YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

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

**Parashat Devarim**

**Sicha of HarAV Baruch gigi**

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

In Loving Memory of

Jeffrey Paul Friedman z"l

August 15, 1968 – July 29, 2012

לע"נ יהודה פנחס בן הרב שרגא פייוועל ז"ל

כ"ב אב תשכ"ח – י' אב תשע"ב

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**Historical Consciousness and the Novelty of the Book of *Devarim***

Summarized by Shmuel Fuchs

Translated by David Strauss

**Commandments and Historical Background in the Book of *Devarim***

The book of *Devarim* consists of two main orations delivered by Moshe: the oration of the commandments, and the historical review that precedes it.

Connections between the commandments and their historical background and context are made in many places over the course of the book; for example, in the song of *Ha’azinu*:

Give ear, you heavens, and I will speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distill as the dew; as the small rain upon the tender grass, and as the showers upon the herb. For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe you greatness to our God…Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will declare to you, your elders, and they will tell you. (*Devarim* 32:1-3, 7)

This is also the case regarding the earlier section that contains the passage recited when bringing first-fruits:

And it shall be, when you come in to the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, and you possess it, and dwell in it; that you shall take of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you shall bring in from your land that the Lord your God gives you; and you shall put it in a basket and shall go to the place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there…And you shall speak and say before the Lord your God: A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous… And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the land, which You, O Lord, have given me. And you shall set it down before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God. (*Devarim* 26:1-2, 5, 10)

This passage strongly emphasizes the connection between commandments and their historical background. First-fruits are a personal matter, the first fruits that grow in each individual’s own field. However, when a person comes to express his gratitude to God for this fruit, he opens by reviewing the entire historical process that brought him to this point – the story of the entire nation of Israel, who by God’s grace came out of Egypt and conquered the land.

Why is it necessary to repeatedly emphasize the connection between God's commandments and the historical process?

One explanation is that this emphasis negates the perception of despair and fixedness presented in the book of *Kohelet*, a perspective that sees the world as not changing at all:

Vanity of vanities, says Kohelet; vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit has man of all his labor wherein he labors under the sun?… All things toil to weariness; man cannot utter it, the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. 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* 1:2-3, 8-9)

When we come to serve God, we must remember that God rests His providence on the course of history: the world does not run without a goal or purpose, but rather it is directed and overseen by God.

**Life Before God**

We can, however, add another point that pertains specifically to *Sefer Devarim*, the whole of which constitutes preparation for the people of Israel as they are about to enter the Land of Israel. A most significant difference between life in the land and life outside of it is that in the land, we must live before God with our entire being, and not merely observe the Torah and its commandments.

This requirement is expressed in the repeated mention of the duties of the heart in *Devarim* – the demand that we must worship God and fulfill His commandments not only through actions but with our entire being, with all our heart and soul.

This requirement is particularly evident in the passages of *Shema*:

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might… And it shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently to My commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul. (*Devarim* 6:5; 11:13)

The same can be seen in the section dealing with repentance later in the book:

Then the Lord your God will turn your captivity, and have compassion upon you, and will return and gather you from all the peoples, where the Lord your God has scattered you. If any of yours that are dispersed be in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there will the Lord your God gather you, and from there will He fetch you. And the Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will do you good, and multiply you above your fathers. And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live. (*Devarim* 30:3-6)

This demand presents the people with a new challenge: from now on, keeping the Torah and observing the commandments in and of themselves will not suffice, because in the Land of Israel, more inclusive and total service of God is required. This change must be emphasized along with its historical context. Until now, we were in the wilderness, but now we must enter the land and fulfill the new role that God has placed before us: to serve Him with all our heart and all our soul.

[This *sicha* was delivered by Harav Gigi on Shabbat *Parashat Devarim* 5780.]