, a land he would see, but never enter.

Shabbat shalom.

For Discussion:

- According to what Moshe says here, why could he not enter Israel? Look in *Bemidbar* 20:2-23. According to that section, why could Moshe not enter Israel? How do you explain the discrepancy?
- What are some of the things that you might expect to find in the *Mishneh Torah* – the Second Torah? What would you expect Moshe to repeat to the Jewish people?
- How would you have felt if you were Moshe, standing right across from the Land of Israel, speaking to the Jewish people for five weeks, and knowing that you were not going to go into the Land with them?