



RABBI AARON

Editor, Torah Tidbits

GOLDSCHIEDER

A Portrait of Moshe Rabbeinu

The fifth book of the Torah is distinct from the other four books in that in *Sefer Devarim* Moshe is the speaker. In the rest of the Torah we find a common refrain “Hashem spoke to Moshe”, but here we find the phrase “Hashem said to me” (1:42, 2:9, 3:2). In the *Book of Devarim* Moshe chose the words and conveyed the commandments as he understood them. Strikingly, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik posited that this book stands alone among the five books of Moshe in the sense that it began as *Torah she’baal peh* (Oral Law). Moshe spoke these words and only after did God command him to inscribe his words in the Torah - and only then became part of the *Torah sh’bechtav* (Written

Torah). (Stone Edition, Artscroll Chumash, pp. 938-9).

The Rav added that Moshe’s honorific *Rabbeinu* is most appropriate in this context; for not only was Moshe the conduit through which God’s words transmitted verbatim to Israel, he was also the *teacher (rabbeinu)* who explained the words of the Torah - exemplified most notably here in the book of *Devarim*. (Ibid., Mesoras HaRav Chumash, Devarim, pp. 2-3)

With an understanding that the book of *Devarim* in particular exemplifies the uniqueness of Moshe Rabbeinu it seems fitting to develop a portrait of Moshe’s life and personality.

Moshe as Defender of the Jewish People

Rashi’s opening comment on *Parshat Devarim* states that Moshe recounted the journey up until that day in an uncommon form. The language he uses only intimated what he intended to convey “due to the



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honor of Israel.” Moshe’s opening statement (*Devarim* 1:1) refers to a place called *Di Zahav*. Rashi states that this refers to the sin of the Golden Calf. “He rebuked them over the calf that they had fashioned because of the abundance of gold...” (Rashi 1:1).

The Rav suggested another layer of meaning regarding this verse. Why specifically emphasize the fact that the Israelites were laden with abundant gold? The Rav answered that this alluded to Moshe’s defense of the nation at that tragic event. The Talmud presents another perspective (*Berachot* 32a): “What is implied by the phrase “and *Di Zahav*”? It is said in Rabbi Yanai’s house of study, this is what Moshe said to the Holy One, Blessed be He: ‘Master of the Universe, the silver and gold [*zahav*] that you gave to the Children of Israel was

in such abundance that they said ‘*Enough [dai]*’ - that is what caused them to commit the sin of the Golden Calf”...This can be compared to a man who had a son. He bathed him and anointed him, fed him, and provided sustenance. Then he hung a pouch of money on his neck and sat him down at the entrance of a brothel. How can the son avoid committing a sin?”

Moshe came to the defense of the Jewish people. The sin was never completely forgiven. At the end of his life Moshe continues to offer arguments in the nation’s defense to mitigate the recurring punishment for their sin.

Moshe’s loyalty to his beloved flock was extraordinary: “And now if you will forgive their sin; and if not, erase me please from your book which You have written”

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(Shemot 32:32). And yet, the Rav pointed to a contrast - the people do not properly appreciate Moshe's loyalty to them and they fail to reciprocate his love.

Moshe Tries to Raise the Second Generation

As the book of Devarim opens, Moshe expresses stunning disappointment in his



Be'er Tziporah a"h - Bottled Water Gemach



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Yoni thanks Hashem for having the opportunity of having Tziporah in his life, to learn of her caring, patience and happiness, to overcome her challenges. May Tziporah's Neshama be a light onto the world, in a time of darkness, and may her Neshama shine to Gan Eden. Yoni misses Tziporah with tears in his eyes, as Hashem gave him a gift, a crown jewel, now he returns her to Hashem. With thanks and Toda. Love, Yoni

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flock by employing a single: *eicha*. The Rav cited the midrash in which the Sages attribute a special significance to the word *eicha*. The word is used in three well-known places in *Tanach*, once by Moshe here, one by Yimiyahu in Lamentations 1:1 ("O how has the city that was once so populous remained lonely!"), and once by Isaiah, ("How the faithful city has become a harlot" (Is. 1:21). The word *eicha* represents so much despair, such a complete lack of understanding, that I do not begin to know how it can be possible. (The Lord is Righteous, p. 146)

The Rav made a fascinating distinction between Moshe's relationship with the first generation of Israelites who left Egypt and the new generation. He showed great understanding towards those who had come out of Egypt, given their background in which they had grown up. Their lives were marked by a struggle to survive, a battle for their very existence.

Moshe vested all his hopes in their children. He would rear them himself, educating them to a life of holiness and purity. Moshe saw the new generation as able to rectify the faults of their parents. Moshe felt that he could shape the spiritual values of the generation that was growing up under his tutelage from the very moment they came of age.

The complaints of the second generation, beginning at *Mei Merivah*, dash all of Moshe's hopes and assumptions about the second generation. That is why his anger is so great. We can now understand the harshness of Moshe's words to the people. ('Moses', Moshe Lichtenstein, pp. 163-165) ■