YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

PARASHAT DEVARIM

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**IN LOVING MEMORY OF**

**Jeffrey Paul Friedman**

**August 15, 1968 – July 29, 2012**

**לע"נ**

**יהודה פנחס בן הרב שרגא פייוועל**

**כ"ב אב תשכ"ח – י' אב תשע"ב**

**ת.נ.צ.ב.ה**

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SICHA OF HaRav AHARON LICHTENSTEIN zt"l

Moshe Rabbeinu: Educator Par Excellence

Adapted by Dov Karoll with Avi Shmidman

"These are the devarim (words) that Moshe addressed to all Israel on the eastern side of the Jordan…" (Devarim 1:1). What are these "words"? What is their content? What is their nature?

Rashi (s.v. elleh), based on the Sifrei (Devarim 1 s.v. elleh), explains that this is rebuke, and the Sifrei cites a verse to this effect, "Yeshurun [Israel] grew fat and kicked…" (31:15). Rashi is looking ahead to the end of the book of Devarim by speaking of rebuke right at the beginning, while actually this is the subject of Parashat Ha'azinu. The Ramban (s.v. amar), on the other hand, explains that the "words" relate to the mitzvot that Moshe will explicate throughout the book of Devarim, starting with the Ten Commandments in chapter 5.

Regarding the significance of the phrase "To all Israel," Rashi and the Ramban again disagree, each one consistent with his position cited above. Rashi (s.v. el kol) explains, based on the continuation of the Sifrei (s.v. el kol), that the rebuke needed to take place in front of all Israel, because otherwise those who were not there would come with complaints: "Why did you not counter Moshe's words? Had I been there, I would have argued as follows…"

According to the Ramban, on the other hand, the need for all Israel to be assembled is a more fundamental one: given that Moshe's speech will involve a new acceptance of the Torah, this acceptance must take place before the entirety of the Jewish people.

Looking over the Sefer, we see that Parashat Devarim and the beginning of Va'etchanan contain much rebuke, as does most of Eikev. Re'eh, Shofetim and Ki Teitzei are full of mitzvot. Ki Tavo has both. Parts of Nitzavim and Vayelekh are rebuke, and Parashat Ha'azinu is rebuke. In their interpretations of the introduction to the Sefer, Rashi focuses on the element of rebuke and Ramban on the mitzvot. Clearly, each approach has significant basis in the Sefer, as both themes are prevalent. Apparently, two functions are being served simultaneously by these "words" that constitute the book of Devarim: rebuke and instruction.

Returning to the opening verse: "that Moshe spoke" - who is Moshe? What is his role? The verserefers to him here simply as "Moshe," but the Jewish people has come to refer to him as Moshe Rabbeinu, the teacher-instructor (mechannekh) par excellence. He filled many roles as a teacher, as indicated by the Ramban in Parashat Yitro (Shemot 18:15, s.v. ki).

Regarding teaching, one can focus on the aspect of hora'a, instruction narrowly defined, the transmission of information and the imparting of knowledge. Alternatively, one can focus on chinukh, whole-person education, formation and development of character. Moshe Rabbeinu is filling two simultaneous roles, wearing two hats. These two aspects do not operate separately, but rather are mutual fructifying.

This dual role was fulfilled in an integrated way. The responsiveness to the call, the commitment necessary for each task, is interdependent.

On the one hand, before you can properly learn Torah, you need to have the basic commitment; you need a foundation in value and ethics. The Rambam highlights this notion in Hilkhot Talmud Torah:

Words of Torah should be taught only to a student who is respectable and proper in action, or to a simple person. But if one encounters a person who is following an improper path, one should first restore him to the proper path, and only after assuring his restoration shall he be introduced to the beit midrash, study hall, and taught. (4:1)

The Rambam goes to an extreme in insisting on proper values as a prerequisite to the study of Torah; nevertheless, he highlights a very important point.

While the proper proportions of this balance may vary in different eras, one thing is clear: a student needs the basis of values before he can start learning Torah. You need to work on the basics of prayer before you can work the advanced dialectics of the Ketzot. We need to follow the example of the Jewish people at Sinai (based on Shemot 24:7), putting action ahead of study, "na'aseh" before "nishma."

On the other hand, learning Torah enables you to learn values, to accept rebuke and spiritual guidance. Torah is our treasure. "The Torah of God is perfect, renewing life; the teachings of God are enduring, making the simple wise" (Tehillim 19:8). Torah gives us the framework and basis, and develops the personality such that it can better respond to matters of ethics and values. The Gemara in Arakhin (16b) quotes two tannaim, one of whom (Rabbi Tarfon) states that nearly no one in his day is willing to accept rebuke, and another (Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya) who states that nearly no one in his day knows how to properly administer rebuke. This Gemara highlights that only someone with a firm basis in learning will be properly responsive to the constructive criticism of rebuke, of spiritual striving.

This development needs to take place in stages, with the two realms affecting each other in a dialectic manner. Each one constantly feeds off the other, and development in one area facilitates further development in the other.

Regarding the timing of Sefer Devarim: the Torah states, "And it was in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, that Moshe addressed the children of Israel with the instructions that God had given him for them" (1:3). Rashi (s.v. vayhi), based on the Sifrei (Devarim 2, s.v. davar acher), explains that Moshe intentionally gave his rebuke proximate to his death, just as Ya'akov Avinu had done before him.

Why did Ya'akov Avinu delay his rebuke to Re'uven, Shim'on and Levi until just before his death? The Midrash provides us with Ya'akov's shocking answer: "Do you know why I did not rebuke you all these years? Because I did not want you to abandon me to follow my brother Esav." For our purposes, it is important to note that the Sifrei provides a very specific reason as to why this rebuke needed to wait for the end of Ya'akov's life, and it does not provide a general rule that rebuke should be saved until one is on his deathbed.

What about our case? Is there a particular explanation as to why Moshe Rabbeinu prefers to give his rebuke just before his passing? Based on what we have explained, it seems clear that there is indeed a reason. Can he rebuke the generation of the spies, the sinful generation that left Egypt and rejected the Land of Israel? It is precisely after Moshe Rabbeinu has toiled and invested in the upbringing of a new generation, tirelessly plowing, planting, and watering, bringing up children raised on his teachings and on his values, for an entire generation, that he can offer rebuke that will be heard.

Moshe can now exclaim, "I have plowed and I have planted, and now the time has come to harvest, to reap the fruits of my labor." This is the generation to whom he can finally give both rebuke and instruction. It is precisely at this point that they are ready to enter into a covenant on the contents, the mitzvot, as well as the valuesof the Torah, as we will see at the end of the sefer:

You stand this day, all of you, before the Lord your God… all the men of Israel…. To enter into the covenant of the Lord your God, which the Lord your God is concluding with you today…. To the end that He may establish you this day as His people and be your God…. (29:9-12)

[This sicha was delivered on leil Shabbat, Parashat Devarim, 5763 (2003).]