YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Student summaries of sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat Devarim**

**Sicha of HarAV Baruch gigi**

In Loving Memory of

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לע"נ

יהודה פנחס בן הרב שרגא פייוועל

כ"ב אב תשכ"ח – י' אב תשע"ב

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה

**Historical Consciousness and the Love of God in the Book of Devarim**

Adapted by Aviad Brestel

Translated by David Strauss

The Ramban notes that the book of *Devarim* includes two types of *mitzvot*: new *mitzvot* mentioned for the first time in this book and *mitzvot* that appeared already in previous books, but are further clarified in this book. However, the book of *Devarim* introduces not only new commandments, but also two new fundamental principles. The first is connected to the beginning of our *parasha*:

These are the words which Moshe spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan; in the wilderness, in the Arava, over against Suf, between Paran and Tofel, and Lavan, and Chatzerot, and Di-Zahav. It is eleven days journey from Chorev to Kadesh-Barnea by the way of Mount Seir. And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moshe spoke to the children of Israel, according to all that the Lord had given him in commandment to them. (*Devarim* 1:1-3)

The commentators disagree about the meaning of the first verse. Rashi maintains that the place names are all allusions to the sins of the people of Israel in the wilderness; what we have here is essentially an implicit rebuke. I wish to follow in the footsteps of the commentators who understand this verse in its plain sense, that the place names are in fact the names of places through which the people of Israel passed over the course of their journeys. In addition to noting the places through which the people of Israel passed along the way before reaching their current location, the passage also notes the precise time of Moshe's oration. Moshe essentially describes recent history prior to his oration. This phenomenon repeats itself years later in the farewell speech delivered by Yehoshua.

Mention of the time and place in speeches requires explanation. What importance is there to the time and place in which Moshe delivered his oration?

The purpose of mentioning the time and the place is to clarify the importance of historical consciousness. Historical consciousness constitutes a necessary basis for every deed in general and for Moshe's oration concerning the *mitzvot* in particular. Without it, observance of the *mitzvot* is void of meaning, and in practice the *mitzvot* will not even be observed.

Historical consciousness is one of the (new) fundamental principles introduced in the book of *Devarim.* As part of the commandment to bring the first-fruits, for example, there is an obligation to deliver a speech that describes our ancestors' descent to Egypt and their exodus from it.

We too must learn from this and develop our historical consciousness. We must remember the destruction of the Temple and of our people and also the exodus from Egypt. An historical consciousness that includes these elements is essential for the people of Israel.

Let us sharpen this point. There are two ways of looking at history. The first sees it as something meaningless. This approach is expressed in *Kohelet*:

One generation passes away, and another generation comes; and the earth abides forever… That which has been is that which shall be, and that which has been done is that which shall be done; and there is nothing new under the sun. (*Kohelet* 1:4, 9)

This perception is also expressed in the statement: "The land is one block" (*sadna de-ar'a chad hu*)*.* The idea is simple: Historical process is unimportant, as history repeats itself without purpose and meaning.

In contrast to this way of seeing the world, there is another, truer approach – an existential view of history. Such an existential view sees in history something of meaning and purpose. As a result, it does not underestimate the importance of the place and time of the various events. It sees them as important and even essential details.

This perspective is what Moshe comes to teach us. He points to the fact that an existential view of history – i.e., historical consciousness – is important in itself and, in addition, is a necessary condition for achieving significant goals in various areas, such as the conquest of the land, the World-to-Come, and the coming of the Messiah.

This is the first innovation of the book of *Devarim*: the importance of historical consciousness and an existential view of history.

The second innovation of the book of *Devarim* is service of God "with all one's heart and with all one's soul." This idea appears multiple times in the book. For example:

With all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might (*Devarim* 6:5)

To love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul (*Devarim* 11:13)

And you shall return and hearken to the voice of the Lord, and do all His commandments which I command you this day. And the Lord your God will make you over-abundant in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your land, for good; for the Lord will again rejoice over you for good, as He rejoiced over your fathers; if you shall hearken to the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law; if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul. (*Devarim* 30:8-10)

 The book of *Devarim* emphasizes the intention of the heart. Borrowing a Talmudic formulation, it may be said that, according to the book of *Devarim*, "[the fulfillment of] *mitzvot* requires intention."

This innovation, the service of God "with all one's heart and with all one's soul," is intrinsically connected to the previous innovation. Both express the importance of consciousness and of the heart in the worship of God, be it historical consciousness or intention of the heart.

These are the two main innovations of the book of *Devarim*. They are relevant to us, especially during the period of the Three Weeks and in light of recent difficult events. We must serve God out of a deep historical consciousness and "with all one's heart and with all one's soul."

[This *sicha* was delivered on *leil Shabbat parashat Devarim* 5777 (2017).]