

## Parshas Devarim

### THE BUBBLE

Moshe tells the Jews that the Torah is the focal point of life and living, around which all other things revolve:

ה אלהינו דבר אלינו, בחרב לאמר: רב-לכם שבת, בהר הזה. פנו וסעו לכם, ובאו הר האמרי ואל-כל-שכניו, בערבה בהר ובשפלה עד-הנהר הגדל נהר-פרת ובנגב, ובחוף הים-ארץ הכנעני והלבנון, עד-הנהר הגדל נהר-פרת until the great river...” (1: 6,7)

Sinai was a monumental event. Rashi notes how at that moment, the Jews were given Torah, mitzvos, the Mishkan, its utensils, government.

R Ahron Bakst notes that the opening mention of Sinai does not continue with further discussion of that incredible moment, but rather, that the Jews must move on. Moshe says that once Sinai is achieved and actualised, פנו וסעו לכם – it’s time to get going.

The Torah is תורת חיים – instructions for living. R Shmshon Raphael Hirsch notes that the Torah is given in the desert – a bubble, a vacuum of civilisation. Their economy was suspended for forty years – everything was free, easy, and abundant. Life was elemental. Life was stripped of its grandeur, power and glory; they were in the womb, so to speak. This is how the Torah is earned and acquired.

This is also the function of exile – a return to the wilderness, a return to the womb to reacquaint ourselves with our duties.

Moshe told the people that if the heights of the Torah can be retained, going out into the world is not scary; it is natural. This is the shining light we can be.

### GOING PLACES

The entire book of Devarim is one long event – Moshe’s parting words with the nation. It begins with Moshe listing the locations they travelled through, which Rashi notes are thinly veiled hints to the sins and tragedies that took place at each of them.

But if Moshe's goal was to rebuke, the way to do that ought to have been through subtle references to the events. The locations were incidental to the events that took place – so why list the places at all?

Perhaps it is because the places themselves are central to understanding how they went wrong.

Teshuva – as delineated by the Rambam – is only fully achieved when the same person, in the same situation, in the same place, do not make the same mistake. The specification of the place is important – sin harms the atmosphere it occurs in, which is then rectified through repentance.

Moshe referenced the locations because they had been damaged by the impact of their behaviour. The Jews were on the cusp of entering Israel – he pleaded with them not to make the same mistakes that they had in the desert. The desert events had been bad, but not catastrophic. Israel would not be like anything they had experienced though, and their actions would have an effect on the environment. We testify this every day in the third paragraph of Shema.

The land of Israel is sensitive to the actions of its residents – Moshe hinted to them to take care of it.

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