



Parshas Devarim 2021, creating your world

This week's Parsha Perspective is in loving memory of Shlomo Ben Edward, Edward Ben Efraim, Leah Bas Moshe, Yaakov Ben Issur & Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Tova Basha.

*This Shabbos has a unique name, “**Shabbos Chazon - the Shabbos of vision.**” For we read a special Haftorah (reading from the Prophets after the Torah portion) beginning with the words “Chazon Yeshayahu - the vision of Yeshayahu.” Yeshayahu envisioned and told the Jewish people about the punishment they would receive for rebelling against G-d. However, he concludes with the prophecy of the ultimate redemption and the coming of Moshiach!*

Our Parsha begins the last book of the Torah, Sefer Devarim. With just 37 days left to live, Moshe gathers the nation for his final address. He rebukes them for their past misdeeds and lack of trust in G-d.

Moshe expresses the burden of leadership and how he mitigated it by appointing leaders over each individual tribe. He recounts the spies frightening reports of Israel's land and the drastic consequences that stemmed from it. He describes their journey through the desert and their wars with Sichon, Bashon, and Emor.

However, a question comes to mind: Our Parsha begins with a statement (*Devarim 1: 1*) “*These are the words that Moshe spoke to the entire Jewish nation.*” But why does the Torah need to write “*these are the words that Moshe spoke,*” rather than just say that Moshe spoke to the Jewish people? What do “*these words*” add to the message that Moshe is trying to convey and impart to the nation before his death?!

Rashi (*Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki, the foremost commentary on the Torah*) answers this question by explaining that Moshe was subtly and delicately rebuking the Jewish people.

The term “*Devarim*” has a few different interpretations. The first translation is “*words*,” like the conventional understanding of our Pasuk, “*these are the words that Moshe spoke to the entire Jewish nation.*” The second translation is “*things*,” meaning, “*these are the things that Moshe spoke to the entire Jewish nation about.*”

Rashi explains that Moshe was hinting at and alluding to the things the Jewish people did wrong and the locations where they happened in. Since it was Moshe’s last few days on earth and his final speech to the Jewish nation, he implied his rebuke rather than stating it outright.

He did not want to leave the nation he led from slavery to Mt. Sinai with the feeling of criticism and critique. Because Moshe understood that people mostly remember and relate to the ending rather than the beginning.

However, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks of blessed memory (*the former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain*) gives a deeper and more profound explanation in his book *Covenant and Conversation*. In the last 37 days of his life, Rabbi Sacks writes that Moshe transformed into the role that he is immortalized by, “*Moshe **Rabbeinu** – Moshe, **our teacher.***”

In Parshas Shemos, we read about the story of the burning bush. (*Shemos 4:2-18*) Once, while following a lone sheep, Moshe saw a bush on fire. But when he came closer, a voice rang out and told him to take off his shoes as he stood on holy ground. G-d then revealed Himself to Moshe and commanded him to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt.

But Moshe did not eagerly accept this job; he told G-d that he had a lisp and won’t represent Him correctly. G-d responded back to Moshe that He is the one who gives a person the power of speech. Therefore, Moshe must assume the job and leadership that G-d had in mind for him.

Rabbi Sacks explains that Moshe said to G-d that he did not want the job because (*Shemos 4:10*) “***Lo Ish Devarim Anochi – I am not a man of words.***” However, at the beginning of our Parsha, Moshe becomes a teacher, **a man of words.**

He already appointed the next leader, Yeushua Ben-Nun, to lead the Jewish people into the promised land. Now, he stepped into the role that he is known and remembered by “*Rabbienu - our teacher.*”

The words that Moshe spoke in the book of Devarim endure, prevail and remain true till this very day since Moshe was talking to the entire Jewish people for all of time. He gave us the outline and method to live life with happiness, meaning, and most importantly, a deep connection to G-d. All this comes from a person who thought he was “*Lo Ish Devarim - not a man of words.*”

The lesson we learn from here is ever more prevalent as we approach the saddest day of the Jewish calendar, Tisha B’Av. A day that will live in infamy and sorrow until the ultimate redemption takes place. Since when Moshe sent the spies to scout the land, and they returned with a negative report about Israel, G-d condemned that generation to die in the desert.

But G-d also told Moshe that if the Jewish people are crying about my land, I will give them what to cry about. According to the Talmud, the spies returned to Moshe on Tisha B’Av, starting a domino effect that we feel till today.

Beginning with their words on Tisha B’Av, the spies convince an entire nation to be scared of the land promised to us. Following up with the destruction of both Temples in Jerusalem and the slaughter of over 500,000 Jews in the city of Betar.

More recently, the final solution in Germany and mass deportation of the Warsaw ghetto to the Treblinka extermination camps were approved. **Your words create the environment in which you, your family, and the next generations will live.**

**"Speech has power. Words do not fade.
What starts out as a sound ends in a deed."**

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*