

**Wembley Synagogue**

דְּבָרִים

Insights from the commentators into the Sidra of Devarim

אלה הדברים - These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel. (1:1)

What is the Torah emphasising by beginning the Book of *Devarim* with the word "*Eileh*" — "these are"? Moshe started delivering his legacy speech to the people of Israel on *Rosh Chodesh Shevat*, and he passed away thirty-six days later on the seventh day of *Adar*. The word "*eileh*" has the numerical value of thirty-six, and the Torah is alluding to the fact that for thirty-six days he spoke words of admonishment to people of Israel.

Why did Moshe admonish them for thirty-six days?

In the *Midrash Rabbah* (Lamentations 1:1) Rabbi Levi says, "The Jewish people did not go into exile until they had renounced the thirty-six ordinances in the Torah, for which the penalty is *kareit* — excision." (The word "*eichah*" — "how" — which is the opening word of the book of Lamentations, has the numerical value of thirty-six.) According to the *Zohar*, the three hundred and sixty-five negative commandments in the Torah correspond to the three hundred and sixty-five days of the solar calendar, and by transgressing a negative commandment, one adversely affects the day corresponding to that negative commandment. (See *Zohar, Bereishit* 170b, Rambam, Introduction to *Mishneh Torah*.) Moshe knew through Divine inspiration that the Jews would ultimately be exiled for violating thirty-six negative commandments (*Sanhedrin* 104a), which would affect thirty-six days of the year. Therefore he admonished them for thirty-six days as a corrective.

It is interesting to note that *Parshat Devarim* is always read on the *Shabbat* preceding *Tishah B'Av*, the day when the book of *Eichah* — Lamentations — is read. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

אלה הדברים - These are the words that Moshe spoke to the Children Of Israel (1:1)

Moshe addressed his words and teachings "to all of the Children of Israel". Moshe intended that each and every member of Israel should be able to absorb the Torah's teachings. He therefore transmitted the Torah in a manner so that it could be understood on many levels. Each Jew from the simplest to the greatest can relate to the Torah on his own individual level. (Source: R' Simcha Bunim of P'shicha)

אל בני ישראל - Moshe spoke unto the Children of Israel.(1:3)

Rashi explains that Moshe rebuked them only when he was close to death in order to avoid rebuking them again and again. How does this accord with the statement of the *Gemara* (*Bava Metzia* 31a) that the Torah command, "*Hochei'ach [tochiach...]*" — "You shall reprove [your fellow]" (*Vayikra* 19:17) — means even one hundred times?

There are two kinds of rebuke:

1. Direct confrontation: specifying the wrongdoing and admonishing the perpetrator for committing the act.
2. A more subtle method: not mentioning the iniquity directly, but encouraging the person to improve his conduct. The advantage of the latter is that the erring individual is spared embarrassment.

When the Torah says "*Hochei'ach tochiach*" — "You shall reprove" — it concludes "*velo tisa alav cheit*" — "and do not bear a sin because of him" — which can also be explained literally to mean, "Do not bring up the sin to him" — that is, be careful not to mention the particular sin, and thus he will not be embarrassed. This type of rebuke may and should be repeated, even one-hundred times. However, since Moshe's current rebuke consisted of specifying through veiled references, the sins committed, he waited until immediately before his death so that his words would be accepted and they would not have to face him constantly and be embarrassed.

When someone is severely criticised, he usually tries to rationalise his behavior. The one giving the rebuke is then faced with a dilemma. If he repeats the reprimand, and shows that the excuses given do not justify the behaviour in question, a quarrel may ensue. On the other hand, if he does not respond to the justifications that are being offered it may seem that he accepts the other person's excuses even if he does not. Both of these problems are avoided if one gives rebuke at the end of his life. The recipient of the rebuke will have no opportunity to interpret the rebuker's silence as an acceptance of his excuses. Thus, one who rebukes towards the end of his life precludes the need to repeat the rebuke and refute the excuses. The fact that he does not have to repeat his rebuke is beneficial because he thereby avoids a heated exchange which can lead to a quarrel. (Source: Chatam Sofer - Ma'ayana shel Torah)

האיל משה באר את התורה הזאת לאמר - Moshe began explaining the Torah (1:5)

Rashi states that this verse means that Moshe translated the Torah into all the world's languages. This indicates a vital lesson. Although the Torah was given to the Jews when they first became a nation, and were about to enter their own homeland, its guiding principles are equally relevant in any situation. The fact that the Torah was given in all languages illustrates that the Torah is a

Jew's guide no matter which country he finds himself in, and no matter which culture he is surrounded by. (Source: K'tav Sofer - Ma'ayana shel Torah)

אֵיכָה אֶשָׂא לְבַדִּי - How can I alone carry your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels? (1:12) The Sidra of Devarim is always read on the Shabbat which precedes Tisha B'Av. This is due to the word eichah, how, the opening word of Megillat Eichah, which is read on Tisha B'Av. Indeed, the word eichah has become synonymous with Tisha B'Av and mourning. In the Midrash Eichah, the Rabbis say three prophesied using the word eichah: Moshe, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Moshe said, "How can I alone carry your burdens?" Isaiah said, "How did (the Jewish people) become like a harlot?" Jeremiah said, "How does she (the Jewish people) sit alone?" What is the Midrash alluding to? Is the association between the "eichahs" applicable to the word alone, or is there an underlying message to be derived herein? Perhaps the two eichahs echoed by the Prophets have a relationship with one another in that Isaiah decries the sin and Jeremiah laments the punishment. What does Moshe's eichah have to do with the others? Furthermore, Moshe's complaint regarding the need for judges to assist him does not seem to be in the correct place. Until this point Moshe criticised the Jewish people for their past sins. He begins with the sin of the spies, and goes off on what seems to be a tangent, bemoaning the fact that he alone must shoulder the responsibility of judging the people.

אֲנָשִׁים חֲכָמִים וְיָדְעִים - (Provide for yourselves) distinguished men, who are wise, understanding, and well-known (to your tribes) (1:13) The Rabbis tell us that in these words Moshe was alluding to a serious problem that threatened the very existence of the Jewish people. He was acutely aware that it was necessary to get judges for each tribe who were members of that tribe, because no tribe would accept a judge that hailed from another tribe. Perhaps he was testing them: Would they accede to accepting a judge who was from another tribe? They responded in the affirmative. Yes, we think it is a great idea to appoint judges. Of course, we want one from our own tribe. The lack of trust between the tribes was at the foundation of the spies' sin. The people wanted spies - one from each tribe, because filial trust was something they did not possess. When you have twelve spies from different tribes, with disparate perspectives, each with his own personal agenda and focus, is it any wonder that the mission resulted in disaster? They were not working together - they were working against each other. Each one had to demonstrate his own personal dedication to the nation. Thus, they could not accept what the other Nasi/spy said, because he was from a different tribe. Yet, if one Nasi claimed that it was dangerous to enter Eretz Yisrael, they could not triumph in battle against its inhabitants - the other Nesi'im were compelled to agree. After all, if they disagreed, it would appear as if they did not care about the nation. In this manner, one Nasi could force the hand of the others. The eichah which decried the need to have different spies from each tribe led to the eichah which lamented the destruction of Jerusalem. (Source: Peninim on the Torah)

Tisha B'Av

The Gemara Taanit 29a says 'mishenichnas Av mema'atin b'simcha' (as the month of Av approaches, we reduce our level of simcha). The Gemara adds the following comment: 'k'sheim she'mishenichnas Av mema'atin b'simcha, kach mishenichnas Adar marbin b'simcha' - just as we reduce our level of simcha in Av, so too we increase our level of simcha in Adar. It stands to reason that if we determine why we reduce our happiness in the month of Av, we can apply it - conversely - to understand why we increase our happiness in the month of Adar, for the Gemara introduces this halacha with the word 'k'sheim' (just as) implying that there exists a connection between the two.

It is not difficult to ascertain the reason for reducing our joy in the month of Av. It is the time when we mourn the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash (the holy Temple). Clearly, we are not crying over the mere loss of a physical structure, as magnificent as it was. We mourn the loss of the Shechina (the Divine Presence) that dwelled in our midst. The Beit Hamikdash brought the Shechina, which not only rested in the Beit Hamikdash, but dwelled in each and every Jew. The Rabbis point out the verse states, 'v'asu li Mikdash v'shachanti b'tocham' (Shemot 25:8) (make for Me a Sanctuary and I will dwell in you). It doesn't say 'make for Me a Mikdash and I will dwell in it,' it states 'in you' - 'b'toch kol echad v'echad.' When the Beit Hamikdash stood, the Shechina was found in every Jew. After the Temple was destroyed, the Shechina distanced Itself from us. This is why we cry on Tisha B'Av; we miss that close relationship, and we yearn for the day when the holy Shechina will return.

Shabbat Shalom



Shabbat starts 8.00pm



Shabbat ends: 10.05pm

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is produced by Chazan Anthony Wolfson
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