

We have arrived at the final book of our Torah. *Devarim*, as it is called in Hebrew, means *words* and also *things*. And this is most certainly a book of many words and many things. *Deuteronomy* is Greek for *Mishneh Torah – second law*, which is what the earliest sages called this book. I like to think of it as an open-ended story of metamorphosis that is still taking place today and will continue as long as there are Jews in the world.

Moses, when called by HaShem to lead the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery, says *Lo ish devarim anochi* – I am not a man of words. He adds that his mouth and his tongue are *heavy*. And now, nearly 40 years later, he is full of eloquent words heavy with urgency to prepare the people for their new life with new leaders in a new land. It is important to note that with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, he is not speaking to the people he has led out of Egyptian slavery. This is a new generation, who needs to understand their history so they can follow its positive aspects and avoid its mistakes. And it is imperative that they learn to structure their lives within the laws and ordinances their ancestors received on Mount Sinai, so they remain able to uphold their – and ultimately our – part of our eternal covenant.

Moses embarks on a series of speeches which retrace the arduous trek through the desert. He enumerates their recent victories, but also recounts the story of the scouts, to make sure the people understand why HaShem has prevented their forefathers and Moses himself from entering the Promised Land. He does not mince words when describing the people's shortcomings, and he makes sure to include himself when he tells the people why their parents were not permitted to enter the land: "The Lord was also angry with me because of you, saying, 'Neither will you come there.'" One can read a tiny note of accusation in "because of you," and derive from it a beautiful lesson: Even our greatest leaders are only human. Jewish stories tend to sanitize the lives of our great rabbis and thinkers in order to highlight their strengths for us to emulate, but this can make these individuals quite one-dimensional. Moses, however, is richly portrayed with all his human weaknesses, and this small "because of you" is a wonderful case in point. It harkens back to the events in Parashah Chukat, when Moses, tired and frustrated from all the obstinacy and complaining, lashes out at the people and strikes the rock instead of speaking to it. Even the humblest and most patient people have a breaking point, and Moses had reached his. He is not superhuman, but simply human like all of us, and like the rest of the generation that left Egypt, he will die without entering the new land. But before he does, he addresses the people with powerful, visionary words, laying out both positive and negative scenarios to illustrate how they must choose if they are to survive as a people. The long, slow metamorphosis has begun. From a man of few words unsure of his ability to lead, Moses has grown to a strong, eloquent mentor and guide. Now the people must also grow and learn how to coalesce into a nation that will endure from generation to generation. Moses knows that there will be many missteps along the way, so he is careful to leave them an enduring legacy.

This is Shabbat Hazon, the Shabbat of Vision, so named after the first words of the Haftarah (Isaiah 1:1-27), the last of the three "Haftarot of Rebuke" which are read during the three weeks of mourning between 17. Tamuz and 9. Av. We are *min ha metzrayim* – between the narrow places, sorely in need of a vision in light of all the catastrophes we remember during this time. In Chapter 1 Verse 12 of our Parashah Moses asks "*eichah – how* can I bear alone your trouble, your burden, and your strife?" Our Haftarah, Isaiah 1:21 reads, "*eichah – how* she (Jerusalem) has become a harlot, a faithful city, full of justice, in which righteousness would lodge, but now murderers." Midrash Eichah Rabbah tells us that there were three prophets who used the word *eichah* in conjunction with Israel: Jeremiah (in Lamentations), who sees her disgraced and abandoned; Isaiah, who sees her arrogance and recklessness; and Moses, who sees her potential greatness. The Midrash reverses the order, emphasizing the degradation of Israel, and indeed, that is what these three weeks are about. But following them are the seven weeks of consolation that lead up to Rosh HaShanah. During these weeks, the haftarot are encouraging, as are the words of Moses, whose warnings and rebukes still carry a vision of hope and promise.

Twice in Parashah Devarim HaShem orders Moses to tell us to move on: "You have dwelt long enough at this mountain" (1:6), and "You have circled this mountain long enough" (2:3). And we have been on the move ever since, in fits and starts, but ever onward, passing the teachings of Moshe Rabbinu, Moses our Teacher, from generation to generation. This vision is why we endure. May we all do our part to further it!