



MIDEI CHODESH B'CHODSHO

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SHABBAT MEVARCHIM

More of Moshe: A Lesson to be Learned

The Book of Devarim is clearly different....

- The volume's opening words immediately reflect a distinction: "And these are the words that Moshe spoke..."
- Tellingly absent, until Devarim's final chapters, are all variations of the familiar phrase: "And HaShem spoke to Moshe saying..."
- Recorded almost completely in the first person, Devarim primarily consists of Moshe's farewell addresses to the Israelites.
- Much of Devarim's text seems to spring spontaneously from Moshe's heart.

The Talmud maintains that the Torah's first Tochacha (extended section of rebuke), recorded in Sefer Vayikra, was transmitted by Moshe "from the mouth of the Almighty." In contrast, the second Tochacha, recorded in Sefer Devarim, was "conveyed by Moshe

of his own accord."¹

These differences ignite a debate that spans the centuries. *Who exactly, ask the rabbis, is the author of Sefer Devarim-Hashem or Moshe?*

The answers proposed by Chazal run the gamut of possible approaches. While all traditional commentaries acknowledge the divine nature of Sefer Devarim, some authorities are more willing than others to accept an expanded role on Moshe's part in the actual crafting of the text.

Whichever position we take concerning the process of Devarim's creation, however, one point is abundantly clear: *There is "more of Moshe" in the book of Devarim than in any other volume of the Torah.* Apparently, God could not allow the Torah to close without a more complete glimpse into the heart and mind of this exceptional leader. Through Sefer Devarim, we are given a greater opportunity to meet Moshe, the man.

The book of Devarim thus conveys a message that goes well beyond the specific issue of Moshe's role in the volume. With this final Sefer, HaShem embeds an overarching truth into the Torah's very structure; a truth that will shape the development of

1 Talmud Bavli Megilla 31b

our nation's tradition across time:

The fabric of Jewish experience is as much a product of people and personalities, as it is a product of technical statute and law.

We inaccurately tend to view the process of *Mesora*, the passing of tradition, as a two-step progression; the receiving of a heritage from the past and the transmission of that heritage to the future. There is, however, an often missed, pivotal third step. We receive tradition from the past generation, *that tradition courses through us*, and, only then, do we then pass that tradition to the future.

Inexorably, as the corpus of Jewish life courses through individuals, families and communities in each generation, it is altered by a myriad of variables. The personal experiences, challenges, perceptions, aspirations and dreams of parents, teachers, grandparents, rabbis, communal leaders and whole communities, all shape the continually developing character of our people's legacy.

By way of clarification, consider the following: Gefilte fish, kugel, cholent, and the like, are not found in the Torah text. The character of a family's Shabbat and Festival table; the warmth of a mother's or a grandmothers' touch; the patient smile on a father's or grandfather's face; the power of a teacher's approval; and so much more; do not emerge from the pages of the Talmud. The contribution of the "human element" to our people's mesora should never be underestimated.

Even in the seemingly technical arena of Jewish law, the human component is

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starkly evident. Judaism is unique in its insistence upon a foundational partnership between man and God in the determination of religious law. Once God establishes the basic legal and methodological foundations of halacha, He hands the law over to the rabbis for continuing interpretation and application. Human beings all, the rabbis naturally bring to bear their own perceptions and personalities as they apply their expertise to the delineation of our nation's legal path.

The phenomenon of personal contribution to the Mesora of our people adds human warmth and creativity to the fabric of our tradition. *This phenomenon, however, also heightens our personal responsibility.*

As the flow of tradition courses through us and our time, we are challenged individually: What will be the nature of our

contribution? How will our children come to view Jewish observance, based on the comments and reactions that they have heard from, and seen in, us? What attitudes and behaviors of ours will they adopt, to be handed down to their children and grandchildren? Will the sum total of our personal involvement in our nation's heritage have a positive or negative impact upon our people's Mesora?

On a communal level, the questions abound, as well. What will be the character and flavor of the Judaism that we will hand down to the next generation? How will that Judaism have shifted from the Judaism we received from those before us? Will we successfully preserve what needs to be preserved, as we apply age-old laws to ever-changing realities; as the contributions of our generation are woven into the unfolding tapestry of Jewish tradition?

Like those before us and those to follow, every one of us is a "shaper" of our nation's mesora; and the daily list of challenges we face in that role goes on and on....

The Torah would not have been complete without a personal glimpse of Moshe. That glimpse is provided by the book of Devarim. With this book, God therefore reminds us of one of the most important lessons of all: to be ever-mindful of the human factor in the shaping and defining of Jewish experience until the end of time. ■

Rabbi Goldin is the author of the OU press volumes "Unlocking the Torah Text," and "Unlocking the Haggada."



OU Israel mourns the tragic loss of life in the Surfside Tragedy

The Jewish people are reeling from yet another national tragedy that contains within it so many personal and familial calamities.

All of us must pause to consider the profound pain being experienced at this moment by so many and turn to Hashem in heartfelt prayer.

May Hashem hear our prayers and bring an end to such devastating events

יאמר לצרותינו די

