

Introduction to Parsha #44: Devarim¹

READINGS: ***Torah Devarim:*** Deuteronomy 1:1 - 3:22
 Haftarah: Isaiah 1:1-27
 B'rit Chadasha: I Timothy 3:1-13



These are the devarim.

[Deuteronomy 1:1(a)]

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is the Avot [Fathers/Patriarchs]

Eleh ha-devarim asher diber Moshe el-kol-Yisra'el - *These are the substantive things/weighty words that Moshe spoke unto all Israel ...* ***b'ever ha-Yarden b'midbar b'aravah*** – *on the Trans-Jordan wilderness plain* Deuteronomy 1:1a.

We have reached a milestone. For the first time in our lives, we can actually *see* the ancient homeland that our ancestors whispered late night stories about. From our new camp in the shadow of Nebo we can gaze out across the Jordan Rift Valley and see Jericho ... and so much more!

We have learned so much over the past 40 years. We are so much freer now than we were when we left Egypt, because we know longer think like slaves, or react to life's challenges like the traumatized victims we were back then. We are so much wiser now than we were when we departed Sinai, trumpets sounding, banners flying, because we now have the benefit of a trans-seasonal and cross-generational history of covenant interactions with - and covenant disciplines at the hand of - the Holy One. We are now so much more trusting of the Bridegroom-King's promises than we were when we begged Moshe to send spies to reconnoiter the land, because we have since walked with the Holy One through the Valley of the Shadow of Death time after time – and He has been with us, and provided His rod and His staff to comfort us – on each occasion. We are now so much more on

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board with the Holy One's Grand Plan than we were when we first got to these high plains, because we have now seen the horrific effects of the folly, vanity, corruption, sensuality, sentimentality, hyper-emotionalism, greed, lust, perversion, pseudo-intellectualism, narcissistic arrogance, toxic negativity, and cultish/occultish deception with which the raging nations are constantly poisoning Creation. They just do not know any better way; but now we do. Because of [a] the stunning revelation downloads we have received and [b] the things we have seen and experienced in the obstacle course Torah calls 'the Wilderness', we know beyond that there is no cure for humanity's horribly fallen state beside the Holy One's plan of redemption. We now know that no solution for what ails mankind will never come from the nations or their institutions. We now know that all we, our children, or our children's children will ever get from the nations/ethnicities/ideologies of this fallen world will be fear and folly; depravity, deception, and demonization; vanity, vulgarity, and vitriol; smoke, mirrors, and snake oil; hoodoos, hatred, and holocaust. And we also now know that the only way the planet on which we live can even survive, much less prosper, is the Holy One's plan to restore every square centimeter of earth, hillside and vale by vale, to its original, intended Edenic state of beauty, fruitfulness, and shalom. We know what our role in the grand plan is. And we that know we are about to be called upon to step into that role with both feet.

We have done the 'prep' work. We have listened in awe to – and learned amazing life lessons from - the sagas of Adam, Noach, Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, and Yosef. We have sweated and slaved in the sun with our progenitors in Egypt's slime pits. We have been gloriously set free from bondage by the miracles wrought by the strong right Hand of our God. We have stood next to Moshe at Mount Sinai. We have been radically re-wired by the Holy One's Ultimate Extreme Bridal Makeover protocols. We have built – and our King has inhabited – a scale model of the Courts of the Heavenlies. We now have the benefit of revelation. We now have the advantage of perspective. now see our appointed season in the desert - with its many tests of commitment, focus, motivation, and socialization, for what it is - a Divine strategy to process us through the primary waystations that the Holy One knew would bring out in us the shrew-like attitudes, unwholesome patterns of thought and speech, uncleanness, animalistic appetites, fleshly emotions, darkened understanding, and futile-thinking that we carried out of Egypt along with our sacks of matzah.

We have successfully navigated the challenges of the Wilderness Proving Ground. Now what, you ask? Welcome to the "Master's Program" of the Kingdom - the final 'special forces' briefing of our King's 'go forth and build a Kingdom-of-

Heaven-scented Society' Initiative. This course will consist of one-part coursebook study, one part lecture, three parts prophetic inspiration, and seven parts boots-on-ground practical application. But take heart! Neither the material for this course nor the mission it introduces is anywhere close to as complicated as you have been led to believe. Quiet in the back. Class is about to begin. We are about to enter the 'on earth as it is in Heaven' component of our mission. Moshe will be our very vocal, intense, and sometimes intimidating Drill Instructor; but our Commanding Officer will be none other than Mashiach. This is *His* Book. This is *His* Vision. This is *His* Strategy. This is *His* Manual for the Great Harvest – and the blueprint for His Reign.

***Introducing Our Eminent and Trustworthy Guide
For this Final Leg of the Journey***

Oh, what an enticement the words '*Eleh ha-devarim*' provide! Oh, what a promise the inclusive '*el-kol Yisrael*' audience indicator contains! With these words Moshe invites us to participate in a totally *new kind of revelatory experience* – a thirty-six-day-long download of [a] prophetic perspective on our collective past and [b] Divinely inspired vision for our collective future. Oh what an adventure this promises to be!

What soul-stirring discoveries does this ancient treasure chest of wisdom hold in store for us? What challenges – and what opportunities – await us in the lines of this scroll? What nuggets of revelation about Mashiach and His Kingdom will we find hidden in plain sight along the way? How will these next few weeks of 'finishing the course' change our worldview and perspective on our Bridegroom-King's Grand Redemptive Plan for Creation? How will our minds be renewed? How will our hearts be inspired? How will our lives be empowered? Ah, we will find out soon enough. The secret is in the *devarim*. And so, before we begin the last leg of the Torah journey, and open the book of wisdom that Moshe Rabbeinu wrote for us, may the cry of our hearts be:

Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your Torah.

[Psalm 119:18]

Send out Your light and Your truth!

***Let them lead me; Let them bring me to Your holy hill
and to Your tabernacle.***

[Psalm 43:3]

Our guide for this part of the journey, as it was with the others, will be Moshe. But the Moshe we will encounter in Sefer Devarim will bear little resemblance to the irritable, sulky, aloof, easily frustrated, oft-offended Moshe we have known in the past. The Moshe we encounter in *Sefer Devarim* is older and wiser, humbler and gentler, than the drill sergeant who rode us so hard, spoke to us so harshly, and

disciplined us so severely in the Wilderness. Gone forever are his days of smashing tablets of testimony, ordering genocidal rampages, striking rocks in anger, and alternatively complaining to God *about us* and screaming epithets *at us*. The Moshe who will give us our final briefing is far more *calm*, far more *patient*, and far more *fatherly* than the one who pushed and prodded us through the Wilderness. This Moshe is a *counselor* - and a *comforter*. He is *an analyst* - and a *caregiver*. He is a *sage* - and a *rabbi*. Up to this point he has been *the fierce prophet of the burning bush* – because in the Wilderness that is what we needed him to be. But we have matured as well. And what need him to be now is a *humble shepherd*, full of grandfatherly wisdom. He no longer has to whip us into shape like a drill instructor. He no longer has to ride herd over us on a dangerous through hostile desert scapes. He no longer has to preside over wars or rumors of wars. Those aspects of his mission are over. In *Sefer Ha-Devarim*, Moshe will become a refreshing fountain of inspiration, flowing in vision, perspective, and empowerment. This will be his season of *Nachamu, nachamu ami! Dabru el-lev Yerushalayim* – *Comfort, comfort My people; speak tenderly to the heart of Jerusalem. See Isaiah 40:1-2a*. In this spirit Moshe will mentor us. In this mode He will lead us inexorably toward a renewal of our vows of betrothal to the Holy One. He will map out for us both a *high road* and a *low road* between which we can choose. He will not pull any punches, but He will not name names – and he will not point any fingers. He will sing a spontaneous, prophetic psalm over us. He will entrust the scrolls he has written to us. He will lift his hands and bless us. And then he will climb Mount Nebo and leave us. In the course of it all, Moshe will help us – and all generations that follow - draw fresh inspiration from our Great Days of Redemption and Betrothal and embark upon the glorious mission to which we are called.

Are you up for the next phase of the journey, Beloved? The honest answer is ‘*No, I am not. I am nowhere close to ready. But I WANT to be. How can I be MADE READY?*’ Enter Moshe, wearing his mentor hat. Are there still some important lessons to be learned from that old greybeard? Well, we are about to find out. Lend Moshe your ears one more time, if you dare! The most blessed steward of Heavenly mysteries among men – at least since Avraham – is finally ready to *unlock his treasure chest* of intimate knowledge of the Creator and His Ways, and *share his great riches with ... US!*

As we begin this final leg of the journey, consider that for the first forty years of his life Moshe learned from the most powerful, narcissistic, materialistic, paranoid, occult-obsessed, and controlling rich people of the world – the house of Pharaoh - *how not to approach life* and *how not to interact with the spirit realm*. For the next

forty years he learned from the most cunning, manipulative, mammon-obsessed poor people in the world – the house of Midyan - how *not to interact with Creation and fellow man*. And in the last forty years he has finally started to learn what man was designed by his Creator *to do*, and how man was intended by his Creator *to live and interact with God, with fellow man, and with Creation*. Over the last four decades of his life he has learned not only *how to speak to the Creator of the Heavens and earth face-to-face, as a man speaks with his friend*, and *how to treat all of Creation as a garden that we have been given to cherish and tend as faithful stewards*, but also *how to see, speak to, and interact with fellow humans as beloved sons and daughters of God*, instead of as *subjects to govern, as objects to use for his own pleasure, as obstacles to his ambition, or as stepping stones to tread on to get where he wants to go*. And now the student has become the *rabbi* – and it is our turn to learn these precious lessons from him. The final section of the scroll is finally ready to be unveiled. Its ancient Hebrew letters and phrases call out: ***Eleh ha-devarim asher diber Moshe*** - i.e. *These are the substantive things/weighty words that Moshe spoke*.

Selah! May our spirits take flight with Moshe - and may our hearts soar with the son of Amram over the beautiful and inspiring vistas of *Sefer Devarim*.

***36 Days' Worth of Wisdom Downloads
From a Man Who Walked With God:***

[To B'nei Yisrael, to Mankind and to Creation ... With Love!]

Moshe is very near the end of his days. In fact, he only has 36-sunrises and 35 sunsets left. And he is about to spend every waking moment he has left downloading in our ears *a prophetic love song of unparalleled beauty*. He is about to paint for us, and our children, and our children's children, a stunning masterpiece - a *magnum opus* that will portray on one simple canvas all the outworkings, the ups and downs, of the past, the present and the future, that make up the Breathtaking Story of Divine Romance. It will be through the *devarim* of this *magnum opus* that the Holy One will most clearly lay out the details of our glorious destiny and atmosphere-shifting purpose on earth.

Thus far we have read of the chilling tests, trials, and tribulations of the great prophetic journeys out of Egypt and through the Wilderness. Now the destination – the land of our fathers, which we are turn into a beachhead from which the Holy One will launch a cross-generational Kingdom of Heaven Invasion of earth – is in sight. Moshe knows that it is finally time for us to focus our individual and collective hearts, minds, souls on the prize of the high calling – and to discover who we are called to be, and what life at its highest and best is supposed to consist

of for us, when we come up from the wilderness leaning on the arm of our Beloved.

Before We Begin the March of Redemption - Moshe's Must Give His Final Accounting, Farewell Briefing, and Forceful Charge

Each year, as we look past the 9th of Av to the seven weeks of consolation; to the great day of trumpet blasts; to the ten days of awe; to the day of rehearsing our own death and giving an account before the King; and ultimately to the joyful celebration of Sukkot, we water our souls from the revelation stream known as *Sefer Devarim* – i.e. the ‘*Book of Deuteronomy*’. When we hear the shofar call to the fifth book of Torah sounding, we know that it is time to begin our final season of ascent on the great staircase to relevance. Stretching out before us now is a great ‘New World Order’ Roll-Out Download – a revelation package that will carry us through the harvest season all the way to the High Holy Days. What is the essence of the words we are about to read? Is this a mere work of literature - or is it a Creative Blueprint for our ultimate purpose and mission on earth? Is it just an old man’s utopian/dystopian fantasy - or is it a mighty rushing river of life-giving revelation, inspiration, and empowerment? Is it an ancient tome of high-sounding religious notions from a bygone era - or is it a roadmap to the future of mankind and the kosmos? Is it a collection of wise sayings - or is it pulsing energy that is designed to transform the world? Is it a perspective - or is it vision? Is it the poison fruit of the tree of knowledge - or is it the sweet fruit of the tree of life? Is it an antiquated code of laws - or is it the ultimate pattern for forward-looking grace? Is Moshe now just a grouchy old geezer who has spent far too many years in the desert heat – or is he a trustworthy messenger crying in out in the wilderness *Panu derech Adonai, yish’ru b’aravah mesilah l’Eloheinu* – i.e. ‘*prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God*’?

Understanding the Times and the Seasons

Our study of parsha *Devarim* occurs around the beginning of the fifth moon cycle of the Hebrew calendar. The Sabbath on which this parsha is read is known as *Shabbat Chazon*, and it is the Sabbath of or immediately preceding the day on which we focus on and mourn over the worst disasters in Hebrew history. What disasters? Disasters like the nations profaning and demolishing both the First and Second Temples; like the expulsions of our people from England, France, and Spain; and many more tragedies all of which befell our people during the ‘*Three Weeks of Dire Straits*’², and especially on the solemn day that concludes this period

² During these three weeks we usually see: 1. the people of the Holy One – individually and collectively, coming under ‘siege’ in at least the form of significantly increased anti-Semitic rhetoric, if not armed attack; 2. the forces of darkness and oppression seeming to be getting the upper hand; 3.

of tribulation – the 9th day of Av. As we read parsha *Devarim* we try to make some sense of these tragedies by joining Moshe as he rehearses in our ears the mistakes and sins he saw our forefathers make. As we stare aghast across the centuries into the flames and violence which engulfed the *Beit HaMikdash* [Temple] in 586 BCE and again in 70 CE, and as we reconsider why our ancestors were expelled from England, France, and Spain by royal decree – *all on the exact same day of the same month* – we look for some explanation – some reason – for such catastrophes.

We know the reason for everything is found in Torah - so we look to Torah for answers. The messages of Moshe in *Devarim* provide all the answers we need. The reason horrible catastrophes have befallen us is because we have not *sh'ma*-ed the Voice of our Bridegroom-King³, nor have we *sh'mar*-ed the Torah He gave us⁴, nor have we *asah*-ed the *mitzvot* and *mishpatim* He commissioned and prophetically empowered us to *asah*⁵ in the land He entrusted to us in fulfillment of His covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and with Ya'akov.

Welcome to the Appointed Time to Weep

Where we happen to find ourselves in the annual Torah cycle, and what we study there in any given week of that cycle, always connects thematically with the point at which we find ourselves on the Creator's Covenant Calendar⁶. That is strategic –

temptations/seductions being offered for individual Jews to collaborate with the enemy, for promises of protection, wealth, and position; 4, days of intense hand-to-hand, street fighting; and 5. A war of words, if not a physical assault, on Temple Mount.

³ *Sh'ma* is the Hebrew verb our English Bibles sometimes translate as “he listens”, sometimes as “he hears”, and sometimes as “he obeys”. To *sh'ma* means much more than just to listen or hear or even obey. It is a verb indicative of a deep, abiding, intimate covenant relationship between a particular speaker and a particular hearer. It means to *totally restructure one's life based solely upon what one has heard*, forsaking all other ways besides that way explicitly spoken by him who has spoken. In the case of Torah, the speaker is, of course, the Holy One Himself. An example of what it means to *sh'ma* is found in the way a mother of a newborn baby responds when her baby cries in the night. We are to *sh'ma* the Holy One's voice the way the mother responds to her baby's cry – drop everything, listen to no other counsel, and respond appropriately, in a manner consistent with the relationship.

⁴ *Sh'mar* is the Hebrew verb our English Bibles frequently translate as to ‘keep’ or to ‘observe’. This verb root means much, much, more, however. It means to *cherish, to treasure, to guard, to keep watch over, to protect, to diligently defend, and to sacrifice in order to save*.

⁵ *Asah* is a frequently used Hebrew verb usually translated to ‘do’. The verb *asah* is much more, however. The Hebraic picture it paints is the picture of a potter fashioning something recognizable and useful from a lump of clay. To *asah* the *mitzvot* and *mishpatim* of Torah means to apply creative energy toward them, to “build” something useful with them – to take them out of the realm of the theoretical and into the world of the practical. It means to conform one's human thoughts, priorities, values, words, and conduct to the shape of the Torah the way a potter conforms the clay with which he works to the blueprint he has in his mind or on his drafting table.

⁶ We thus always find ourselves studying parsha *B'reshit* immediately after *Sukkot* and *Sh'mini Atzeret*; studying parsha *Miketz* around the time of *Chanukah*; studying parsha *Ki Tisa*'s narrative of the near-holocaust-ending-in-redemption related to the golden calf, around the season of *Purim*, in which we recall

by at least scribal, and very probably Divine, design. As the sages say, ‘one must *live with the times*’⁷ – meaning that *every day one should 'live with' and experience in one's own life the Torah portion of the week and the specific section of the week's portion which is connected to that day.* This is because *everything that happened to our forefathers was as a portent for us, their descendants.*⁸

This week we mark the prophetic day of *Tisha B'Av* – the day the parsha we study this week, *Devarim*, is how we have learned to mark it. *Devarim* is Torah's precursor to the prophetic song of the season – Lamentations⁹. As Moshe mourns the sin of the spies, and its aftermath, in the parsha of the week, we pause to remember all the other tragedies that have befallen us in this season over the generations since. And, through tears, we sing: *How/why? Lonely sits the city that was full of people! How/why? She who was great among the nations - like a widow is she! The princess among the provinces has become a slave! She weeps bitterly in the night; her tears are on her cheeks. Among all her lovers she has none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies. Y'hudah has gone into captivity; under affliction and hard servitude she dwells among the nations. She finds no rest; all her persecutors overtake her in dire straits. The roads to Tziyon mourn because no one comes to the set feasts. All her gates are desolate.* Lamentations 1:1-4(a).

Though we mourn for everything we have lost in this season, however, our tale is not by any means destined to be a tale of woe. Our song therefore can never – and does never - end on a note of sadness. *Those who sow in tears*, said the Psalmist, *shall reap in joy.* After a day of communal mourning, therefore, come seven joyous weeks of *comfort and consolation!* The comfort and consolation actually begin in the midst of the song of lamentation itself, as some the most poignant and

the near-holocaust-ending-in-redemption related to the dastardly plot of Haman. We also always find ourselves studying parsha *Vayikra*, and our Bridegroom-King's instructions about drawing near to Him with the fruit of our fields, orchards, and pastures, about the time of the beginning of a new agricultural year – i.e. 1 Nisan/Aviv; and find ourselves studying parsha *Sh'mini*, each year right around our season of unleavened bread. We then find ourselves studying parsha *B'midbar* each year right around *Shavu'ot*; studying parshot *Balak*, *Pinchas* and *Mattot/Massei* during the *Three Weeks Between the Straits*; and knee deep in parsha *Devarim*, with its recounting of the loss of a generation via the sin of the spies, at and around the day of communal mourning we know as *Tisha B'Av*. Then we find parsha *Va'etchanan* – the parsha of the *Sh'ma* - kicking off for us the *Seven Weeks of Consolation*, and ultimately find the ‘choose life’ challenge of parsha *Nitzavim* ushering us into the High Holy Days each year.

⁷ Chassidic Rabbi *Schneur Zalman of Liadi*, as interpreted for us by his brother *Rabbi Yehudah Leib*.

⁸ Ramban – i.e. Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman. Midrash *Tanhuma*, *Lech Lecha* 9.

⁹ The Hebrew name of this prophetic book is *Eichah* – which is the first word found in the text, and sets the tone for the book –and the season – with a poignant Hebrew interrogative that we in English might consider a cross between a tearful ‘*why?*’ and an embittered ‘*how?*’

beautiful words of hope in all of Holy Writ declare: *This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the Holy One's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. The Holy One is my portion,*" says my soul, "therefore I hope in Him!" Lamentations 3:21-24.

Thus, while this is a week to consider, and shed tears for, the precious people and things that have been lost to us at this season of the year by reason of shortsightedness, distraction, seduction, and sin, is also a time to dig deep into our individual and collective souls, trust wholeheartedly in our Bridegroom-King's mercies, and take consolation in everything that He promises we still have to look forward to.

Just a Song Before I Go

As stated above, the events that will be chronicled in this Book of Torah all transpired within a matter of a mere thirty-six days. Compare that with the multiple epochs covered by the Books of *Genesis* and *Exodus*, the almost-a-year period covered by the Book of *Leviticus*, and the over 38 ½ year period covered by the Book of *Numbers*.

As the final leg of the journey toward reconnecting with and understanding the Purposes, Plans, and Ways of our Creator begins, we should be feeling a deep longing arising in our hearts for *home* and for *destiny*, and hearing the faint whispers of a call to 'come up here!' The Grand Symphony of Torah is about to close – but not without a truly climactic crescendo.

Every symphony needs instruments. What instruments does Moshe, the Grand Maestro, choose for the climactic crescendo of this masterpiece? His trusty old rod will be laid aside - totally useless for this delicate assignment. Instead of arrogantly wielding the rod of power, as he did at Meribah, he will do what the Holy One told him to do at that location – just humbly and gently *speak* what he has been given to say. He will call us to his table, and serve us four course meals of wisdom. He will download *critical bytes of downloaded revelation* onto our hungry hard drives. He will make his words fall like dew – as raindrops on the tender herb, as showers on the meadows. First will come a sweeping retrospective, to give us some context. Then Moshe will remind us from whence we have come; then he will address who we really are called to be, and why we are really here, and how this grand scheme of the Holy One is designed to shake out – for us and for the world.

Substantively *Sefer Devarim* is going to consist primarily of a series of speeches/teachings/prophetic messages given by Moshe to B'nei Yisrael in

approximately 1273 BCE. The events this book chronicles begin on the 1st day of the Eleventh month¹⁰ [known to some as *Shevat*] in that year and end on the 7th day of the Twelfth Month [known to some as *Adar*]. It was on the latter day that Moshe was gathered to his people. Thirty days of mourning then followed, and three days after that the Jordan River parted to allow our forefathers to cross over into the Promised Land.

What worthy of a whole Book of Torah could possibly happen in a period of mere thirty-six days, you ask? Do not worry - this will not just be any old thirty-six day period. What Sefer Devarim will chronicle will be the final few days of the Friend-of-the-Bridegroom ministry of Moshe, prophet of the Most High. Moshe has so much to say, you see - and so little time to say it.

Over the final 36 days of his life what Moshe will deliver will break down into *three stunning prophetic sermons/discourses, a formal commissioning of his prophetic successor, a prophetic song revealing what history holds for us and the world, and a prophetic blessing over each of our tribes.* After giving us all these things in written form, to study in detail after he is gone, Moshe will then climb one last mountain – i.e. Nebo. He will gaze across the Jordan Rift Valley longingly, enjoy a final, sweet conversation with the One His Soul Loves More Than Any Other ... and disappear into the prophetic sunset¹¹.

The words Moshe will speak in Sefer Devarim are therefore the precious ‘last words’ of a prophet unparalleled in history. These precious words will constitute Moshe’s *final instructions, last warnings, fatherly admonitions and loving impartations.* They will carry both *the prophet’s passion and the Holy One’s empowerment to see the great mission through to fulfillment in Messiah.* To all who read and meditate upon these words they will taste like *honey from the honeycomb* and will refresh the dry places of our souls us like *streams of water pouring forth the sweet elixir of life.*

The original ‘audience’ for these speeches - the generation of B’nei Yisrael selected by the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven to enter and possess the Land under the leadership of Y’hoshua and Kalev – will actually get the privilege of hearing these words pour forth from Moshe’s mouth. Selah! They will observe the expressions on his face as he releases them. They will observe the light on his countenance as he unveils them. They will see both *the fire and the tears in his eyes* as they pour out of his soul like a drink offering. They will hear *the raw*

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 1:3-4 tells us specifically ***And in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month*** [i.e. 1 Shevat], ***Moshe spoke (and taught) these mitzvot.***

¹¹ At least until the time of Yeshua, when he will appear on the Mount of Transfiguration.

emotion in his voice. They will visibly experience both the exhilaration of his laughter and the bittersweet impartation of his tears. They will shudder at the wilting passion of his flashes of frustration, yet melt at the over-arching, unshakeable assurance of his tender affection.

Oh how I would have loved to have been there to see and experience all that. How about you, Dear One? But one thing is clear: Moshe's parting words are by no means intended for the generation of the Conquest alone. Millennia later we, just like the people of that generation, stand poised on the brink of a new and potentially world-changing era. And Moshe's final passionate words of exhortation, edification and encouragement are *every bit as meaningful to us today as they were to those who heard them from the graybeard's one's own mouth.* He who has ears to hear, let him hear what Moshe is releasing into the world through these *devarim*.

Note the Change Of the Form of Discourse – From Third Person to First Person

In writing the first four books of Torah Moshe *transcribed everything exactly as he received it* from the Holy One. Even when he wrote of himself Moshe wrote in the third person form of discourse, describing himself by name, or as 'he'. In the first four books of Torah, you see, Moshe was merely a *narrator* or scribe. But that is about to change. In *Sefer Devarim* Moshe will no longer be 'he'; he will finally become 'I'. He will speak to us for the first time "in his own words." He will finally describe things through *his own eyes*.

Moshe has spent the last 40 years speaking to the Holy One *face-to-Face as a man speaks to a friend*. Now he will share with us, in his own words, what he considered the most important things the Holy One taught him over that time period. As the *Vilna Gaon*¹² taught:

The first four books were heard directly from the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed is He, through the throat of Moshe. Not so *Devarim*. Israel heard the words of this Book the same way they heard the words of the prophets who came after Moshe. The Holy One, Blessed is He, would speak to the prophet today and on a later day he would go and make the vision known to Israel. Accordingly, at the time the prophet spoke to the people, the word of the Holy One had already been removed from him. So, too, *Sefer Devarim* was heard from the mouth of Moshe himself¹³.

For the last five weeks of his life Moshe will cease to be merely a *scribe* [i.e. one who records word for word what the Holy One has told him to write] and will become for us a *teacher*. Instead of *Moshe ha-Navi* [Moshe the prophet] he will be called *Moshe*

¹² The *Vilna Gaon* [i.e. genius of Vilna], a sage, lived from 1720 CE to 1797 CE.

¹³ This is a translation of the Vilna Gaon's comments on *Devarim* 1:1 in *Ohel Ya'akov*. Also see the Artscroll Mesorah Stone Edition Chumash, p. 938.

Rabbeinu [Moshe our teacher]. He will graduate from merely telling us what the Holy One has done and said as in the other Books to laying out explanations and personal observations designed to clarify the instructions that the Divine Bridegroom has given and incite and inspire us to respond to them with enthusiasm.

Alas, however, with some sadness I must report that the phrase which we have come to rely upon so much - '*Vayadaber Adonai el-Moshe l'emor ...*' ["*And the Holy One spoke to Moshe, saying ...*"] as the critical verbal cue that alerts us that the Holy One is about to speak, and that we should therefore listen with all our heart, all our soul, and our strength, will be *heard no more* in Torah. Even when functioning as a teacher and author, however, Moshe cannot and will not completely lay down his mantel as a *prophet*. In the course of his teaching of the generation who would enter and possess the Promised Land he will prophetically lay out for us who live in 'the end of days' the critical elements of the plan the Holy One has in store for all those of our generation who will *sh'ma* the Holy One's Voice, and who will *sh'mar* His Holy things, and who will the Divine Bridegroom's Words¹⁴. Reading Moshe's *Devarim* will thus feel almost like sitting on the plains of Moav with the generation of the conquest listening to Moshe give his 'farewell address'.

The Opening Lines Of Moshe's Farewell Address

As discussed above, the concluding book of the Torah opens with this simple announcement: *Eleh ha-devarim* - i.e. *These are the devarim ... asher diber Moshe el-kol-Yisra'el* - that Moshe spoke to all Israel

I have not, in connection with the above quotation, even attempted to translate the Hebrew word from which this book gets its name. What, after all, exactly are *devarim*? I have previously referred to them as '*revelation downloads*'. But, in truth, there is no one-word or phrase in the English language that can be substituted for the Hebrew word *devarim*. Some English translators choose to interpret *devarim* to mean simply 'words'. Those same translators, however, at other times

¹⁴ This does not mean that Deuteronomy is any less authoritative than the other books of Torah. Moshe was every bit as inspired by the *Ruach HaQodesh* as he was writing *Devarim* as he was when he wrote the scrolls of *B'reshit*, *Shemot*, *Vayikra* and *Bamidbar*. It is just that in the former books Moshe *quoted* the Holy One, and clearly identified when he himself was the one doing the speaking. In *Sefer Devarim* on the other hand the words Moshe speaks are all prophetic words spoken *on behalf of* the Holy One. For instance, Moshe will state in *Devarim* 11:13: "*I will grant the rain of your land in its season.*" This statement, made in the first person, makes no sense if the "I" is Moshe – after all, how can Moshe – or any man - grant rain? Clearly Moshe is speaking in prophetic voice, FOR THE HOLY ONE. On the other hand it is also clear that the Book of *Devarim* involves much more of Moshe's own thinking process than the other books. This means that comprehension of *Devarim* requires that rules of mortal wisdom and innuendo of language play a larger part.

shift gears according to context, and interpret *devarim* to instead mean ‘things’, or ‘actions’. Take note! In the English mindset, *words*, *things*, and *actions* are vastly different concepts. To the English-speaking mind, particularly in post-Western culture, *words* are inanimate - mere ethereal representations of ideas, while *things* and *actions* are animate – substantive, visible, tangible material realities. Perhaps we need to do a little Hebraic investigation to get a real, workable idea of what Moshe is going to be doing in the Fifth Book of Torah.

The Hebrew word *devarim* is the plural form an ancient noun derived from the verb root *dabar*¹⁵. The verb *dabar* connotes ‘*setting in a row*’ or ‘*arranging in proper order*’. It can thus cover every purposeful creative act from the preparation or delivery of a verbal presentation, writing or playing a song, writing or acting out a script, choreographing or dancing a dance, strategizing a battle plan, or arranging physical objects, or scheduling events in sequence.

Consider Our Humble Friend the Bee

The *dabar*-ing process is perhaps best understood by referencing another well-known Hebrew noun that the ancients derived from the same verb root. That related noun is *devarim* [*dalet, veit, cholem vav, resh, yod, mem*], meaning ‘bees’ - particularly communal bees such as honeybees. Everything a honeybee does is purposefully creative, in order and sequence, and highly organized. From the orderly process of gathering nectar to the fine architecture and engineering of the hive and honeycomb to the buzzing noise bees make as they engage in their creative enterprise these insects epitomize the *dabar*-ing process.

Moshe is going to be like a honeybee the last few days of his earthly life. He is going to be absolutely *buzzing with purposeful, creative activity*. He is going to start by extracting nectar, as it were, from the events of the wilderness journey. He will then condense that nectar into a highly potent concentrated form that will be analogous to honey. It will, like honey, taste sweet in the mouth, but will be bitter in the belly and therefore provide a catalyst for dramatic change.

When do *words function like things* and *things function like words*? When the one speaking the words and doing the things is being purposefully creative, is drawing out ‘nectar’ with his words or actions, is distilling that nectar, producing it in a concentrated form, and then releasing that concentrated form in a way to provoke a dramatic change.

Devarim are words backed up by action and that carry not only *a buzz that gets and holds the hearer’s attention* but also *a sweet initial flavor that stirs up the*

¹⁵ Dabar is *dalet, beit, resh*, Strong’s Hebrew word #1696, pronounced *daw-BAR*.

hearer's appetite yet carry a stinger that makes the hearer think and act differently as a result of the encounter.

Devarim are not 'just words'. *Devarim* are not doctrinal statements, doctrines, dogmas, creeds, statements of halakah or professions of faith – *devarim* are much, much more substantive than that. *Devarim* are words accompanied by actions that are totally consistent with the words spoken, which words and actions work together harmoniously to fulfill the same purpose and vision. *Devarim* are words that therefore both *carry tangible weight* – and *bring about tangible reaction in the hearer* [which can, of course, be positive or negative]. They not only inspire people to talk the talk but empower them to walk the walk.

It is with this kind of words – prophetic utterances that empower – that Moshe is going to regale us in this book. He will start with an insightful retrospective bringing into clarity *the major events of Torah*. He will close the deal with *the most awe-inspiring download of instructions for individual and communal life on earth that has ever been released on the earth*.

Sometimes the *devarim* of Moshe will assume the form of gentle exhortations, encouraging us to be all that the Holy One has created us to be; other times Moshe's words will feel like stinging rebukes, a verbal flogging which, however well-deserved, cuts us to the spiritual 'bone' and leaves us bleeding. Sometimes the *devarim* of Moshe will appear to be *nostalgic remembrances* of times gone by; other times they will be couched in the form of *prophetic declarations* of that which is yet to come. Sometimes they will look and sound like *poignant expressions of Moshe's personal pain*; other times they will be *matter-of-fact acknowledgments of what a life well-lived looks like and consist of*.

A Devarim Travelogue

Parsha *Devarim* offers merely the bare beginning of the revelation we will receive through the Fifth Book of Torah. But this bare beginning will lay the foundation for and color all that comes after flows. Parsha *Devarim* is all about remembrance. Specifically, in this parsha Moshe calls to our remembrance some of the most and destiny-shaping events of our national past, including:

- [1] the *Matan Torah* [i.e. the giving of the Torah] at Mt. Sinai,
- [2] the appointment of judges and administrators over the nation;
- [3] the traumatic story of *chet ha-meraglim* [the sin of the spies], and its aftermath;
- [4] the Holy One's prohibition against any attack on Edom or Moav,
- [5] the attack of the Emori kings, Sichon and Og, upon the Redeemed Community; and

[6] the events leading up to the taking of the land of Gilad by the tribes of Reuven, Gad and half of the tribe of Menashe.

See you on *memory lane*, Beloved – and then on the road to Jerusalem!

A Quick Look at Haftarah Devarim

Isaiah 1:1-27

In this week's Haftarah reading we will meet a new character – a man the Western world has come to know as "Isaiah". His real name was *Yeshayahu*. Here is how he – and the book that bears his name – are introduced to us:

*Chazon Yeshayahu [A vision of Yesha'yahu] the son of Amotz,
which he saw concerning Y'hudah and Y'rushalayim,
in the days of 'Uzziyah, Yotam, Achaz, and Hizkiyahu, kings of Y'hudah.*

[Isaiah 1:1]

The prophet *Yeshayahu* [Isaiah] begins his book with the same kind of retrospective approach that Moshe utilized in today's aliyah. Remember that at the time of Yeshayahu's prophesies the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov were divided into two separate kingdoms – the *Northern Kingdom* (called Israel), whose capital was Samaria, and the *Southern Kingdom* (called Judah), whose capital was Jerusalem.

How did Yeshayahu become the Holy One's representative? Read Isaiah 6. In the year King Uziyah died the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven *visited* [Hebrew *paqad*] him dramatically. And in the course of this visitation the Holy One called him as a prophet, commissioning him with the following words:

***Go, and tell this people, 'You hear [Hebrew, shama]
but you do not understand [Hebrew, biyn];
And you see [Hebrew, ra'ah]
but you do not perceive [Hebrew, yada].'
Make the heart of this people fat;
Make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes;
Lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears,
and understand with their heart,
And turn again [Hebrew, shuv],
and be healed [Hebrew, rapha]."***

[Isaiah 6:8-10]

Hmmm. Perhaps we are beginning to see a theme developing here.

The Apostolic Message for the Week

I Timothy 3:1-13

This week our study from the apostolic Scriptures will be taken from the third chapter of Shaul's first letter to Timothy. The subject matter of this passage is 'leadership' in the Redeemed Community. But 'leadership' may not be what you think. Let's investigate, shall we?

We are first presented with Shaul's counsel to his charge *Timotheus* [later re-named 'Timothy' by English speaking theologians] regarding something the Greek text calls "*episkopos*". Our English texts translate this term as bishops or overseers. Before the week is over Shaul will proceed to discussion *diakonos* – which our English Bibles transliterate as deacons. Shaul begins his instructions to his beloved young charge by saying:

*This is a faithful saying: If a man desires episkopos*¹⁶

[literally meaning *visitation, investigation, inspection, scrutiny, and/or accountability*],

he desires a precious/valuable activity.

[I Timothy 3:1]

We just may find, as we study this verse and the next few this week the concepts of "overseer/bishop" and 'deacon' as utilized in today's modern churches is something far different than Shaul is describing. Eager to justify and perpetuate ecclesiastical "authority", Christianity has completely divorced the concepts of oversight and service from their Hebraic roots of service and turned these things instead into a horrible mockery of everything Shaul was talking about. Organized Christianity is – after all - and has for centuries been - all about awarding grandiose *titles* and assigning 'offices' to those who financially and emotionally support the system they have created and browbeating all others into submission to ecclesiastical authority. But are titles and 'offices' awarded to one's financial supporters and cronies really what Shaul is talking about to His Torah-educated, half-Hebrew charge Timotheus?

The Hebraic perspective of an "overseer/bishop" has been much misunderstood and misapplied by a Christian leadership ever eager to justify its ecclesiastical "authority" - *despite its divorce from its Hebraic roots.*

¹⁶ In Luke 19:44 Yeshua uses the word *episkopos*. For Yeshua, the meaning is clearly not 'bishop', but 'visitation'. Here is the verse: *Now as He [Yeshua] drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your episkopos [i.e. visitation, investigation, inspection, scrutiny, and/or accountability]."*

*Shall I hide from Avraham what I am doing,
since Avraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation,
and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?
For I have known him, in order that he may command his children
and his household after him,
that they keep the way of the Holy One, to do righteousness and justice,
that the Holy One may bring to Avraham what He has spoken to him.*

[Genesis 18:17-19]

Viewed over millennia through the ecclesiastical eyes or organized religion this simple expression of spiritual truth has been completely *re-translated in a way that meets the needs of organized religion*. The ‘faithful saying’ of Shaul is long-since forgotten, and the verse is *now* being translated as: *If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.*

Compare the two translations of this verse. Note that the subject matter of the verse has been *totally changed* over the centuries. Note that organized religion has turned the individual’s quest for personal spiritual development [desiring to be visited, investigated, inspected, scrutinized, and made accountable by God] into a ‘job search’ for a position within the organizations/institutions of Christian religion – the position of Bishop of this, that, or the other. Note that the beautiful picture drawn by Shaul of a passionate *talmid*, desiring like Avraham to be visited, tested, and proved by God, has been totally transformed into the dark picture of an ambitious candidate for office, desiring the title, power, position, and pay of a Bishop.

Alas, people caught up in organized religion – and Bible translators produced by organized religion - always look at the world through the rose-colored glasses of institutional self-absorption. But the Holy One visits whom He will. And like Avraham, hundreds of thousands of talmidim who have either never darkened the doors of institutionalized religion - or who in innocence have somehow managed to remain un-jaded by it - hunger for *visitations*, for *inspections*, and for *investigations* from the Holy One, and whisper passionately: *If I have found favor in Your eyes “... do not pass your servant by!”*

*May the Holy One visit you, Beloved,
And may you learn the principles of true leadership at His Feet.*

The Rabbi’s son

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus

Avot – The Prayer of the Fathers

Baruch Atah Adonai

Blessed are You, O Holy One

eloheinu v'elohai avoteinu

Our God, and God of our fathers

Elohai Avraham Elohai Yitzchak v'elohai Ya'akov

God of 'Abraham', God of 'Isaac', and God of 'Jacob';

Ha-El ha-gadol, ha-gibor, v'han'ro, El-Elyon

the God [who is] great, mighty, awesome, supreme God

gomel chasodim tovim v'konai ha-kol

Who bestows good on those He loves and Who creates all things

v'zachar chasdai avot

Who remembers our fathers' love

u'mayvi goel liv'nei v'nayhem

and Who brings a Redeemer to their children's children

l'ma'an sh'mo b'ahavo

for the sake of His Name, and out of love

Melech ezer u'moshiach u'mogan

O King, Helper, Messiah/Savior, and Shield/Defender

Baruch Atah Adonai Mogen Avraham

Blessed are You, Holy One, Guardian of 'Abraham'