Sage Advice

Rashi – *R' Shlomo Yitzchaki*

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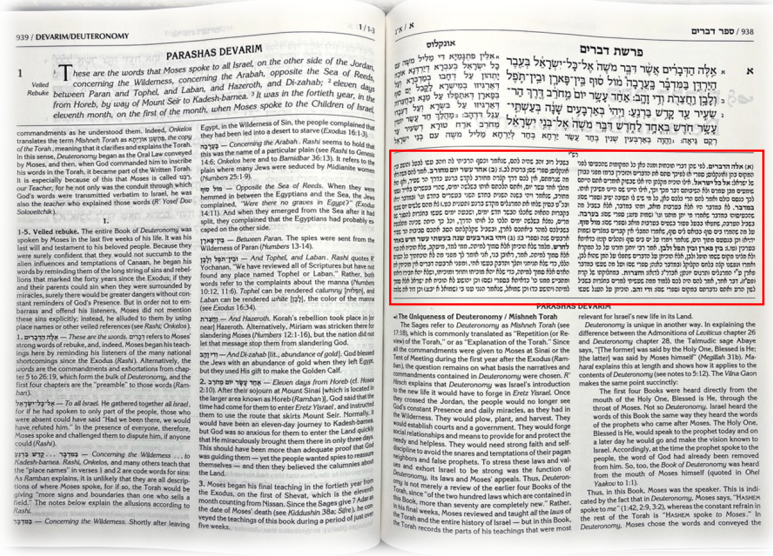

PARASHAS DEVARIM

1 1. These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel, on the other side of the Jordan, concerning the Wilderness, concerning the Arabah, opposite the Sea of Reeds, between Paran and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Di-zahab; 2 eleven days from Horeb, by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea. 3 It was in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first of the month, when Moses spoke to the Children of Israel,

Veiled Rebuke

commandments as he understood them. Indeed, *Onkelos* translates the term *Mishneh Torah* as פתגם אורייתא, *the copy of the Torah*, meaning that it clarifies and explains the Torah. In this sense, *Deuteronomy* began as the Oral Law conveyed by Moses, and then, when God commanded him to inscribe his words in the Torah, it became part of the Written Torah. It is especially because of this that Moses is called רבנו *our Teacher*; for he not only was the conduit through which God's words were transmitted verbatim to Israel, he was also the teacher who explained those words (*R' Yosef Dov Soloveitchik*).

1.

1-5. Veiled rebuke. The entire Book of *Deuteronomy* was spoken by Moses in the last five weeks of his life. It was his last will and testament to his beloved people. Because they were surely confident that they would not succumb to the alien influences and temptations of Canaan, he began his words by reminding them of the long string of sins and rebellions that marked the forty years since the Exodus; if they and their parents could sin when they were surrounded by miracles, surely there would be greater dangers without constant reminders of God's Presence. But in order not to embarrass and offend his listeners, Moses did not mention these sins explicitly; instead, he alluded to them by listing place names or other veiled references (see *Rashi*; *Onkelos*).

1. אלה הדברים — *These are the words,* דברים refers to Moses' stirring words of rebuke, and, indeed, Moses began his teachings here by reminding his listeners of the many national shortcomings since the Exodus (*Rashi*). Alternatively, the words are the commandments and exhortations from chapter 5 to 26:19, which form the bulk of *Deuteronomy*, and the first four chapters are the "preamble" to those words (*Ramban*).

אל־כל־ישראל — *To all Israel.* He gathered together *all Israel*, for if he had spoken to only part of the people, those who were absent could have said "Had we been there, we would have refuted him." In the presence of everyone, therefore, Moses spoke and challenged them to dispute him, if anyone could (*Rashi*).

במדבר ... קדש ברנע — *Concerning the Wilderness ... to Kadesh-barnea. Rashi, Onkelos,* and many others teach that the "place names" in verses 1 and 2 are code words for sins. As *Ramban* explains, it is unlikely that they are all descriptions of where Moses spoke, for if so, the Torah would be giving "more signs and boundaries than one who sells a field." The notes below explain the allusions according to *Rashi*.

במדבר — *Concerning the Wilderness.* Shortly after leaving Egypt, in the Wilderness of Sin, the people complained that they had been led into a desert to starve (Exodus 16:1-3).

בערבה — *Concerning the Arabah. Rashi* seems to hold that this was the name of a particular plain (see *Rashi* to Genesis 14:6; *Onkelos* here and to *Bamidbar* 36:13). It refers to the plain where many Jews were seduced by Midianite women (Numbers 25:1-9).

מול סוף — *Opposite the Sea of Reeds.* When they were hemmed in between the Egyptians and the Sea, the Jews complained, "*Were there no graves in Egypt?*" (Exodus 14:11). And when they emerged from the Sea after it had split, they complained that the Egyptians had probably escaped on the other side.

בין פארן — *Between Paran.* The spies were sent from the Wilderness of Paran (Numbers 13-14).

ובין תפל ולבן — *And Tophel, and Laban. Rashi* quotes R' Yochanan, "We have reviewed all of Scriptures but have not found any place named Tophel or Laban." Rather, both words refer to the complaints about the manna (Numbers 10:12; 11:6). *Tophel* can be rendered *calumny* [תיפול], and *Laban* can be rendered *white* [לבן], the color of the manna (see Exodus 16:34).

וחצרות — *And Hazeroth.* Korah's rebellion took place in (or near) Hazeroth. Alternatively, Miriam was stricken there for slandering Moses (Numbers 12:1-16), but the nation did not let that message stop them from slandering God.

ודי זהב — *And Di-zahab* [lit., *abundance of gold*]. God blessed the Jews with an abundance of gold when they left Egypt, but they used His gift to make the Golden Calf.

2. אחד עשר יום מחורב — *Eleven days from Horeb* (cf. Hosea 2:10). After their sojourn at Mount Sinai [which is located in the larger area known as Horeb (*Ramban*)], God said that the time had come for them to enter *Eretz Yisrael*, and instructed them to use the route that skirts Mount Seir. Normally, it would have been an eleven-day journey to Kadesh-barnea, but God was so anxious for them to enter the Land quickly that He miraculously brought them there in only three days. This should have been more than adequate proof that God was guiding them — yet the people wanted spies to reassure themselves — and then they believed the calumnies about the Land.

3. Moses began his final teaching in the fortieth year from the Exodus, on the first of Shevat, which is the eleventh month counting from Nissan. Since the Sages give 7 Adar as the date of Moses' death (see *Kiddushin* 38a; *Sifre*), he conveyed the teachings of this book during a period of just over five weeks.

פרשת דברים

אונקלוס

א אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵבֶר
הַיַּרְדֵּן בַּמִּדְבָּר בָּעֲרָבָה מוּל סוּף בֵּין־פָּארָן וּבֵין־תֹּפֶל
וְלָבָן וַחֲצֵרֹת וְדִי זָהָב׃ אַחַד עָשָׂר יוֹם מֵחֹרֵב דֶּרֶךְ הַר־
שֵׂעִיר עַד קָדֵשׁ בַּרְנֵעַ׃ וַיְהִי בְּאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּעַשְׁתֵּי־
עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְיָ אֹתוֹ אֲלֵיהֶם׃

PARASHAS DEVARIM

The Uniqueness of Deuteronomy / Mishneh Torah

The Sages refer to *Deuteronomy* as *Mishneh Torah* (see 17:18), which is commonly translated as "Repetition (or Review) of the Torah," or as "Explanation of the Torah." Since all the commandments were given to Moses at Sinai or the Tent of Meeting during the first year after the Exodus (*Ramban*), the question remains on what basis the narratives and commandments contained in *Deuteronomy* were chosen. *R' Hirsch* explains that *Deuteronomy* was Israel's introduction to the new life it would have to forge in *Eretz Yisrael*. Once they crossed the Jordan, the people would no longer see God's constant Presence and daily miracles, as they had in the Wilderness. They would plow, plant, and harvest. They would establish courts and a government. They would forge social relationships and means to provide for and protect the needy and helpless. They would need strong faith and self-discipline to avoid the snares and temptations of their pagan neighbors and false prophets. To stress these laws and values and exhort Israel to be strong was the function of *Deuteronomy*, its laws and Moses' appeals. Thus, *Deuteronomy* is not merely a review of the earlier four Books of the Torah, since "of the two hundred laws which are contained in this Book, more than seventy are completely new." Rather, in his final weeks, Moses reviewed and taught all the laws of the Torah and the entire history of Israel — but in this Book, the Torah records the parts of his teachings that were most relevant for Israel's new life in its Land.

Deuteronomy is unique in another way. In explaining the difference between the *Admonitions* of *Leviticus* chapter 26 and *Deuteronomy* chapter 28, the Talmudic sage Abaye says, "[The former] was said by the Holy One, Blessed is He; [the latter] was said by Moses himself" (*Megillah* 31b). *Maharal* explains this at length and shows how it applies to the contents of *Deuteronomy* (see notes to 5:12). The *Vilna Gaon* makes the same point succinctly:

> The first four Books were heard directly from the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed is He, through the throat of Moses. Not so *Deuteronomy*. Israel heard the words of this Book the same way they heard the words of the prophets who came after Moses. The Holy One, Blessed is He, would speak to the prophet today and on a later day he would go and make the vision known to Israel. Accordingly, at the time the prophet spoke to the people, the word of God had already been removed from him. So, too, the Book of *Deuteronomy* was heard from the mouth of Moses himself (quoted in *Ohel Yaakov* to 1:1).

Thus, in this Book, Moses was the speaker. This is indicated by the fact that in *Deuteronomy*, Moses says, "הוא דבר אלי — spoke to me" (1:42; 2:9, 3:2), whereas the constant refrain in the rest of the Torah is "הוא דבר אל — spoke to *Moses*." In *Deuteronomy*, Moses chose the words and conveyed the

Rashi Script

- Rashi wrote commentaries on most of the Tanach and most of the Talmud.
- Rashi's primary focus was on the *pshat* [plain meaning] of the text.
- Rashi's is the first commentary Torah students learn in yeshiva.
- Several miracle legends surround the birth of Rashi.
- Rashi's commentaries had a profound influence on Christian scholars in the 12th–17th centuries.
- Hundreds of commentaries have been written about Rashi's commentaries!