

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

DEUTERONOMY (in Greek, "the second law") – the common name for the Fifth Book of Torah, Devarim – is a gross mistranslation of "mishneh torah" by which the rabbis defined this book. The Hebrew phrase has an entirely different meaning. In its original context, dealing with the role of the king, it simply means a copy (or possibly two) of the Torah (Deut. 17:18): "Seated on his royal throne, he shall write for himself a copy of this Torah on a scroll at the dictation of the levitical kohanim." The words, "this Torah," say the rabbis, refer to the entire Mosaic Teaching. The king was supposed to have two scrolls, each including all the Five Books, one kept in his treasury and the other accompanying him everywhere. Borrowing the phrase the rabbis applied "mishneh Torah" to describe the Fifth Book: This book is both a "repetition" (from "shano") and a "reinterpretation" (from "shanon") of a large part of the Mosaic teaching, as elaborated by Moses himself in his vividly detailed speeches – of which this book is mostly comprised – delivered during the last year of Israel's wandering in the desert. The un-Jewish name for this book, "Deuteronomy," is thus both meaningless and misleading. A better translation of the Hebrew name would be: "the reaffirmation of Torah." Both by repeating and by reinterpreting the divine Teaching from Sinai, Moses – on the threshold of the promised land – crystallized and confirmed it for eternity.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

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By **RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

DEVARIM, the name of the fifth book of Torah, stems from the first phrase of the book: "These are the *devarim*" – the words, the speeches – of Moses. The book is also known as Deuteronomy, namely: "Repeated Teaching." Mainly a collection of Moses' farewell speeches during the last year of his life, this book contains a partial repetition of laws and stories related elsewhere in the previous books of Torah – by way of their reiteration, completion, and explanation. Hence its Hebrew surname Mishnah-Torah ("the repetition of Torah") which is the basis for its current name (from the Greek) Deuteronomy.

The setting of this book is provided in its introduction (1:1-5), which concludes: "Moses undertook to expound this Teaching (Torah)." The Hebrew for "expound" is *be'er*. The verb stems from the imagery of a well *b'er*. It means: to dig, divulge, open up. This term is also related to the idea of light (*ohr*). The purpose of expounding, *be-ur* in Hebrew, is to shed light, clarify, enlighten, explain.

In the fifth book of Torah, Moses undertook to unveil and illumine – *be'er*, in both senses, of digging a well of water, and of bringing to light – by repeating and elaborating – the teachings contained in the entire Torah.

QUALIFIED JUDGES: Seven prerequisite qualities of judges are mentioned in Torah (Deuteronomy 1:13-15; Exodus 18:21). They are summarized in Maimonides' Code (Sanhedrin 2:7): (1) wisdom; (2) humility; (3) reverence [of God]; (4) hatred of [the excessive pursuit of] money; (5) love of truth; (6) being loved by others; and (7) a good reputation.

This outline of virtues is applicable to leaders in general. It serves as a guiding light – a list of ideals and goals in human perfection.

The integrity of leadership is the theme of Shabbat Hazon, preceding the Fast of Tisha b'Av, which commemorates the destruction of Israel's both commonwealths (First in 587 B.C.E.; Second in 70 C.E.). It reminds us that complete national redemption is contingent upon the restoration of genuine leadership.

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RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

THE FIFTH BOOK OF TORAH – the culmination of Torah's Five Books of Moses (the Pentateuch) – is called *Devarim* (Moses' words, orations) and *Mishneh-Torah* (repetition of Torah; Deuteronomy). Torah's final book contains a collection of Moses' farewell speeches, delivered during the last year of his life. Thus, this book is also a partial "repetition" – of concepts, laws and stories previously stated in the other books of Torah. Its Hebrew surname, *Mishneh-Torah*, is the basis for its current name, Deuteronomy ("second teaching" in Greek). The book's setting is given in its introduction (1:1-5): "Moses undertook to expound (*ba'er*) this teaching." The Hebrew for "expound" stems from the imagery of a well of water: to dig, divulge, open up. The term is also related to the imagery of light (*ohr*). The purpose of "expounding" is to shed light, clarify and enlighten.

This Shabbat – occurring before *Tisha b'Av* (the fast of the 9th of Av), commemorating Israel's First and Second Commonwealth destructions (586 B.C.E.; 70 C.E.) – is also called *Shabbat Hazon*. *Hazon* (vision) is the opening phrase of Isaiah's first prophecy, read as haftarah for this Shabbat. It includes the key word *Eikha!* (how!) – the biblical outcry of lamentation, that combines bewilderment with resolve.

All "Eikha!" verses are interrelated, pointing to a painful evolution: the people's harshness (Moses' verse), leading to their corruption (Isaiah's verse), causing their destruction (Jeremiah's *Eikha!*). In addition to sorrowful astonishment, *Eikha!* also expresses hope and promise. The lamenter views calamity not as fatal and unavoidable, but as unacceptable, with a resolve to defy tragedy and amplify consolation and a vision of hope.

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

DEVARIM, the name of the Fifth Book of Torah, stems from the first phrase of the book: "These are the devarim" – the words, the speeches – of Moses. The book is also known as *Deuteronomy*, namely: "repeated teaching." Mainly a collection of Moses's farewell speeches during the last year of his life, this book contains a partial repetition of laws and stories related elsewhere in the previous books of Torah – by way of their reiteration, completion and explanation. Hence its Hebrew surname, *Mishneh-Torah* ("the repetition of Torah"), which is the basis for its current name (from the Greek), *Deuteronomy*.

The setting of this book is provided in its introduction (1:1-5) which concludes: "Moses undertook to expound this Teaching (*Torah*)." The Hebrew for expound" is *be'er*. The word stems from the imagery of a well of water (*b'er*). It means: to dig, divulge, open up. This term is also related to the idea of light (*orr*). The purpose of expounding *bi-ur* in Hebrew, is to shed light, clarify, enlighten, explain.

In the Fifth Book of Torah, Moses undertook to unveil and illumine – *be'er*, in both senses, of digging a well of water and of bringing to light – by repeating and elaborating the teachings contained in the entire Torah.

Friday, July 23, 1993

THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

DEVARIM is the Hebrew name of the fifth book of Torah, known as Deuteronomy. Devarim means words, orations; it stems from the book's opening phrase (1:1), "These are the words (speeches; *devarim*) that Moses spoke to all Israel, in Ever Ha-Yarden (east side of Jordan)" during the last year of his life (40th year in the desert). Another title, which defines the book's content, is *Mishneh Torah*, namely "The Repetition of Torah." This term is somewhat imprecisely rendered in Greek as Deuteronomy ("Second Law"). Its true

sense, however, is the explication of teaching – by reiteration and elaboration.

The term *Mishneh Torah* invokes the Hebrew verb for diligent study, *we-shinantam* (in the *Shema*). The term derives from the verse (1:5), "Moses undertook to clarify (*be'er*) this Teaching (Torah)." The Hebrew for clarification invokes the double imagery of a spring of water (*be'er*; well) and a ray of light (*be-or*; enlightenment). To expound on the meanings of Torah is virtually to "dig" and open up wellsprings of insight; to shed light. This is the essence and purpose of Moses' Devarim.

Friday, August 7, 1992

OF WEEK

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In the fifth book of Torah, Moses undertook to unveil and illumine – *be'er*, in both senses, of digging a well and of bringing to light, by repeating and elaborating, the teachings contained in the entire Torah.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

DEVARIM, the name of the Fifth Book of Torah (after its opening "eile ha-devarim:" "these are the words"), is the plural of the Hebrew "devar," which connotes three basic meanings: idea, saying and event. In biblical usage, unlike modern, "davar" never means "thing." It refers to a dynamic concept – not a static object – which is contemplated, expressed or occurring; which is realized in thought, speech and deed. The "devarim" of the fifth and final Book of Torah capture the final year, the 40th, of Israel's wandering in the desert, preparing their entrance to the promised land. These "devarim" remain eternally the guidelines for living. They reinforce the covenant at Sinai and envision the destiny of the people. The Book of Devarim concludes with the death of Moses, father of all prophets, and the uniqueness of his mission.

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

DEVARIM AND DEVORIM: The former (vocalized "va") means words, ideas; the latter (vocalized "vo") means bees.

From *Midrash Rabbah* (1:6): The words of Torah ("*devarim*") are compared to bees ("*devorim*"). As the bees yield sweet honey, but also impart a sharp sting to those who are negligent and careless in approaching them — so are the words of Torah. With utmost respect and care must one approach them, in order to enjoy their celestial sweetness.

Thought of the Day

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE FIFTH BOOK OF TORAH (Devarim) is also known as Deuteronomy, namely “the repeated teaching.” Since this book is mainly a collection of Moses’ farewell speeches during the last year of his life, it contains a partial repetition, completion and explanation of laws and stories related elsewhere in the previous books of Torah. The setting of the book is provided in its introduction (1:1-5), which concludes; “Moses undertook to expound this Teaching.” The Hebrew verb for expounding stems from the imagery of a well of water (*be'er*); meaning to dig, divulge, open up. It is also related to the idea of light (*behaor*); meaning to shed light, clarify, explain. In the Fifth Book of Torah, Moses undertook to unveil and bring to light—by repetition and elaboration—the teachings contained in the entire Torah.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK: "Tisha b'Av", the ninth day of the Hebrew month Av, commemorates the national calamity of "Galut", symbolized by the two destructions of the Temple in Jerusalem, the first, by the Babylonians in 568 B.C.E., and the second, by the Romans in 70 C.E. The day recalls also similar and consequent catastrophes, in various lands and periods, which typify Galut. The remembrance of, and mourning over, Galut as a historical reality with all its tragic manifestations, greatly fostered the people's hope for, and vision of, Ge'ula — redemption and return to Zion. On the Shabbat before Tisha' b'Av, the first chapter of Isaiah is read, beginning with "Hazon," meaning "vision". This chapter uses the key word of biblical lamentation, "eicha" (1:21) which is a poetic outcry of shock and bewilderment, closely renderable as "how come?" It indicates, subtly but acutely, the Mourner's mood of resoluteness and hope. For him, the tragedy of Destruction can never be reconciled. It remains forever a shattering question, indeed, an impossibility. Its only positive solution is full redemption. So concludes the prophet: "Zion will be redeemed with justice, and her returning people, with righteousness." (1:27)

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Thought of the Week

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MOSES AND ISAIAH:

Give ear, O heavens, as I speak!

Hear, O earth, the words of my mouth!

Thus Moses begins his Song, rhetorically addressing the whole universe, “the heavens and the earth” (Dt. 32:1-3). So, too, does Isaiah (1:2):

Hear, O heavens:

Give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken!

Why does Moses use “give ear” for heavens, and “hear” for earth, and Isaiah the reverse? Midrash: “Give ear” indicates more closeness than “hear.” Isaiah, rebuking the people, was closer to earth; Moses, singing to God, was closer to the heavens.

Friday, July 19, 1991

THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

SEVEN PREREQUISITE QUALITIES OF JUDGES are mentioned in Torah (Deut. 1:13-15; Ex. 18:21). They are summarized in Maimonides' Code (San. 2:7): (1) wisdom; (2) humility; (3) reverence (of God); (4) hatred of (excessive pursuit of) money; (5) love of truth; (6) being loved by others; and (7) a good reputation.

This outline of virtues for qualified judges is applicable to leaders in general. The seven points syllabus may sound today like an unrealistic expectation, but it must serve as a guiding light – a list of ideals and goals in human perfection.

The integrity of leadership is the theme of *Shabbat Hazon*, preceding the Fast of Tisha B'Av, which commemorates the destruction of both of Israel's commonwealths (first in 587 B.C.E.; second in 70 C.E.). A reminder that complete national redemption is contingent upon the restoration of genuine leadership.

Thought of the Week

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THESEVEN QUALITIES OF JUDGES, required by Torah (Deut. 1:13-15; Ex. 18:21), are summarized in Maimonides' Code (San. 2:7): (1) wisdom; (2) humility; (3) reverence (of God); (4) hatred of (excessive pursuit of) money; (5) love of truth; (6) being loved by others; and (7) having a good reputation.

Maimonides' summation of the seven virtues of qualified judges may sound like an unrealistic expectation in our society; but it must serve as a guiding light -- a list of ideals and goals in human perfection we must aspire to emulate.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

HAZON means vision. In biblical context it mostly refers to prophecy: divinely revealed insight, wisdom and direction. In its broader sense, vision includes human aspiration, introspection, moral conscience and historical perspective. In Isaiah's complaint (1:3), "My people refuse to envision" (*lo hitbonan*), human awareness in general is meant. The Hebrew verb (from *bina*) implies seeing and penetrating between the lines, perceiving what is beneath and beyond the plain surface; it points to self-inspection and self-understanding. Prophetic or human, vision is indispensable for national survival (Proverbs 29:18): "Without vision, the people are left in disarray" (*yipara*). The Hebrew verb may also mean that the people are left exposed, open to danger, unprotected; or, left unrestrained, lacking moral discipline. Where there is no vision, confusion, insecurity or demoralization cause the people to perish.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

TISHA B'AV (9th day of Av) is the Jewish national day of mourning. This date marks the two destructions of Jewish political and spiritual independence in the land of Israel: the first by the Babylonians (586 B.C.E.), the second by the Romans (70 C.E.). These events are symbolized in the Jewish consciousness by the destructions of the Temple in Jerusalem. But, it is not the loss of a magnificent edifice that the Jews lament. A building – even a Temple – is only a physical structure of wood and stone. Like all other man-made constructions – important and imposing as they may be – a Temple, too, is, by definition, destructable, dispensable, and replaceable. But the people of Israel, so insist the prophets, is not. The Jewish people is indestructable, enduring and destined for ultimate victory and glory. These two national catastrophes, recalled on Tisha B'Av, engendered a remarkable and dynamic, ongoing survival – heroic and tragic indeed – of Jews and Judaism in “galut” (Exile) for many subsequent centuries. The collapse of the wood and stone of the two Temples, far from indicating final defeat of Divine rejection (so claim the enemies of Judaism), signify – to the contrary – for Jews the mystery of an irreplaceable promise and covenant. God seeks and demands the purity of heart and the integrity of deed, not the splendor of imposing houses of rituals. Jews remember the destructions not with despair and helplessness, but with reawakening and resolve: let us return to God; let Him renew our day as of old.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

“HOW COME?” (“eicha”) is a biblical, forceful, rhetorical expression of lamentation and bewilderment, comprising amazement and shock: “How can this be possible?” Intriguingly it appears in Scripture three times in an indicative sequence. Firstly in Torah, Moses bemoans the people’s encumbrance (Deuteronomy 1:12): “How come I alone must carry your harrassment, burden and bickering?” Secondly in the Prophets, Isaiah decries the people’s corruption (1:21): “How come a faithful city is now a harlot? And thirdly in Ketuvim, in the Scroll of Lamentation which repeats as well as starts with this rhetoric exclamation (1:1): “How come a once populated city is now sitting lonely:” There is indeed a connection between the three verses of “How come?”—harshness, decline and destruction. On a deeper level, however, the usage of this rhetoric, in all three instances, points to an underlying sense of consolation and positivism: A refusal to admit that the people’s faults and fall are final and conclusive. They are only temporal, out of line with the people’s true greatness and destiny. By crying out “How come?” all three, Moses, Isaiah and the Lamentor (presumably, Jeremiah), are asserting that all signs of the people’s deterioration are incongruent—they must and they shall be rectified, the people and its city returning to their original glory.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

HUMAN AWARENESS OF GOD is compared by the prophet Isaiah to the animals' awareness of their human masters. So he exhorts his people Israel (1:3):

An ox knows its owner,

A donkey its master's manger;

Israel does not know,

My people does not give thought!

The people of God, complains Isaiah, do not relate to God, perceiving neither His mastery nor His beneficence, not even as domestic beasts recognize and appreciate their human providers and their provisions. Two ways of recognition are mentioned: (a) of the master himself ("An ox knows its owner"); (b) of the sustenance he supplies ("A donkey its masters manger"). In religion, too, human awareness of God is two-fold: clinging in devotion to God Himself and realizing in appreciation His bountiful creation. How ungrateful to recognize neither the Master nor His blessings, teaches the prophet by his dramatic comparison of the people to beasts, showing the people to be worse. Much more is expected of humanity. The idiom "give thought" in the final verse ("hitbonan") implies the idea of human introspection (or self-understanding). The way to human awareness of God is through understanding of self. By better knowing oneself one comes closer to the knowledge of God.

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..HAZON (Vision) is the name of the Shabbat preceding Tisha B'av (ninth day of Av, marking the destruction of the first Temple, in 586 B.C.E., and the second Temple, in 70 C.E.). The name comes from the first word of the Book of Isaiah, whose first prophecy is read on this Shabbat. There, Isaiah admonishes the people harshly and relentlessly: the people is corrupted throughout, "from the heel to the head," the leaders as well as the plain folk. This must not be understood literally as total condemnation. The prophet uses rhetorical emphasis, but his love and regard for the people come through. It is only because he entertains lofty expectations and applies high standards that he accuses with acuteness and force. Compared with other societies all over, then and today, the Israelite one shines as a paradigm of moral excellence and virtue. The very phenomenon of prophecy, and the remarkable fact that the people "denounced" by it cherished it and copied and studied its books, attests to the people's greatness. Far from giving up on the people, the prophet expresses his unshakable conviction of future redemption and restoration: "Zion will be redeemed in justice, and her restored people, in righteousness."

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

..SHABBAT HAZON preceding Tisha B'Av, mourning the Temple's destruction, we read the sharpest prophetic condemnation against Temple ritual (Isaiah 1:12-15). The prophets' pronouncements seem to contradict Torah's teachings. Amos in the name of God argues with the people (5:25): "Did you ever bring Me any sacrifices and offerings, during all those 40 years in the desert?" But Torah tells us they did! Also Jeremiah asserts in the name of God (7:22): "Indeed I did not speak with your ancestors, nor did I order them, when I brought them out of Egypt, on matters of ascent-offerings and ritual-slaughtering." But Torah tells us He did. How is the prophetic claim reconciled with Torah's record of the ordination and practice of sacrifices soon after the Exodus? The prophetic style is emphatic. An underlying echo of a uni-syllable word – "rak" ("only") – is implicit in both prophetic statements. Amos means that the sacrificial ritual was not the **primary** ("rak") occupation of the people during their formative period in the desert. Jeremiah means that sacrifices were not the **main** ("rak") theme of the Divine covenant. The real target of the prophets' outrage is the people's distorted sense of priorities – clinging to peripheral ritual rather than essential worship. Isaiah condemns even Temple visitation, festival celebration and prayer demonstration if they are merely a cover for moral transgression. By means of extreme and provocative pronouncements, the prophets point to the value of balanced and truthful living.

Thought of the Week

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SHABBAT HAZON: The Shabbat before the Ninth of Av, the Jewish national mourning day, is called *Hazon*: Vision. the literal reason for this is that on this Shabbat the first prophecy of Isaiah is read which starts with the words "Vision of Isaiah." But the name also conveys a symbolic message: Jews approach the day of mourning not with despair and confusion but with hope and vision. We mourn the catastrophes of past and present because we envision a better future. The biblical Scroll of Lamentation concludes with the vision of return and restoration (5:21): "Bring us back to You, O Lord, and we shall come back; renew our days as in earlier times." Vision makes the difference between a sense of doom and a reality of renewal.

Candlelight time 8:19 Sabbath ends 9:11

Scriptural reading for Saturday, Aug. 8:

DEVARIM: Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22

HAFTARAH: Isaiah 1:1-27

Shabbat Hazon

Tisha B'Av: Sunday, Aug. 9