



#19 • DEVARIM • 6 AV, 5774 • 8/2/14

DAF KESHER

SHAPELL'S / YESHIVAT DARCHE NOAM | MIDRESHET RACHEL V'CHAYA | PATHWAYS ISRAEL | PATHWAYS PLUS

DVAR TORAH THE JESTER'S MUSSAR

The Torah has two different ways of teaching ethics, morals, and the “how-to”s of life. In the books of Bereishit and Shemot, as well as in Bamidbar, the messages, for the most part, come through engaging stories – Yosef and his brothers, the Korach rebellion, Moshe growing up in Egypt and dozens more. But the book of Devarim is different. There Moshe often just tells it to us straight: “Be just and good,” “Fear God,” “Love God with all your heart, soul, and might.” Why did Moshe shift from anecdotal education to direct messages?

Says Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Barditchov, zt”l, the Kedushas Levi: The Israel who heard the book of Devarim was on a much higher level than the Israel who heard the books of Bereishit and Shemot at Mount Sinai forty years earlier. After forty years of learning Torah directly from Moshe Rabbeinu, eating Manna, drinking from Miriam’s Well, and seeing the Clouds of Glory, Israel was ready to hear straight *mussar* from Moshe, not cloaked in stories (and even in the fortieth year, Moshe opened up the book of Devarim with only hints of rebuke, and only spoke directly later on).

Most of us, like the Jews who had just left Egyptian slavery, still need to digest our moral messages through the anecdotes, stories, and jokes of our rabbis, darshanim, and maggidim. In the tradition of King Solomon, the author of Mishlei, the master of teaching morals and values through *meshalim* (parables) was the Dubno Maggid, Rabbi Yaakov Krantz, zt”l (1740-1804). He was once asked why he explained everything through a parable. He answered with a parable:

The king’s son became very ill, and the doctors prescribed a very bitter medicine that the sick child refused to take. All the doctors and ministers and wise men tried to persuade him how important it was to take the medicine – but to no avail. When the court jester came by, and asked, “What’s all the fuss?” and they explained the difficulty. He said to them, “Let me give it a try. Please hand me the medicine.”

The jester proceeded to unleash all of his best jokes on the sick prince, who started laughing uncontrollably. When the laughing prince’s mouth was open wide, the jester seized the opportunity to throw in the teaspoon of medicine. The goal was attained and the prince healed.

“I am that jester,” said the Maggid of Dubno. People find it difficult internalizing ethical messages directly in their raw and sometimes bitter state. I get them engaged in the story line of a parable. Sometimes I get them laughing, and when their hearts are open I throw in the mussar in a way they’re willing to swallow it.

**This issue is dedicated in memory of:
Ernst ben Moshe, z”l**

Also in this week’s Daf Keshar: [The Netziv: Trusting in God, Appreciating His Land](#) · Rabbi Gidon Shoshan: [Super Highs, Super Lows](#)

STUDY GUIDE TRUSTING IN GOD, APPRECIATING HIS LAND

One comment by the Netziv in Haamek Davar (Devarim 3:12) sheds light on our entire parshah. We'll follow it step-by-step. [We benefited much from Rav Yehuda Cooperman's annotated edition.]

The Problem

The Netziv's starting point is a fundamental question: What function does the end of our parshah serve?

Haamek Davar 3:12 We must pay attention to the entire story, from "We turned and went up ..." (Devarim 3:1) until the end of the parshah; what rebuke is included in this?	העמק דבר דברים ב:יב יש לשום לב לכל הספור מן "ונפן ונעל" עד סוף הסדרה איזה דבר תוכחה יצוק בזה:
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The beginning of the book of Devarim records Moshe's rebuke to the people of Israel (see Netziv Devarim 1:6 and Rashi at the beginning of the book). The parshah gets off to a clear start, recalling the sin of the spies. But, asked the Netziv, what rebuke is inherent in the story of the victorious war Israel fought against Og? [Perhaps we could broaden the question, and ask, "Where is the rebuke in the entire post-spies section (Devarim Chapter 2 and 3)? Why record the encounters with Edom, Moav, Sichon, and Og?"]

The Netziv's Assumption

The Netziv assumes here that the episode of Reuven and Gad's settling in Transjordan (Devarim 3:12-22) has a negative side to it (see, however, Rashi and the Netziv's own comments on Devarim 33:21).

Haamek Davar 3:12 We must know, though, that had the tribes of Reuven and Gad not taken their portions in Transjordan they would not have been the first to go into exile (see Melachim II 15:29). For the holiness of Transjordan is of a lower level than the land of Israel, and the power of Torah within it is also less. See the end of Avot D'Rabbi Natan Chapter 26: "At first they would say that there is grain in Yehudah, straw in the Galil, and chaff in Transjordan." Grain, there, alludes to Torah, as the Midrash in Parshat Toldot says: "Much grain" refers to Talmud." Moshe hinted this to them when he said, "Know your sin that will find you" (Bamidbar 32:23). Furthermore, after the tribes of Reuven and Gad went into exile, the holiness of the land of Israel was lessened, as it says in Erchin 32b: "When the tribes of Gad and Reuven went into exile, Yovel ceased to be applicable."	העמק דבר דברים ב:יב אבל ראוי לדעת דאלו לא חלקו ב"ר וב"ג בעה"י לא גלו תחלה ב"ג וב"ר. דעה"י קדושתה קלה מא"י וגם כח התורה מעט בקרבה כדתניא באדר"ג ס"פ כ"ו בראשונה היו אומרים דגן ביהודה ותבן בגליל ומוץ בעה"י. ולענין תורה מיירי שם. וכדאי' במדרש פ' תולדות ורוב דגן זה תלמוד. וכבר רמז משה להם באמרו ודעו חטאתכם אשר תמצא אתכם כמש"כ בס' במדבר ל"ב כ"ג. ואחר שגלו ב"ר וב"ג הוקל גם קדושת א"י כדאי' בערכין דל"ב ב' כשגלו שבט ב"ג וב"ר כו'.
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The tribes of Reuven and Gad settled for a lower level of kedushah and Torah, and were thus the first ones vulnerable to exile. What caused that?

The Cause

The Reuven and Gad episode was a negative side effect of the sin of the spies.

Haamek Davar 3:12 The sin of the spies caused all of this.	העמק דבר דברים ב:יב וכ"ז גרם חטא מרגלים:
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The Netziv proceeds to outline how the sin of the spies caused a chain reaction, resulting in a weak encounter with Edom, a detour near Moav, wars against Sichon and Og, and then Reuven and Gad's request for land outside of Israel proper.

<p>Haamek Davar 3:12 Had they [not sinned because of the spies] went up to the land of Israel from Kadesh Barnea through Edom, the King of Edom would not have refused passage through his borders (see Bamidbar 20:20-21), for after the splitting of the Yam Suf the princes of Edom were terrified of Israel (see Shemot 15:15).</p>	<p>העמק דבר דברים ב:יב דאלו עלו מקדש ברנע דרך אדום לא"י לא היה אז מלך אדום מסרב מלהרשות את ישראל לעבוד בגבולו בעוד שהיה פחד קריעת י"ם על אלופי אדום:</p>
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Because of the sin of the spies, there was a forty year break between the splitting of the Sea and the encounter with Edom. Edom initially would not have refused Israel direct passage through their country, and Israel would have entered the land **through Edom from the south** (through what we today call the Negev Desert), as opposed to the east. Had that happened, what would have the outcome been?

<p>Haamek Davar 3:12 They would then have first conquered the land of Israel (Israel proper, not the lands of Sichon and Og) and divided it up equally. They would then go to Transjordan and the exile and other troubles would not have happened.</p>	<p>העמק דבר דברים ב:יב והיו כובשים תחלה א"י ומחלקים בשוה ובאים אח"כ לעה"י ולא היה הגלות ושאר צרות:</p>
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However, the sin of the spies brought about a train of unfortunate developments:

<p>Haamek Davar 3:12 But now, that they (after the sin of the spies) forced their way into the land and were smitten from Seir to Chormah, Israel's honor and awe was diminished in the eyes of Edom. The same was true for Moav, [and their journey took them] until it was necessary that they reach Sichon. It ended up that they conquered the lands of Sichon and Og, and Transjordan was divided up between the people of Reuven and Gad – and what happened happened.</p>	<p>העמק דבר דברים ב:יב אבל עתה כשהעפילו לעלות והוכתו בשעיר עד חרמה הוקל כבוד ומורא ישראל בעיני אדום. וכן במואב עד שהגיעו בע"כ לסיחון. ועלה שנכבשו ארץ סו"ע ונתחלק ארץ עה"י לב"ג וב"ר ויצא מה שיצא:</p>
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Here are the two scenarios – what could have happened and what actually happened:

What could have happened had the Jews not sinned? They would have entered Israel from the south, directly from Kadesh Barnea. Edom, out of fear, would have let them march through their country. All of Israel, including Reuven and Gad, would have received portions of Israel proper, with full *kedushah*, and we would have been saved from exile and other troubles.

What actually happened because of the sin of the spies? A group of Israelites forced their way into Israel, against Moshe's warning, and were slaughtered. Edom lost their respect and fear for Israel. After wandering forty years in the desert, Edom refused Israel passage through their land, forcing a detour past Moav and forcing a war against Sichon and Og, so Israel could enter the land through the east. After Israel won those battles, Reuven and Gad requested land in Transjordan. Because their inheritance had less holiness than Israel proper and they were less involved in Torah, they were the weakest element in Israel, and went into exile first, diminishing the holiness of the land.

<p>Haamek Davar 3:12 All of this (the end of the parshah) was rebuke for what the sin of the spies brought about. It also showed that they had to hold on to their learning and to develop it intensely.</p>	<p>העמק דבר דברים ב:יב וכ"ז תוכחה מה הגיע עון מרגלים ומה שהעון סיבב. ואת אשר לפנייהם לעשות בשמירת התלמוד ופולפולה:</p>
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FACULTY SUPER HIGHS, SUPER LOWS, BY RABBI GIDON SHOSHAN

In the coming days, we will read the same word spoken by three great men, in three very different contexts – Eichah! This one haunting word, the echoing and rhetorical, Eichah, “how”. On Shabbos morning, we will read how Moshe said, Eichah – How can I handle the many burdens of the large nation of Klal Yisrael. In the Haftorah, the great prophet Yeshayah bellows, Eichah – how have the Jewish people, the inhabitants of a once just city, become so immoral. And finally, in the dark on Tisha B’Av night, we will hear the cry of Yirmiah, Eichah – how has the once honorable city of Jerusalem, been left desolate as a lonely widow?



Rabbi Gidon Shoshan

Moshe’s Eichah is in response to the growing multitude of Israel on its way into the Holy Land. Yeshayah’s responds to the immoral Israel, and Yirmiah’s to Israel’s sinful consequence – a land desolate and decimated. These three great men, says the Midrash are like three servants of a noblewoman – one who saw her in her majesty, one who saw her in harried, anxious times, and one who saw her finally impoverished and disgusting.

The commentaries on the Midrash point out that these three prophets used this same word in reaction to three very different sets of circumstances, because the common denominator of the circumstances were their exaggerated and miraculous natures. Moshe saw a Jewish people that was majestic and whose growth and glory were unnaturally great. Yeshayah saw a people whose holy foundations had been sunk to a level previously unimaginable – and indeed unnatural – for the chosen people. And Yirmiah saw a city once so majestic, uncharacteristically empty and dead. The same supernatural power that Israel has to be holy and great, it has to be supernaturally sinful and decrepit.

Spiritual highs and lows are like a swinging pendulum. The greater the potential for height, the greater the gravitational pull towards lowliness. In mathematical terms, spiritual potential is like an integer, with every individual leading a life that provides the integer with its positive or negative charge.

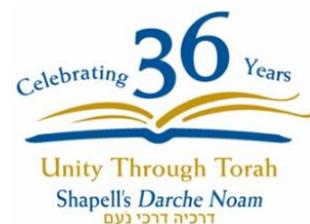
When asked by a chosid, where one is to place the bulk of their spiritual efforts, one contemporary rebbe said that a person should examine the areas of spiritual life where they most excel and most fail. It is likely that in both of these opposite areas lies their greatest potential.

The feelings of Tisha B’Av fall on a similar axis. Chazal say that whoever focuses on the the mournful sorrow of a destroyed Jerusalem, is fortunate to witness and rejoice in its rebuilding. For only he who has the power to be sad, has the power to be happy.

Good Shabbos!!

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We remember all of the soldiers, the kedoshim, z”l, who gave their lives defending the people of Israel and the land of Israel in operation Tzuk Eitan. יהי זכרם ברוך.

May Hashem send a speedy recovery to the wounded, יבל”ח, and בשורות טובות to all of Israel.