

**Serving God out of Fear
Serving God out of Love -
Not Mutually Exclusive**

TRANSLATED FROM HEBREW BY S. NATHAN

L'ILUI NISHMAT ESTHER BAT MORDECHAI

The Book of Devarim is also called The Book of Torah Repeated. Its verses are filled with power and splendor, evoking poetry. The garb of poetic beauty clothes things that have already been said in detail in the narratives of the Exodus from Egypt in the Book of Shemot, and mainly in the Book of Bamidbar. However, nothing substantive is added.

Despite what has just been said, it appears that “The Repeating of the Torah” holds a fundamentally new element that transforms it entirely, in substance as well as in form. Moshe has discovered a new perspective, and not on a familiar topic. Rather, a new issue has arisen to transform his mission, making it either very difficult or impossible.

Why does Moshe find it necessary to express himself in such sharp, embittered terms, when he is committing himself to the people of Israel and accepting responsibility for them upon himself? He is blaming himself, if this were possible, and simultaneously binding himself to them, tying his own fate to theirs.

Overt rebuke mingles with covert blame:

“I will not be able to carry you by myself.” What did he do until now? What has changed? What has the faithful shepherd who took them out of Egypt suddenly realized?

Eicha? “How can I carry, by myself, your trouble, your burden, and your quarrel?”

How is Moshe’s advice, “Get yourselves wise men” designed to solve this problem? What revisions does Moshe make in the story of the spies and their weeping, which became “a weeping for generations”?

“And the thing was good in my eyes...” Really? Had Moshe conceded to the demand for a spying expedition with a light and happy heart? Had he not given Yehoshua, his faithful disciple, a special prayer and blessing? “May God save you from the counsel of the spies.”

It is with a heavy heart that Moshe sends them on their mission, knowing the temptation that lies hidden in such a mission. Where is it hidden?

Here in Devarim we see even the description of the event itself from an entirely new perspective, one indicated by complete and utter failure: “‘And in this thing you do not believe,’ that He promises to bring you to the Land but you do not believe in Him.”
(Rashi)

Last but perhaps worst: “Also against me, God was incensed, because of you.” Moshe finds that by his involvement with them, he has taken a double beating: He will not merit the coming to the Promised Land, his heart’s desire, his dream and goal. Because of them! He is taking no responsibility whatsoever. “Because of you,” and not because of me. I have done no wrong. As if someone had found some trace of wrongdoing in Moshe, God’s faithful servant.

And you have shown yourselves ungrateful, because you lacked for nothing all these forty years traveling this fearsome wilderness of a desert.

Furthermore, what is the meaning of the new promise? “Today I will begin putting a fear of you and a dread of you upon all the nations...and they will quake and tremble before you.” (Devarim, 2:25) This same message is stated even more clearly and powerfully in Parashat Va’Etchanan, 4:6) “For this is your wisdom and your insight in the eyes of the nations...and they shall say: ‘This great nation is simply a wise and insightful people.’”

Ramban makes a basic point that sheds light on the new element contained in Moshe’s remarks. (6:26) “‘Would that their hearts would be in awe of Me this way always...’ so that man would hold in his own hands the power to be just or to be wicked, because ‘everything is in Heaven’s Hands, except fear of heaven,’ and this is what the scripture is saying, only in ordinary human language.”

Here we hold the key to the riddle behind Moshe’s words: What is effective for promoting *dvaikut*? Does awe bring “attachedness” to God? ? Or does love? Moshe, “God’s servant”, who was attached to Him on a steady basis, required no preparation in order to connect to his Creator, as did all the other prophets. Moshe was ever ready. He had separated from the ways of men, who are tied to the physical matter of this world, who are in need of food, drink, and sleep to the point of utter dependency. Moshe was non-dependent on these worldly futilities.

“‘Now what is God your Lord demanding of you? No more than to be in awe of Him...’ Yet is awe of God a small matter?” Hazal pose this difficult question: Is fear and awe of God a little thing?

Yes, they answer. “For God’s servant, Moshe, it is a small matter.” Moshe finds it difficult to comprehend or to appreciate dependency on physical conditions, and his sister Miriam has occasion to criticize him for this. Miriam, who loved and revered Moshe above every other human being, found it difficult to understand how Moshe could separate from his wife. She understood separating from one’s own wife as indicating a lack of love, for after all separating because of one’s duty would be less difficult to understand. However, she saw his separating as a deficiency in the emotion of love.

For this she was smitten with leprosy, meriting a direct rebuke from the great and terrible Focus of Moshe’s love, meaning to say: You are in error, in attributing to Moshe any deficiency of any sort in the emotion of love. “Moshe, My servant, the faithful one of

My house,” does not only fear Me. He does not only experience awe without love. His awe is love, and his love is awe. These emotions of love and awe are intertwined, inseparable twins.

Awe without love does not last long. External fear imposed by a fearsome object is not called awe. “When the thing is canceled, the [awe] is canceled.” Love is similar. Love too must be non-dependent on any external thing. If it is, “when the thing is canceled, the love is canceled.”

Both awe and love are emotions that originate in the self, in one’s essential inner substance, rather than in any sort of survival mechanism. Moshe, who served God with an attachment that was total and utter, who was never not connected with his Creator, found it difficult to separate – and truth to tell, he also saw no need for separating – between the two. And now he finds suddenly that there has been a change in the system, in the way of connecting between the Creator and the people of Israel. And the change is profound, reaching to the very infrastructure, to the very essence of the ways of men.

There are peoples for whom the very substance of government is built upon a dictatorial regime. A terrifying dictator cruelly tyrannizes them, punishes and puts to death on a regular basis, and they feel content. Place over them a ruler elected by free democratic electoral process, and behold: Not only do they fail to revere him and love him, but they actually despise him, and refuse to obey his laws. Which means to say that what comes forth from within themselves, they consider unworthy of notice. In contrast, laws forced upon them by an outside power, by a strong arm, seem like real laws, worthy of respect.

A similar phenomenon occurs on the private plane. People differ from one another. One is motivated by love, while another will obey only power. Each of these has a strength and a weakness. The one motivated by the power of love will not lovingly accept laws that do not appear valid in his eyes. He dislikes laws that restrict him, that are not compatible with his opinions (yet his opinions are colored by personal interests). The second one will be in awe and behave respectfully only in the presence of a threatening regime. He will not obey a law if there is no policeman around, and this includes even laws beneficial to himself, such as traffic regulations designed to save his life.

We see here that only a regime that imposes its authority both through power and through love, can truly succeed in the leadership role. A regime of this type is the vision of a future yet to come, that will be actualized only with the coming of the righteous Redeemer, hopefully soon and in our own time.

A significant example of the sharply contrasting forms of rule is the teacher: One rules his class of little ones with an iron fist, while another teacher rules by the power of his love for his students. In my day, two generations ago, we feared an educator who would not refrain from physical punishment, no matter how slight the misdemeanor. This teacher was an embittered man who had never undergone pedagogical training of any sort, though he was a scholar. He tyrannized his students, who dreaded him.

Would anyone think of placing him in front of a classroom today? The contemporary classroom swarms with spoiled children, whom the law protects against adult power and intimidation. The reality of the classroom today is that the teacher fears the students, and both know it. Placed in front of a contemporary classroom, certain teachers of previous generations would run for their lives. Their failure would be a foregone conclusion.

In a related contrast, Moshe ruled the nation of Israel, uniting and consolidating them as a shepherd does his flock, while the Holy One initiated every connection with the people, never anticipating any initiative on their part. This was a form of Divine Providence that required none of the supporting elements of human free choice. Suddenly, with their entry into the Promised Land, The Creator sees fit to present Israel with the challenge of a new method: The Free Choice Method.

Here is a land of human habitation: Dealing with it will mean dealing with free choice, and dealing with it by way of one's physical conditions. "Every man under his grapevine and every man under his fig tree." Meaning that the grapevine and the fig tree might lean too heavily on man's connection with God, on man's direct approach to the Creator of the universe, Who has no interest in physical matter.

Yes, precisely man, as a physical creature, bent under his burden. Yet Moshe wonders: How will he rise toward heaven when he is loaded with his physical burden to the point of exhaustion? The new method seems strange to Moshe, whereas he has led them through the desert where there was no load of physical burden to bear.

He therefore finds that there is a need to prepare them, from within, to educate them, to deal with the initiative of free choice. It is indeed 'because of them', because of the substantive change they are undergoing, that there is no longer a need for his leadership, upon their entry into the Land so abundantly endowed with the burden of physical matter.

Moshe's spiritual power as a presence in the Land would hamper their ability to make use of free choice. Viewed from this perspective, all of Moshe's "Repeating of the Torah" takes on a new aspect.

Not only does the Book of Devarim take on a new dimension, of a far deeper meaning, but the entire perception of Judaism takes on a new dimension, decisively in favor of man. It puts man in center place, a sort of counterweight response: He must complete and complement the initiative of the Divine Providence toward him.

From this point on, man is expected to depart from his passive role as mere witness. The mission has now been placed on man's shoulders: Free choice, which expresses sanctity, which indicates that man has the ability to sanctify himself. It is now demanded of man that he join the world of physical matter to sanctity. He is commanded with a new commandment, one that will decisively affect his worship of his God: "Be sacred."

The Ten Commandments recur in Parashat Va'Etchanan, but with a few changes, somewhat different from the way they appeared in the Book of Shemot, where they

formed part of the Biblical narrative. The changes are in keeping with the spirit of the new issues:

The reason given for the sanctity of Shabat changes from “Remember” to “Keep”. No longer is it because the Master on High keeps Shabat, as is written in the Book of Shemot: “Because six days, God made the heavens and the earth, and He rested on the seventh day.” Rather, it is “in order that your slave, your ox, and your donkey, will rest as you do.” A prosaic social reason, it seems, unconnected, as it were, to the commandments between man and God, its place being rather among the commandments governing person to person relations. Meaning, the purpose of man’s obligation to keep Shabat is – repair of the universe.

“And you said: ‘Here God has shown us...His glory...this day we have seen that God may speak to a man, and yet he is alive.’” Yet in the following verse: “And now, why should we die?”

Why would they fear the Godly Presence after they have realized that it is possible to face God and remain alive? Is there not a clear contradiction here?

It appears that the later verse comes after man has become aware of his role as a choosing being, obligated to assume responsibility before God. This responsibility is of powerful significance, and awakens personal involvement. On careful examination, it awakens a fear of the immensely heavy burden that one bears. It is far more awesome than the presence of a passive human being who merely serves as a witness to the Godly initiative while bearing no responsibility. This is the reason behind the Talmudic statement: “Greater is the one who is commanded, and does, than the one who is not commanded, and does.”

“But you, stand here, with Me.” This phrase defines Moshe’s unique status vis a` vis the Godly Presence: Your status is different from theirs. You do not belong to physical matter. You are Mine!

Then why were Moshe’s prayers not accepted, when he was closer to God than any man on earth? “That is plenty for you. Speak to Me no more of this matter.” Why?

Moshe: “And God was irritated with me for your sakes.” “Because of you.” He is not blaming the nation. He is not blaming anyone at all. He is also unable to view his non-entry into the Land as a punishment for hitting the rock at *mei merivah*.

Continuing along the lines of the basic principle discussed above, we must view the prospect of Moshe’s entry into the Land as potentially introducing a presence of Godly power that would be incompatible with a worship of God built on free choice and human initiative.

This is why Yehoshua, Moshe’s faithful servant, is so suited to the role, as are the seventy Elders with him. He is from the people, from within the people. By the initiative of the

people. With Yehoshua there would be no pressure on them from above, unlike the sheer pressure exerted by the mere presence of Moshe, their master who had taken them out of Egypt and split the sea for them.

The Ramban's definition testifies to the substance and spirit of the matter. On the phrase, "Would that their hearts would be in awe of Me this way always," he comments: "So that man would hold in his own hands the power to be just or to be wicked, because 'everything is in Heaven's Hands, except fear of heaven,' and this is what the scripture is saying, only in ordinary human language." These words of the Ramban describe an awe that is a source for love, an awe that is never separated from love, and a love that is never separated from awe.

Here is none of that light and easy love between friends. We find here a love that grows from the ground of the most profound awareness, of the deepest appreciation, deriving from *yirat haromemut*, awe of the supreme. This is love resulting from profound, personal, sensory consciousness of the Godly Presence.

It brings with it a profound gratitude excluding all else, containing only this love. It is *dvaikut*, expressing thanks from the depths of one's heart for having been privileged to shelter beneath the wings of the *Shechina*. With Moshe, fear and awe were the expression of this love from the depths of his heart.

The people needed to cross the threshold and enter the Land. They needed to confront physical matter with the goal of sanctifying it, in order to attach to the Godly Presence, through expression of the physical, in which man is immersed. Only then could physical man's love find its proper expression. Moshe did not require this process of connecting to the Creator through physical matter.