



# Parshas Devarim

For the week ending 9 Av 5758  
31 July - 1 August 1998

## Overview

**T**his Parsha begins the last of the Five Books of The Torah, *Sefer Devarim*. This Book is also called *Mishneh Torah*, "the Repetition of the Torah" (hence the Greek/English title Deuteronomy). *Sefer Devarim* relates what Moshe told the *Bnei Yisrael* during the last five weeks of his life, as they prepared to cross the Jordan into *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe reviews the *mitzvos*, stressing the change of lifestyle they are about to undergo: From the supernatural existence of the desert under Moshe's guidance to the apparently natural way of life they will experience under Yehoshua's leadership in *Eretz Yisrael*.

The central theme this week is the sin of the spies, the *meraglim*. The Parsha opens with Moshe hinting to the sins of the previous generation who died in the desert. He describes what would have happened if they hadn't sinned by sending spies into *Eretz Yisrael*. Hashem would have given them all of the land from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates including the lands of Ammon, Moav, and Edom without a fight. He details the subtle sins that culminate in the sin of the spies, and reviews at length the sin of the spies, and its results: The entire generation would die in the desert, Moshe would not enter *Eretz Yisrael*. He reminds them that their immediate reaction to Hashem's decree was to want to "go up and fight" to redress the sin; he recounts how they wouldn't listen when he told them not to go, that they no longer merited vanquishing their enemies miraculously. They ignored him and suffered a massive defeat. They were not allowed to fight with the kingdoms of Esav, Moav or Ammon — these lands were not to be part of the map of *Eretz Yisrael* in the meantime. When the conquest of Canaan will begin with Sichon and Og, it will be via natural warfare.

## Insights

### THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT

**"Hashem heard your words and He was incensed and He swore, saying 'If even a man of these people, this evil generation, shall see the good Land that I swore to give to your forefathers.' " (1:34)**

**M**aimonides lists five things which happened on Tisha B'Av: It was decreed that the generation who came out of Egypt should not enter the Land of Israel; both Holy Temples were destroyed; the great city of Betar was captured and the tens of thousands of Jews living there were slaughtered. Its king, thought by the greatest of the sages to be the Mashiach, fell amongst them; "And on that day," concludes Maimonides, "which is prepared for tragedy, Turnus Rufus of the kings of Edom/Rome plowed over the Sanctuary and its environs in fulfillment of the prophecy 'Zion will be plowed over like a field.'"

Let me ask you a question. If the Sanctuary was already destroyed, what was so tragic about plowing it over? If Maimonides lists all five of these events together, the implication is that they all are of equal gravity. Moreover, if this is the last event in the list, it implies that this was the end of the process, the final destruction, the final solution.

How can plowing over what has already been destroyed be considered worse than the destruction of the Temples themselves? How can it be listed in the same league as the murder of tens of thousands at Betar; of the extinction of the Messianic hopes of an entire generation? It's only a bunch of ruins, isn't it?

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The world is tuned into a vast broadcast. A broadcast which beams out its message relentlessly day and night: "Go for it! Grab it now!" It's the modern, less eloquent version of the old Epicurean call "Eat drink and be merry — for tomorrow we die!" It's the message of denial. Denial that our actions have cosmic repercussions. Denial that there is a Law. Denial that there is a Lawgiver.

This voice is of immense overpowering strength. It is the voice of the spiritual heirs of Turnus Rufus from the kings of Edom. Edom is Esav, Yaakov's twin brother. We are locked in an historical battle with Esav. It is a symbiotic relationship which allows the ascendancy of one only at the downfall of the other. The world isn't big enough for both of us. When he is up, we are down. And he is riding very high at present. The massive machinery of materialism grinds out its glib jingle to a deafened world. And the still small voice of Yaakov, of the way of the spirit, is drowned out.

Esav destroyed the Holy Temple. But that wasn't enough. He wanted to remove all vestige of its ever being there. That's why Maimonides lists the plowing over of the Sanctuary last: *The ultimate destruction will be that you won't be able to see that there ever was a Temple there in the first place.* They will want to uproot it to the extent that not only can they say it doesn't exist — but it *never* existed. This is the way of denial. It's not enough for them to say "G-d is dead" (*chas v'shalom*). They must say that He was never here in the first place. They want to remove all trace.

This is the greatest tragedy of Tisha B'Av. This is why it is listed at the end. It's the ultimate destruction.

A ruin is a very sad thing. But it speaks of life that once was. It speaks of a reality that existed. When you remove a ruin, you remove its reality from the minds of men. You destroy not just its physical existence, but its spiritual existence as well. You disenfranchise its very existence.

That is what they have done to us. Should we not weep?

#### CONSOLATION

***"Hashem heard your words and He was incensed and He swore, saying 'If even a man of these people, this evil generation, shall see the good Land that I swore to give to your forefathers.'" (1:34)***

**W**hy do we still cry for the destruction of the Holy Temple? It happened so long ago.

Of all his sons, Yaakov loved Yosef the most. Yaakov's favoritism provoked the brothers' jealousy. This jealousy ultimately led to their selling Yosef into slavery. They dipped Yosef's coat into blood and showed it to their father Yaakov. Yaakov supposed that Yosef had been torn to pieces by a wild animal. He rent his clothes and mourned, and despite all his children's efforts to comfort him, Yaakov was inconsolable for 22 years, until he received the news that his son Yosef was alive and well in the land of Egypt.

G-d has only decreed that there be consolation over those who have passed from this world. No such decree exists for those who are still alive. This is why Yaakov was inconsolable. Consolation is only for the bereft, and Yosef was still alive.

It once happened on the night of Tisha B'Av that Napoleon was walking through the streets of Paris. He came upon a synagogue. From inside came the sounds of lamenting. Napoleon told his servant to go inside and bring him the president of the synagogue. After some moments the servant returned with the president. Napoleon said "What is the reason for this terrible lamentation? Have the Jewish People experienced a tragedy that I am not aware of?" "Your majesty," replied the president, "We have experienced a tragedy beyond words. Our Holy Temple has been destroyed." "I was not aware that a tragedy had befallen my Jewish subjects" said Napoleon. "When did this happen?" "Eighteen hundred years ago, Your Majesty." "Eighteen hundred years! — and you're still mourning?" said Napoleon. *"If you can mourn for your temple for eighteen hundred years, you will surely get it back!"*

Consolation is only for the bereft.

There is no consolation for Tisha B'Av because the potential to have everything that we lost is still very much alive. The Holy Temple will be rebuilt. Its Builder lives and endures and His People survive as everlasting witnesses to this fact.

Source: Rashi

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## Parshas **Devarim**

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## Haftorah: Yishayahu 1:1-27

This is the final haftorah of "Three of Affliction." It is always read on the Shabbos before Tisha B'Av.

The ninth of Av wasn't always a day of tragedy. During the days of the Second Temple, it was turned into a day of great joy at the celebration of rebuilding of the *Beis Hamikdash*. When the Second Temple was destroyed, Tisha B'Av reverted to its former sadness.

Every generation in which the Holy Temple is not rebuilt, it is as though we ourselves destroyed it. The Prophet Yirmiyahu laments not for the Temple's destruction, but rather for those evils that caused its destruction. For it is not enough for us to bemoan what was. We must realize that it is within our power to bring the Redemption and the rebuilding of the *Beis Hamikdash*. We must use this time of national mourning to analyze our mistakes and correct them.

This year Tisha B'Av falls on Shabbos and the fast is "pushed off" until Sunday. We could "push off" Tisha B'Av for good, if we want to. We could be dancing in the streets this year, and the ninth of Av could again become a day synonymous with joy and exultation.

It's up to us.

### HORSE SENSE

**"The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's trough. Israel does not know, My people do not perceive." (1:3)**

Rabbi Yochanan ben Taurisa once sold an ox to a non-Jew. When Shabbos came, the non-Jew tried to plough his field, but the ox refused to budge.

He beat the animal vigorously until Rabbi Yochanan came and whispered in the animal's ear "You are no longer under my jurisdiction. You are now under the domain of the non-Jew. You must work now as he desires."

Immediately, the ox started pulling the plough. Seeing this, the non-Jew went and converted. And that's how Rabbi Yochanan got his name "ben Taurisa" — son of an ox (*Taurus*).

Similarly, our Sages relate the incident of the ox which Eliyahu *HaNavi* gave to the false prophets of the *baal*. The ox refused to be slaughtered in the name of the idol *baal* until Eliyahu told it that by letting itself be offered as part of the contest which would ultimately discredit the *baal*, it too would be sanctifying G-d's Name. Only then, the ox gave in and allowed itself to be slaughtered.

Our Sages also tell of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair's donkey which refused to eat food from which *maaser* (tithes) had not been taken.

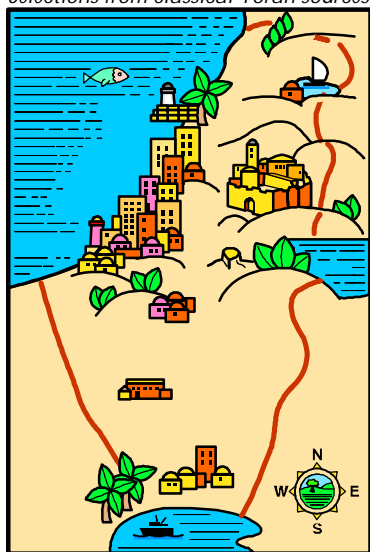
All of this is hinted in this verse: "The ox knows its owner" — there is an ox that knows its master — the ox of Eliyahu *HaNavi* who submitted to being sacrificed to idolatry, and the ox of Rabbi Yochanan ben Taurisa who wouldn't work on Shabbos; "And the donkey, the feeding trough of its master" — the donkey of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair who wouldn't eat un-tithed food. However, you, My people, says Hashem, you have sunk lower than the ox and the donkey, for "Israel does not know, My people do not perceive."

*Horse Sense - Tzoare Shalal in Mayana shel Torah*

# LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

## WHY CRY? — A TALE OF TWO CITIES



How can a Jew weep on Tisha B'Av for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Beis Hamikdash which took place thousands of years ago, when he sees how beautifully Jerusalem has been rebuilt in our days?

Perhaps we can learn a lesson from Rabbi Gershon Kitover, brother-in-law of the Ba'al Shem Tov, who arrived in Jerusalem two and a half centuries ago with the first group of Chassidim to settle in the Holy Land. He looked around at a city which sported foreign legations and all the signs of a serene community restored, in sharp contrast to the desolation described by Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban) in his famous letter reporting on his visit to the city some five centuries earlier.

Rabbi Gershon broke into tears. Now, he said, I fully understand the words of the prayer that Jews say at the end of the final ne'ilah service on Yom Kippur, when the gates of Heaven are about to close. As they stand at this dramatic moment, weakened in body from a long day of fasting and strengthened in spirit from prayer and repentance, they strive to

send one more prayer heavenward, invoking the 13 attributes of Divine mercy. The opening lines, sounding more like a Tisha B'Av lamentation than a Yom Kippur prayer, cry out: "I recall, O G-d, and I am overcome by emotion, as I see every city solidly built on its foundation, while the City of G-d is reduced to the depth of the grave. Nevertheless, we are with G-d and our eyes are turned to G-d."

Until Rabbi Gershon saw the rebuilt Jerusalem of his day, he assumed — as we all do — that the above lament contrasts a desolate Holy City with the mighty capitals of the world, Rome, Paris, London and Berlin. But when he saw the beginnings of a rebuilt Jerusalem and contrasted it with the ruins of the *Beis Hamikdash* he sensed a deeper meaning in those words:

'Every city' — said Rabbi Gershon — refers to the *Jerusalem of Below*, the city of brick and mortar; while the 'City of G-d' refers to the *Jerusalem of Above*, the heavenly city characterized by the *Beis Hamikdash*.

It is certainly painful to contrast these ruins with the prosperity of foreign cities. But the pain is indescribably greater when one sees the contrast between material prosperity and spiritual ruin before his very eyes. Small wonder that this great man of spirit, who finally realized his lifelong dream of reaching Jerusalem, was moved to tears when he sensed the awful contrast.

The above account of Rabbi Gershon Kitover's experience and observation is recorded by one of the great halachic authorities, Rabbi Yosef Tumim, who served as rabbi of Frankfurt, Germany two centuries ago. In his classic commentary on *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim*, "*Pri Megadim*" (661a *Eshel Avraham*), he quotes his father as the source for this moving story about Rabbi Gershon Kitover.

A footnote to this is the sentiment expressed in the last line of the above mentioned prayer — "*Nevertheless, we are with G-d and our eyes are turned to G-d.*" This sense of hope amidst mourning reminds us of the story of a father who took his young son to the Western Wall for the first time. It was Tisha B'Av, and the youngster asked his father why grown men were weeping.

"Here," said the father, "our *Beis Hamikdash* once stood. The *Har Habayis* (Temple Mount) on which it stood was surrounded by four large walls. Now the *Beis Hamikdash* is destroyed, as well as the walls around the *Har Habayis*. All we have left of all our sacred glory is this one wall where you see people praying. Is it any wonder that they cry when they remember what once stood here?"

"But Father," responded the son, "isn't it true that Mashiach will soon come to redeem us, rebuild the *Beis Hamikdash* and the four walls around *Har Habayis*? We should take comfort in the fact that one of those walls is already standing, and there are only three more to go!"

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