

The Parshah in a Nutshell

# Devarim

*Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22*

On the 1st of Shevat (37 days before his passing), **Moses** begins his **repetition of the Torah** to the assembled **Children of Israel**, reviewing the events that occurred and the laws that were given in the course of their **40-year journey** from Egypt to Sinai to the Promised Land, **rebuking** the people for their failings and iniquities, and enjoining them to keep the Torah and observe its commandments in the land that G-d is giving them as an **eternal heritage**, into which they shall cross after his death.

Moses recalls his appointment of judges and magistrates to ease his burden of meting out **justice** to the people and teaching them the word of G-d; the journey from Sinai through the **great and fearsome desert**; the sending of the **Spies** and the people's subsequent spurning of the Promised Land, so that G-d decreed that the entire generation of the Exodus shall die out in the desert. "Also against me," says Moses, "was G-d angry for your sakes, saying: **You, too, shall not go in there.**"

Moses also recounts some more recent events: the refusal of the nations of **Moab and Ammon** to allow the Israelites to pass through their countries; the **wars** against the Emorite kings Sichon and Og, and the settlement of their lands by the tribes of Reuben and Gad and part of the tribe of Menasseh; and Moses' message to his successor, **Joshua**, who will take the people into the Land and lead them in the battles for its conquest: "**Fear them not**, for the L-rd your G-d, He shall fight for you."



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## Devarim

*Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22*

*Summary and Commentary*

in the Arava, opposite Suf, between Paran, and Tofel, and Lavan, and Hazerot, and Di-Zahav.

These are the **words** which **Moses spoke** to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan, in the desert,

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### Commentary

**words:** *These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan, in the desert, in the Arava, opposite Suf, between Paran, and Tofel, and Lavan, and Hazerot, and Di-Zahav (Deuteronomy 1:1)*

According to the Sifri, the numerous place names listed here are not landmarks indicating where Moses spoke these words -- indeed, some of these places do not even exist as geographical locations. Rather, these are words of rebuke by Moses to the people of Israel. Instead of mentioning their sins outright, he alluded to them with these place names:

"In the desert" -- the time they complained "if only we would have died in the desert" (Exodus 17:3)

"In the Arava (Plain)" -- their worship of Baal Peor in the Plains of Moab (Numbers 25)

"Opposite Suf" -- the trouble they made at the shores of *Yam Suf*, the Red Sea (see Exodus 14:11 and Rashi on Exodus 15:22)

"Paran" -- the sin of the Spies, who were dispatched from Paran (as recounted in Numbers 13 and later in our own Parshah)

"Tofel" and "Lavan" (meaning "libel" and "white") -- their libeling the white manna (Numbers 21:5)

"Hazerot" -- where Korach's mutiny against Moses took place.

"Di Zahav" (literally "too much gold") -- the sin of the Golden Calf. (Sifri; Rashi; et al)

**Moses spoke:** It would have been fitting that the rebukes (in the Book of Deuteronomy) be pronounced by Balaam, and that the blessings (in the Parshah of Balak) be said by Moses... But G-d said: Let Moses, who loves them, rebuke them; and let Balaam, who hates them, bless them. (Yalkut Shimoni)

It is **eleven days' journey** from Horeb (Sinai) by the way of Mount Se'ir to Kadesh-Barnea.

And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spoke **to the children of Israel**, according to all that G-d had given him in commandment to them

-- after he had slain Sichon the king of the Emori, who dwelt in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, who dwelt at Ashtarot in Edre'i --

Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses began to **explain** this Torah, saying:

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### Commentary

**eleven days' journey:** *It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Se'ir to Kadesh-Barnea (1:2)*

Moses said to them: see what you have caused! There is no shorter way from Horeb (Mount Sinai) to Kadesh-Barnea than by the way of Mount Se'ir, and even that is a journey of eleven days; nevertheless, you traversed it in three days

-- for on the 20th of Iyar they set forward from Horeb (as per Numbers 10:11) ... and on the 29th of Sivan they sent the Spies from Kadesh-Barnea (as per Talmud, Taanit 29); deduct from this period the 30 days they spend at the "Graves of Lust" where they ate meat for a "month of days" (Numbers 11:20) and the seven days they spend at Hazerot for the seclusion of Miriam there (ibid.12:15-16); consequently, they traveled that entire way in three days --

So much did the Divine Presence trouble itself for your sake to hasten your entry into the Land! And because you acted corruptly [in the incident of the Spies], you were kept going round Mount Se'ir for forty years. (Rashi)

**to the children of Israel:** *These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel (1:1)*

It was only to the people of Israel that Moses spoke of their iniquities and failings. To G-d, Moses spoke only of the virtues of Israel, and justified them no matter what they did.

(Chassidic saying)

**explain:** *Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses began to explain this Torah (1:5)*

He translated it for them into seventy languages. (Rashi)

The L-rd our G-d spoke to us in Horeb, saying: "You have long enough surrounded this mountain.

"**Turn away**, and take your journey, and go to the mountain of the Emori, and to all the places near it, in the plain, in the hills, and in the lowland, and in the Negev, and by the sea side, to the land of the Canaanites, and the Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. Behold, I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which G-d swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them and to their seed after them."

### Moses Delegates the Leadership of Israel

And I spoke to you at that time, saying: "I am not able to **bear you myself** alone.

"G-d your G-d has multiplied you, and, behold, you are this day like the stars of heaven for multitude. (May G-d, the G-d of your fathers make you a thousand times so many more as you are, and bless you, as he has promised you!) --

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### Commentary

**Turn away:** *G-d spoke to us in Horeb, saying: "You have long enough surrounded this mountain. Turn away, and take your journey..." (1:6-7)*

The mountain we're talking about is Mount Sinai, scene of the most monumental event in human history: G-d's revelation of His wisdom and will to man. Still G-d says: "You've been hanging around this mountain long enough. Move on!"

In our lives, we also have moments, days or years of revelation, times when we learn and grow and are enriched. But the purpose most always be to move on, move away, and carry the enlightenment and enrichment to someplace else -- some corner of creation that awaits redemption.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

### bear you myself:

When someone comes to a Rebbe and seeks his counsel and assistance in dealing with a spiritual malady, the Rebbe must first find the same blemish, if only in the most subtle of forms, in his own soul; only then can the Rebbe help him to refine and perfect his self and character. This is the deeper significance of that which our sages have said, "the faults of a generation rest with its heads and leaders". (Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok of Lubavitch)

"How can I myself alone bear your care, and your burden, and your strife?

"Bring wise and understanding men, known among your tribes, and I will place them **at your head**."

And you answered me, and said: "It is good, this thing which you have spoken, to do."

So I took the chief of your tribes, wise men, and known, and made them heads over you, captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens, and officers among your tribes.

And I charged your judges at that time, saying: "Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. Do not give anyone special **recognition** when rendering judgment; hear the small as well as the great; fear no man; for the judgment is G-d's. And the thing that is too hard for you, bring it to me, and I will hear it."

And I commanded you at that time all the things which you should do.

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### Commentary

**at your head:** *Bring forth wise and understanding men, known among your tribes, and I will place them at your head (1:13)*

The word *va'asimaim* ("and I will place them") is written in the Torah lacking the letter Yud, so that the word can also be read as *va'ashamam*, "and their guilt." This comes to teach us that the faults of a generation rest with its heads and leaders.

(Talmud; Rashi)

**recognition:** *Do not give anyone special recognition when rendering judgment (1:17)*

An impoverished widow once came to the *bet-din* (court-house) of the great sage Rabbi Yehoshua Kutner. Weeping bitter tears, she begged him to summon to the court a man she accused of having wronged her.

Rabbi Yehoshua summoned the man to appear before the court, but referred the case to another rabbi, refusing to preside over it himself. "The Torah forbids the taking of bribes," he explained. "Do you think that a bribe is only a gift of money? Tears can also be a bribe that 'blinds the clear-sighted' -- especially the tears of a poor widow." (Maayanah Shel Torah)

## The Sending of the Spies

We departed from Horeb, and we went through all that great and terrible wilderness, which you saw, by the way of the mountain of the Emori, as G-d our G-d commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-Barnea.

And I said to you: "You are come to the mountain of the Emori, which G-d our G-d gives to us. Behold, G-d your G-d has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as G-d, the G-d of your fathers has said to you; fear not, nor be discouraged."

And you all approached me, and said: "We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us back word by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come."

**And the thing pleased me well;** and I took twelve men of you, one for a tribe. And they turned and went up to the mountain, and came to the wadi of Eshkol, and searched it out.

And they took of the fruit of the land in their hands, and brought it down to us, and brought us back word, and said: It is a good land which G-d our G-d gives us.

Yet you would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of G-d your G-d.

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## Commentary

**And the thing pleased me well:** *And you all approached me, and said: "We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land..." And the thing pleased me well (1:22-23)*

Moses consulted with G-d, and G-d said: "Send you" (Numbers 13:2) -- as your mind dictates. I am not instructing you; if you so desire, send... By your life, I shall now give you the option to err.

(Rashi; Talmud)

*And moreover we have seen the sons of the giants there (1:28)*

The descendents of Shamchazi and Azael, who fell from heaven in the generation of Enosh. (Rashi)

The Chassidic masters explain that the generation of the Spies was loath to enter the Land because they feared the transition from the spiritual life they led in the desert (where they were sustained by "bread from heaven" and all their physical needs were provided by miraculous means, and their sole occupation was the study of Torah and the service of G-d) to a life on the land and all the material entanglements this brings.

And you murmured in your tents, and said: "Because G-d hates us, He has brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Emori, to destroy us. Whither shall we go up? Our brethren have made our heart faint, saying: The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven; and moreover we have seen **the sons of the giants** there."

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## Commentary

This explains the Spies' mention of the "sons of the giants" they encountered in the Land. The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Bereishit 44) relates the story of these "fallen angels": In the years before the Flood, when violence and promiscuity pervaded the earth, two angels, Shamchazi and Azael, pleaded before the Almighty: Allow us to dwell among the humans, and we shall sanctify your name! But no sooner had the two heavenly beings come in contact with the material world, they, too, were corrupted.

If these heavenly beings -- the Spies were saying -- could not survive the plunge to materiality, what could be expected of us, mortal and fragile men?

(From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

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(From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

Then I said to you: "Dread not, neither be afraid of them. G-d your G-d who goes before you, He shall fight for you, according to all that He did for you in Egypt before your eyes; and in the wilderness, where you have seen how that G-d your G-d carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went, until you came to this place!"

Yet in this thing you did not believe G-d your G-d, Who went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to show you by what way you should go, and in a cloud by day.

### G-d Decrees that Moses' Generation Shall Not Enter the Land

And G-d heard the voice of your words, and was angry, and swore, saying: "Surely not one of these men of this evil generation shall see that good land, which I swore to give to your fathers. Save Caleb the son of Yefunne; he shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he has trodden upon, and to his children, because he has wholly followed G-d."

Also with me was G-d angry for your sakes, saying: "**You, too**, shall not enter there.

"Rather, Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there: encourage him: for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.

"And your little ones, concerning whom you said they should be a prey, and your children who in that day had

no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there, and to them will I give it, and they shall possess it.

"But as for you, turn, and take your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Sea of Suf."

### The Attempt to Storm the Land

Then you answered and said to me: "We have sinned against G-d; we will go up and fight, according to all that G-d our G-d commanded us." And you girded on every man his weapons of war, and ventured to go up into the hill.

And G-d said to me: "Say to them: Neither go up, nor fight; for I am not among you; lest you be smitten before your enemies."

So I spoke to you; and you would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of G-d, and went presumptuously up into the hill.

And the Emori, who dwelt in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you, **as bees do**, and beat you down in Se'ir, as far as Horma.

And you returned and wept before G-d; but G-d would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear to you. So you dwelled in Kadesh many days, according to the days that you abode there. Then we turned, and took our journey into the wilderness by the way of the Sea of Suf, as G-d spoke to me; and we went about mount Se'ir many days.

### After Forty Years in the Desert

G-d spoke to me, saying: "You have compassed this mountain long enough. Turn northwards.

"And command the people, saying: You are to pass through the border of your brethren the children of Esau, who dwell in Se'ir; and they shall be afraid of you: take good heed to yourselves. Do not provoke them; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot

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## Commentary

**You, too**,: *Also with me was G-d angry for your sakes, saying: "You, too, shall not enter [the Land] (1:37)*

G-d said to Moses: "With what face do you request to enter the Land?" This may be illustrated by a parable. It is like the case of a shepherd who went out to feed the king's flock, and the flock was abducted. When the shepherd sought to enter the royal palace, the king said to him: "If you come in now, what will people say? That it was you who have caused the flock to be carried off!"

So, too, did G-d say to Moses: "Your greatness is that you have taken the 600,000 out of bondage. But you have buried them in the desert and will bring into the land a different generation! This being so, people will think that the generation of the desert have no share in the World to Come! No, better be beside them, and you shall in the time to come enter with them."(Midrash Rabbah)

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## Commentary

**as bees do**: *And they chased you, as bees do, and beat you down in Se'ir (1:44)*

Just as a bee, as soon as it stings a person, it dies, so, too, these [Emorites] -- no sooner did they touch you, that they died.

(Rashi)

breadth; because I have given mount Se'ir to Esau for a possession.

"You shall buy food of them for money, that you may eat; and you shall also buy water of them for money, that you may drink.

"For G-d your G-d has blessed you in all the work of your hand; He knows your walking through this great wilderness: these forty years G-d your G-d has been with you, you have lacked nothing."

And when we passed by from our brethren the children of Esau, who dwelt in Se'ir, through the way of the Arava from Elat and from Etzyon-Gever, we turned and passed by the way of the wilderness of Moab.

### Bypassing Moab

And G-d said to me: "Do not harass Moab, nor contend with them in battle, for I will not give you of their land for a possession; because I have given Ar to the children of Lot for a possession.

(The Emim dwelt there in times past, a people great, and many, and tall, like the Anaqim; who also were considered Refa'im as the Anaqim; but the Moabim call them Emim. The Horim also dwelt in Se'ir beforetime; but the children of Esau succeeded them, and they destroyed them from before them, and dwelt in their place; as Israel did to the land of his possession, which G-d gave to them.)

"Now rise up, and get you over the wadi Zered." And we went over the wadi Zered.

And the days in which we came from Kadesh-Barnea, until we were come over the wadi Zered, were thirty eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as G-d swore to them. For indeed the hand of G-d was against them, to destroy them from among the host, until they were consumed. So it came to pass, when all the men of war were consumed and dead from among the people.

### Bypassing Ammon

And, that G-d spoke to me, saying: "You are to pass over through Ar, the border of Moab, this day.

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## Commentary

"And when you come near, opposite the children of Ammon, harass them not, nor contend with them; for I will not give you of the land of the children of Ammon any possession, because I have given it to the children of Lot for a possession.

(That also was considered a land of Refa'im: Refa'im dwelt therein in old time; and the Ammonim call them Zamzumim. A people great, and many, and tall, like the Anaqim; but G-d destroyed them before them; and they succeeded them, and dwelt in their place; as He did to the children of Esau, who dwelt in Se'ir, when he destroyed the Horim from before them; and they succeeded them, and dwelt in their stead until this very day. And the Avvim who dwelt in Hazerim, as far as 'Azza; Kaftorim who came from Kaftor, destroyed them and dwelt in their stead.)

### War with the Emori

"Rise up, take your journey, and pass over the wadi Arnon; behold, I have given into your hand Sichon the Emorite, king of Heshbon, and his land; begin to possess it, and contend with him in battle.

"This day will I begin to put the dread of you and the fear of you upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of you, and shall tremble, and quake because of you."

And I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemot to Sichon king of Heshbon with words of peace, saying:

"Let me pass through your land: I will go along by the high way, I will neither turn to the right hand nor to the left. You shall sell me food for money, that I may eat; and give me water for money, that I may drink: only I will pass through with those who follow me (as the children of Esau who dwell in Se'ir, and the Moabim who dwell in Ar, did to me) until I shall pass over the Jordan into the land which G-d Our G-d gives us."

But Sichon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him; for G-d your G-d hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into your hand, as is apparent this day. And G-d said to me: "Behold, I have

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## Commentary

**I have begun to give:** *And G-d said to me: "Behold, I have begun to give Sichon and his land before you (2:31)*

G-d bound the supernal minister of the Emorites under Moses' feet and made Moses tread on his neck. (Rashi)

**begun to give** Sichon and his land before you; begin to possess, that you may inherit his land."

Then Sichon came out against us, he and all his people, to fight at Yahaz.

And G-d our G-d delivered him before us; and we smote him, and his sons, and all his people. And we took all his cities at that time, and devoted to destruction every city, the men, and the women, and the little ones; we left none remaining; only the cattle we took for a prey to ourselves, and the spoil of the cities which we took.

From Aro'er, which is by the edge of the wadi of Arnon, and from the city that is by the wadi, as far as Gilaad, there was not one city too strong for us: G-d our G-d delivered all to us:

Only to the land of the children of Ammon you did not come, nor to any place of the torrent of Yabbok, nor to the cities in the mountains, nor to whatever place G-d our G-d forbade us.

### The Battle at Bashan

Then we turned, and went up the way to Bashan; and Og the king of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Edre'i.

And G-d said to me: "Fear **him not**; for I will deliver him, and all his people, and his land, into your hand; and you shall do to him as you did to Sichon king of the Emori, who dwelt at Heshbon."

So G-d our G-d delivered into our hands Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people; and we smote him until none was left to him remaining. And we took all his cities at that time, there was not a city which we took not from them, sixty cities, all the region of Argov, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. All these cities were fortified with high walls, gates, and bars; besides unwalled towns a great many. And we devoted them to destruction, as we did to Sichon king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men,

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### Commentary

**him not:** *And G-d said to me: "Fear him not..." (3:2)*

In the case of Sichon, it was not necessary for G-d to reassure Moses in this way. Why did Moses have more cause to fear Og than Sichon? Because he was afraid lest it stand by Og the merit that he served Abraham, as it is written (Genesis 14:13), "And the refugee came and informed Abraham [of the capture of Lot]" -- and this was Og. (Rashi)

women, and children, of every city. But all the cattle, and the spoil of the cities, we took for a prey to ourselves.

And we took at that time out of the hand of the two kings of the Emori the land that was on this side of the Jordan, from the wadi of Arnon to mount Hermon; (which Hermon the Zidonim call Siryon; and the Emori call it Senir;) all the cities of the plain, and all Gilaad, and all Bashan, as far as Salkha and Edre'i, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan.

For only Og king of Bashan remained of the remnant of the Refa'im; behold, his bed is a bed of iron; is it not in Rabba of the children of Ammon? Nine cubits is the length of it, and four cubits the breadth of it, after the cubit of a man.

### Two and a Half Tribes Receive the Lands East of the Jordan

And this land, which we possessed at that time, from Aro'er, which is by the wadi Arnon, and half mount Gilaad, and its cities, I gave to the Reubenites and to the Gaddites.

And the rest of Gilaad, and all Bashan, being the kingdom of Og, I gave to the half tribe of Menasseh; all the region of Argov, with all Bashan, which was called the land of Refa'im. Ya'ir the son of Menasseh took all the country of Argov as far as the border of the Geshuri and the Ma'akhati; and called them (that is the Bashan) after his name, Havvot-Ya'ir, to this day. And I gave Gil'ad to Machir.

And to the the Reubenites and to the Gaddites I gave from Gil'ad to the wadi Arnon, the middle of the wadi as a border, as far as the torrent of Yabbok, which is the border of the children of Ammon; the Arava also and the Jordan, as a border, from Kinneret as far as the Sea of the Arava, even the Salt Sea, under the slopes of Pisga eastward.

And I commanded you at that time, saying: "G-d your G-d has given you this land to possess it; [but first you must] pass over armed before your brethren the children of Israel, all that are fit for the war. Only your wives, and your little ones, and your cattle, (for I know that you have much cattle), shall abide in your cities which I have given you. Until G-d gives rest to your brethren, as well as to you, and until they also possess the land which G-d our G-d has given them beyond the Jordan; then shall you

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### Commentary

return every man to his possession, which I have given you.

And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying: "Your eyes have seen all that G-d your G-d has done to these two kings; so shall G-d do to all the kingdoms into which you will pass. You shall not fear them: for G-d your G-d, He shall fight for you."

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**Commentary**



## WORDS

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

*Devarim* means "Words", and is the name of this week's Torah reading -- the first weekly reading in the Book of Devarim, the fifth book of the Torah. Of course, the entire Torah -- at least as it was communicated to us earthly beings -- consists of words; but in the Book of Devarim, the nature of these words is of particular significance.



The Book of Devarim is a 37-day long speech by Moses, beginning on the 1st of Shevat and ending on the 7th of Adar -- the day of Moses' passing -- in the year 2488 from creation (1273 bce). In his speech, Moses recaps the major events and laws that are recorded in the Torah's other four books. Thus, the Book of Devarim is also called *Mishneh Torah*, "Repetition of the Torah" (and hence its Anglicized-Latin name, *Deuteronomy*, or "Second Law").

Technically, Moses wrote all five books. But as our Sages explain, in the first four books Moses transcribed everything as he received it from G-d, while in Devarim he says it, "in his own words." The distinction is clearly seen by the fact that the first four books are written in the third person ("And G-d spoke to Moses, saying"), while in Devarim we hear Moses' voice in first person ("At that time, G-d said to me", etc.).

Nevertheless, Devarim belongs to what we call the "Written Torah," meaning that not only the content but also the words and letters are considered to be of Divine origin. Our sages explain that Moses had so totally abnegated his ego to the Divine will that "The Divine presence spoke from his throat" -- Moses' own words are also G-d's own words.

As such, the Book of Devarim acts as a bridge between the Written Torah and the "Oral Torah." The Oral Torah includes the Talmud and the Midrashim,

Kabbalah, and "everything that a worthy student will expound before his master" -- everything that has been produced by thirty-three centuries of Torah scholars studying and interpreting the Torah in accordance with the Sinai tradition. In the Oral Torah, which is generated by minds and mouths less ego-free than Moses', the content is Divine, but the words and letters are human -- man's own.

In other words, we have two dimensions to Torah: a dimension in which both the content and the "packaging" are bestowed from Above, and a dimension in which the Divine wisdom and will is packaged in "our own words". And then we have the Book of Devarim, in which the two converge: a human being, Moses, attains a level of identification with the Divine wisdom and will on which his "own words" are completely in harmony with their Divine content -- so much in harmony that they are no less G-d's words than those which G-d dictated in the first four books.

Indeed, it is from the Book of Devarim that the entire "Oral Torah" flows. Moses' utter identification with the Divine wisdom empowers our own lesser souls, each of which possesses "a spark of the soul of Moses", to do the same (albeit on a lesser level): to create of "our own words" receptacles for the Divine wisdom.

### Talking Man

This happens, on one level, every time we open our mouths.

The ancient philosophers refer to the human being as "the speaker," and no one has yet come up with a better appellation for our talkative race. We do love to talk. Witness the endless self-explaining we engage in, the perpetual conversation we feel obliged to "make", the quadrillions of words unleashed each day in every imaginable media. Why this insatiable need to put everything into words, as if nothing truly exists until it is trimmed and stretched to fit a set of humanly emitted sounds?

Because, say the Chassidic masters, there is nothing that the human being wants more than to play G-d.

G-d did it: He spoke reality into being. He said, "Let there be light!" and there was light. He said, "Let the waters gather and the land be revealed!" and oceans and continents were formed. But man looks at G-d's creation and sees it as something still unformed, still

categorizing, quantifying and qualifying G-d's world in an effort to give it meaning and purpose.

Of course, there are differences. G-d is infinite and omnipotent; we are finite and fallible. G-d spoke light into being; we have been granted the power to speak that light into a brighter, more focused luminescence - but we are just as likely to speak it into darkness. We can verbalize the continents as countries and provinces of a productive world community -- or we can speak into them boundaries of animosity and strife.

But that's the "partner in creation" whom G-d desired: a partner who is just as likely to run the shop to ground as to build it up. A free, independent partner, whose choices are fully his own -- and therefore fully his responsibility and fully his achievement. Because G-d wanted true *partners* to His endeavor, not a bunch of employees and messenger boys (He had plenty of those already when He created man -- they're called "angels").

#### *Taking it to the Next Level*

But G-d did even more. Not only did He subject his creation to human speechifying, He also put His Torah -- His own thoughts and desires -- into humanly cognizant words, and then invited us into the process of verbalizing His Torah.

Because if we're His partners, we have to be in on it all. A true partner doesn't only do his part in the running and the development of the business -- he also participates in drawing up the mission statement, the *modus operandi*, the rules and regulations.

So G-d granted the human mind and mouth a mandate not only to shape His world, but also to participate in the formulation of the Torah -- the laws, the blueprint, the "source code" of creation.

Thus was born Devarim, the Book of Words.

The first to receive this mandate was Moses, who fulfilled it so perfectly that his "contribution" became one of the five books that form the crux of Torah. And Moses' achievement contains the empowering seeds for all subsequent human partners to the articulation of the Divine wisdom.

## THE VACUUM OF CHOICE

On whose initiative were the Spies sent? The way the story is told in Numbers 13, it was by Divine command:

*And G-d spoke to Moses, saying: "Send you men that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel. One man, one man, per tribe shall you send, each a prince among them..." (Numbers 13:1-2)*

But when Moses recounts these events 40 years later, he tells the people of Israel,

*And you all approached me, and said: "Let us send men before us, that they may search out the land and bring us back word regarding the road by which we shall go up and the cities to we shall enter." And the thing was favorable in my eyes; and I took twelve men from amongst you, one man per tribe..." (Deuteronomy 1:22-23)*

The commentaries reconcile these two accounts of the sending of the Spies by explaining that the initiative indeed came from the people of Israel. "Moses then consulted with G-d, who said to him, 'Send you men...' to imply: Send them as dictated by your understanding. I am not telling you what to do. Do as you see fit" (Rashi). Thus, the Spies' mission, while receiving the divine consent, was a human endeavor, born of the desire of the people and dispatched because "the thing was favorable" in Moses' eyes.

The result was a tragic setback in the course of Jewish history. The spies brought back a most demoralizing report and caused the people to lose faith in G-d's promise of the land of Israel as their eternal heritage. The entire generation was then deemed unfit to inherit the land, and it was decreed that they would live out their lives in the desert. Only 40 years later did Moses' successor, Joshua, lead a new generation across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. (Joshua and Caleb were the only two spies to speak in favor of conquering the land, and the only two of that entire generation to enter the land.)

Up until that time, G-d had imparted specific directives to Moses and the people of Israel virtually every step of the way. The case of the spies was the first instance in which G-d said, "I'm not telling you

what to do -- do as you see fit." Should this not have set off a warning light in the mind of Moses?

Indeed, it did. Our sages tell us that Moses sent off Joshua with the blessing, "May G-d deliver you from the conspiracy of the spies" (Rashi, Numbers 13:16). So why did he send them? And if, for whatever reason, he thought it necessary to send them, why did he not at least bless them as he blessed Joshua? Even more amazing is the fact that a generation later, as the Jewish people finally stood at the ready (for the second time) to enter the land, Joshua dispatches spies(!) This time, it works out fine; but why did he again initiate a process which had ended so tragically in the past?

Obviously, Moses was well aware of the risks involved when embarking on a course of "Do as you see fit." For man to strike out on his own, without precise instructions from On High and with only his finite and subjective judgment as his compass, is to enter a mine-field strewn with possibilities for error and failure. Yet Moses also knew that G-d was opening a new arena of human potential.

### Free Choice

A most crucial element of our mission in life is the element of choice. Were G-d to have created man as a creature who cannot do wrong, then He might as well have created a perfect world in the first place, or no world at all. The entire point of G-d's desire in creation is that there exists a non-perfected world, and that we choose to perfect it. It is precisely the possibility for error on our part that lends significance to our achievements.

The concept of choice exists on two levels. When G-d issues an explicit instruction to us, we still have the choice to defy His command. This, however, is choice in a more limited sense. For, in essence, our soul is literally "a part of G-d above" and, deep down, has but a single desire: to fulfill the divine will. In the words of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi: "A Jew is neither willing, nor is he able, to tear himself away from G-d." When it comes down to it, each and every one of us desires only to do good, as defined by the will of G-d. The only choice we have is whether to suppress our innate will or to express it in our daily life.

Up until the episode of the spies, this was the only choice offered the Jewish people. G-d provided unequivocal guidelines for each and every issue that confronted their lives. They had the choice to

disobey, but to do so would run contrary to their deepest instincts.

The second level of choice was introduced with G-d's reply to Moses regarding the spies. When Moses heard G-d saying, "Do as you see fit," he understood that G-d was opening another, even deeper and truer dimension of choice in the life of man. By creating an area in which He, the creator and absolute master of the world, states, "I am not telling you what to do," G-d was imparting an even greater significance to human actions. Here, and only here, is the choice truly real; here, and only here, is there nothing to compel us in either direction.

When we enter this arena, the risks are greater: the possibility to err is greater, and the consequences of our error more devastating. But when we succeed in discovering, without instruction and empowerment from Above, the optimum manner in which to enter the Holy Land and actualize the divine will, our deed is infinitely more valuable and significant.

### The Self of Joshua

This was why Moses dispatched the spies, though fully aware of the hazards of their mission, without so much as a blessing that they be safeguarded from the pitfalls of human endeavor. Were he to have blessed them -- to have imparted to them of his own spiritual prowess to succeed in their mission -- he would have undermined the uniqueness of the opportunity that G-d had granted by consenting that their mission be by your understanding. The entire point was that both Moses (in deciding whether to send them) and the Spies (in executing their mission) be entirely on their own, guided and empowered solely by their own understanding and humanity.

The only one to receive Moses blessing was Joshua, who was Moses' "faithful servant... never budging from [Moses'] tent" (Exodus 33:11). The unique relationship between Moses and Joshua is described by the Talmud by the following metaphor: "Moses face was like the face of the sun; Joshuas face was like the face of the moon." On the most basic level, this expresses the superiority of Moses over Joshua, the latter being but a pale reflector of the former's light; on a deeper level, this alludes to the depth of the bond between the greatest of teachers and the most devoted of disciples. As the moon has no luminance of its own but receives all of its light from the sun, so had Joshua completely abnegated his self to his master, so that everything he had and was derived from Moses.

For Moses to bless Joshua was not to empower Joshua with something that was not himself: Joshua's entire self was Moses. Armed with Moses' blessing, Joshua was truly and fully on his own -- this was his essence and self, rather than something imposed on him from without.

Thus it was Joshua, who had successfully negotiated the arena of true and independent choice, who led the people of Israel into the land of Canaan. For the conquest of Canaan and its transformation into a "Holy Land" represents our entry into a place where there are no clear-cut divine directives to distinguish good from evil and right from wrong, and our independent discovery of how to sanctify this environment as a home for G-d.

## SHABBAT OF VISION

*And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, but the people with me did not see it; yet a great terror befell them, and they fled into hiding*

Daniel 10:7

*But if they did not see the vision, why were they terrified? Because though they themselves did not see, their souls saw*

Talmud, Megillah 3a

On the ninth day of the month of Av ("Tish'ah B'Av") we fast and mourn the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Both the First Temple (833-423 bce) and the Second Temple (349 bce-69 ce) were destroyed on this date. The Shabbat preceding the fast day is called the "Shabbat of Vision," for on this Shabbat we read a chapter from the Prophets (Isaiah 1:1-27) that begins, "The vision of Isaiah..."

But there is also a deeper significance to the name "Shabbat of Vision," expressed by Chassidic master Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev with the following metaphor:

A father once prepared a beautiful suit of clothes for his son. But the child neglected his father's gift and soon the suit was in tatters. The father gave the child a second suit of clothes; this one, too, was ruined by the child's carelessness. So the father made a third suit. This time, however, he withholds it from his son. Every once in a while, on special and opportune

times, he shows the suit to the child, explaining that when the child learns to appreciate and properly care for the gift, it will be given to him. This induces the child to improve his behavior, until it gradually becomes second nature to him -- at which time he will be worthy of his father's gift.

On the "Shabbat of Vision," says Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, each and every one of us is granted a vision of the third and final Temple -- a vision that, to paraphrase the Talmud, "though we do not see ourselves, our souls see." This vision evokes a profound response in us, even if we are not consciously aware of the cause of our sudden inspiration.

### The Divine Dwelling

The Holy Temple in Jerusalem was the seat of G-d's manifest presence in the physical world.

A basic tenet of our faith is that "The entire earth is filled with His presence" (Isaiah 6:3) and "There is no place void of Him" (Tikkunei Zohar 57); but G-d's presence and involvement in His creation is masked by the seemingly independent and arbitrary workings of nature and history. The Holy Temple was a breach in the mask, a window through which G-d radiated His light into the world. Here G-d's involvement in our world was openly displayed by an edifice in which miracles were a "natural" part of its daily operation and whose very space expressed the infinity and all-pervasiveness of the Creator. Here G-d showed himself to man and man presented himself to G-d.

Twice we were given the gift of a divine dwelling in our midst. Twice we failed to measure up to this gift and banished the divine presence from our lives.

So G-d built us a third temple. Unlike its two predecessors, which were of human construction and therefore subject to debasement by man's misdeeds, the Third Temple is as eternal and invincible as its omnipotent architect. But G-d has withheld this "third suit of clothes" from us, confining its reality to a higher, heavenly sphere, beyond the sight and experience of earthly man.

Each year, on the "Shabbat of Vision," G-d shows us the Third Temple. Our souls behold a vision of a world at peace with itself and its Creator, a world suffused with the knowledge and awareness of G-d, a world that has realized its divine potential for goodness and perfection. It is a vision of the Third Temple in heaven -- in its spiritual and elusive state -- like the third set of clothes that the child's father has made for him but is withholding from him. But it is

also a vision with a promise -- a vision of a heavenly temple poised to descend to earth, a vision that inspires us to correct our behavior and hasten the day when the spiritual vision becomes tactual reality. Through these repeated visions, living in the divine presence becomes more and more "second nature" to us, progressively elevating us to the state of worthiness to experience the divine in our daily lives.

### The Wearable House

The metaphors of our sages continue to speak to us long after the gist of their message has been assimilated. Beneath the surface of the metaphor's most obvious import lies layer upon layer of meaning, in which each and every detail of the narrative is significant.

The same applies to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's metaphor. Its basic meaning is clear, but many subtle insights lie hidden in its details. For example: Why, we might ask, are the three temples portrayed as three suits of clothes? Would not the example of a building or house have been more appropriate?



The house and the garment both "house" and envelop the person. But the garment does so in a much more personal and individualized manner. While it is true that the dimensions and style of a home reflect the nature of its occupant, they do so in a more generalized way-not as specifically and as intimately as a garment suits its wearer.

On the other hand, the individual nature of the garment limits its function to one's personal use. A home can house many; a garment can clothe only one. I can invite you into my home, but I cannot share my garment with you: even if I give it to you, it will not clothe you as it clothes me, for it "fits" only myself.

G-d chose to reveal His presence in our world in a "dwelling" -- a communal structure that goes beyond the personal to embrace an entire people and the entire community of man. Yet the Holy Temple in Jerusalem also had certain garment-like features. It is these features that Rabbi Levi Yitzchak wishes to emphasize by portraying the Holy Temple as a suit of clothes.

For the Holy Temple was also a highly compartmentalized structure. There was a Women's Court and a courtyard reserved for men, an area restricted to the *kohanim* (priests), a "sanctuary" (*heicha*) imbued with a greater sanctity than the "courtyards," and the "Holy of Holies" -- a chamber into which only the High Priest may enter and only on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year. The Talmud enumerates eight domains of varying sanctity within the Temple complex, each with its distinct function and purpose.

In other words, although the Temple expressed a single truth -- the all-pervasive presence of G-d in our world -- it did so to each individual in a personalized manner. Although it was a "house" in the sense that it served many individuals -- indeed the entire world -- as their meeting point with the infinite, each and every individual found it a tailor-made "garment" for his or her specific spiritual needs, according him or her a personal and intimate relationship with G-d.

Each year, on the Shabbat before Tish'ah B'Av, we are shown a vision of our world as a divine home -- a place where all G-d's creatures will experience His presence. But this is also a vision of a G-dly "garment" -- the distinctly personal relationship with G-d, particularly suited to our individual character and aspirations, that we will each enjoy when the third divine Temple descends to earth.

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe; adapted by Yanki Tauber*