

5781 – Deuteronomy 1-3 – D'varim (Words)

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Our Dialogue with G-d¹

The writer sits at her desk, pen poised. The sheet is blank.

Ideas bombard her mind. Will her message be powerful? She discards, develops, refines, and expands. Words, sentences, and paragraphs. She trims, fine-tunes, and gropes for clearer phrases.

The final version is before her. The page is messy, full of blotches, scribbles, and indentations strewn in every which direction. But with these words she has created—given birth to—her idea. This is the power of words.

The process is a metaphor for life itself. The journey begins with a blank sheet of paper. There are many paths and daily crossroads. There are mistakes and revisions, so many crossed-out false starts, and actions clumsily added like the asterisks on the side of her paper.

But in the end, she has created something meaningful.

These are the words **which Moses spoke** to all Israel.—DEUTERONOMY 1:1
With this sentence, the fifth book of the Torah, the book of Devarim, or "Words," begins.

Although all the five books of the Torah were transcribed by Moses, the Talmud differentiates between the book of Devarim and the first four books: they were transcribed, word for word, **as dictated by G-d to Moses**, while Devarim was written by Moses "in his own name." (Megillah 31b)

Nevertheless, **the book of Devarim is regarded as one of the five books of the "Written Torah," implying that even the words themselves (not only the concepts and ideas) are divinely given.** This is because Moses had nullified his own ego to be completely in tune with G-d's will, to the point that "the divine presence spoke from his mouth." (Zohar I: 232a; Shemot Rabbah 3:15)

The Torah is comprised of two basic elements: the Written Torah (the five books of Moses) and the Oral Torah (Mishnah, Talmud, codes and commentaries).

Both the "Written Torah" and the "Oral Torah" derive from the revelation at Sinai. But while **the Written Torah was set in writing at the time by Moses, the Oral Torah developed and continues to develop over the generations.**

Because of the unique way in which book of Devarim was transcribed—generated by the mind of Moses, yet at the same time unequivocally the words of G-d—it acts as a bridge between the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.

The Written and the Oral Torah need this bridge, because they represent two dimensions of our developing relationship with it.

The **Written Torah** speaks with the voice of authority and transcendence. It is a voice that cannot be challenged or altered. **Even a single letter cannot be contributed to it or erased from it.**

The **Oral Torah**, on the other hand, is **a continuing dialogue of constant growth, analysis, and application.** The Oral Torah goes back and forth in discussions and conclusions, adapting to situations as they arise.

Both the written and oral traditions are undeniably parts of the divine Torah. Both are G-d's voice on how to lead our lives to create a better world.

But while the Written Torah takes the "**masculine**" form in speaking to us from above, the Oral Torah takes the "**feminine**" approach in speaking through us. **Both work jointly to express G-d's will** for our world and to create the Judaism that adapts to every circumstance without inherent change. But only the second aspect of the Torah, the feminine Oral Torah, involves our participation as it emerges and develops through time.

The Written Torah and the Oral Tradition represent two phases in our relationship with the Torah.

On the first level, the mind is preoccupied with the Torah as an intellectual performance. The relationship at this level can be compared to a subject-object encounter, an "I" facing "it." The second level emerges when Torah becomes, not just an acquisition of knowledge, but a personal meeting place, an "I" facing "you," or better yet, a "we" relationship.

While our relationship with Torah might begin as an intellectual activity that requires exertion, concentration, and absorption, this is not the ultimate intent. Only in the second stage have we reached the point whereby we have entered into a personal experience with Torah.

G-d wants us to be His partners in creation, so that we are not only transcribing His will into our life's story, but, in addition, His will has become an intrinsic part of our personality, so that we can use our own words and actions to express it. We are no longer like a student mechanically writing notes on a professor's lecture, but rather one so bound up with his personal mentor that the student's words spontaneously reflect the ideas, positions, and philosophies of his teacher.

In order to be truly personal, G-d's message had to be universally accessible. Thus the Sages tell us that Moses did not speak only these words of Devarim,

¹ Chana Weisberg, *Shabbat deLights, Vayikra/Bamidbar/Devarim*, (chabad.org), pp. 207-212

but that **he also translated the entire Torah into the seventy languages of the original seventy nations of the world.** (Bereishit Rabbah 49:2)

This translation not only reflects the bridge that the book of Devarim forms to the Oral Tradition, but it also opened up the Torah to future translations. It represents the personal communication and understanding of Torah by all kinds of people at all times.

The book of Devarim was addressed to the generation who were about to enter the Holy Land. The translation reflected what that generation **and each successive generation would need.**

Their parents had left Egypt forty years before and witnessed the wondrous giving of the Torah in the miraculous, secluded, spiritual setting of the wilderness. But this new generation was the one that would enter the Land of Israel to live an existence that was in harmony with nature. The Torah could not remain a closed spiritual/intellectual exercise—as something that they had objectively witnessed—but rather it needed to become something with which they were intimately familiar, that they would communicate among themselves, within the context of their new circumstances, in their own country.

This new development could only happen if they learned from their leader, Moses, how to use their own words to create a G-dly communication. Moses demonstrated to them how to experience Torah. He was the bridge from the objective experience of the Written Torah to their more personal experience of the Oral Tradition.

While the translation and opening up of the Torah to our own input and dialogue might seem to detract from its holiness and divine absoluteness, in truth this is the ultimate elevation. **G-d desires that Torah become a part of our experience,** which is far more intimate and meaningful than the objective study of a static text.

That is why this section of the Torah is always read on the Shabbat before the Ninth of Av, the saddest day on our national calendar. It reminds us that, like the "opening up" of the Torah, the loss of the Temples and the subsequent exile will also result in a greater elevation. In the final redemption, in the Messianic Era at the end of our journey, we too will experience a more intimate relationship with G-d, precisely because of our encounters within exile.

Devarim, "Words," teaches us the power of our words, in being used as an ongoing G-dly dialogue.

1. *The Torah is comprised of two basic elements: the Written Torah (the five books of Moses) and the Oral Torah (Mishnah, Talmud, codes and commentaries).*

a. *Sola Scriptura*²

- 1) The "doctrine" of *sola scriptura* is fundamental to the debates between **Catholics and Protestants** also, as well as ... to the lack of doctrinal unity among Protestants.
 - a) *Sola scriptura* ("by the Bible alone") is an affirmation that **the only source of knowledge regarding divine revelation is the Bible, and that there is no ... (other) authority established by (the Messiah) to correctly interpret it.**
 - b) Even within Protestantism the definition of *sola scriptura* is disputed, although it is accepted as a general principle. One expression of *sola scriptura* ... is found in the Westminster Confession—"The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, **is ether expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture ... All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves,** nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, **are so clearly propounded** and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, **but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them...**"
 - c) **It is important to understand that the issue is *sola* NOT *scriptura*—**even the Catholic Church ... affirms the importance of the Bible as an indispensable source of discovering God's revelation.
- 2) Historical Difficulties
 - a) **The idea of *sola scriptura* does not make its appearance in Christianity until the 14th century.** John Wycliffe first formulated the concept—it was rejected by his colleagues at Oxford and found no general support.
 - b) **It does not *reappear* until the 16th century—it was promoted by Martin Luther as one of the principles of the Reformation.**
 - c) **How is it possible that a principle so vital to Christianity was unknown until the 14th century?—And, is one to believe that Martin Luther received a revelation in the 16th century that was unknown to the (Church) Fathers ... (some) of whom were taught by the Apostles or by men who knew and were instructed by the apostles?**

- d) *Sola scriptura* contains two important facets.
 - 1] One, **the Bible is the only source of God's revelation.**
 - 2] Two, **there is no church authority empowered to infallibly interpret its meaning.**
- 3) **There are insurmountable difficulties with these positions.**
 - a) It ignores the super-abundance of historical evidence that **the early Church relied on Apostolic or Sacred Tradition in resolving doctrinal disputes, not *sola scriptura*.**
 - b) **ALSO, the Bible** as we now have it **was not compiled into one book until THE END OF THE 4TH CENTURY.**
 - c) If Sacred Scripture is the only source by which a person can know what (Yeshua) taught, **how was the faith transmitted from the death of the last Apostle until the canon of the Bible was formulated** at the Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) and approved by Pope Damasus I?
 - d) **AND, prior to the Councils of Hippo and Carthage there were disagreements among local (congregations) regarding which books belonged in the New Testament.**
 - 1] Questions were raised regarding the inspiration of the Epistles of James, Jude, 2Peter, 2, 3John, Hebrews, and the Book of Revelation.
 - 2] Luther threw out 7 books of the Hebrew Bible: Tobias, Baruch, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiastics, I & II Maccabees, and parts of Esther and Daniel.
 - e) Yet ... **all Christians accepted these books as being divinely inspired until the 16th century.**
 - 1] Luther discounted the Epistles of James, Jude, Hebrews, and the Book of Revelation—should they be rejected too?
 - 2] To be consistent, one who accepts *sola scriptura* should reject any book that the Bible itself does not affirm to be divinely inspired—the result would be a very thin Bible!
- 4) A Principle of Anarchy—not Unity
 - a) **Individual interpretation** of the Bible has lead to an uncontrollable fragmentation within Protestantism—rapidly approaching 44,000 denominations.
 - b) Even Luther, who introduced this virus of chaos into Christianity, came to see the excesses to which it was headed.
 - 1] After he broke from Rome Luther wrote that **the Bible could be interpreted by anyone “even the humble miller's maid, nay, a child of nine.”**

- 2] But, later in his career **he called the Bible the “heresy book”**—in 1525 he wrote: **“There are as many sects and beliefs as there are heads.** This fellow will have nothing to do with baptism; another denies the sacraments; a third believes that there is another world between this and the Last Day. Some teach that (Yeshua) is not God; some say this, some say that. **There is no rustic so rude but that, if he dreams or fancies anything IT MUST BE THE WHISPER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT and he himself is a prophet.”**
- c) The vital issue with *sola scriptura* is interpretation.
 - 1] *Sola scriptura* asserts that **the Holy Spirit guides the Bible believing Christian in correctly interpreting the word of God in matters essential to the faith—but, HOW DOES ONE RECONCILE DIFFERENCES?**
 - 2] **Take the case of** “baptismal regeneration.”
 - a] One group teaches that baptism is essential.
 - b] A second group teaches that baptism is desirable, but not essential.
 - c] A third group rejects baptism altogether.
 - 4] Each group cites the Bible as its source—which is the correct interpretation?
 - d] **Is the holy spirit is responsible for this confusion?**
 - e] When one listens to the scriptural interpretations that flood the Christian airwaves, one rarely hears qualifying statements like, “In my opinion.” Rather the audience is told **“this is what the word of God means”** with an air of absolute certitude.
 - f] **By rejecting an infallible teaching authority in the Church, SOLA SCRIPTURA ATTRIBUTES INFALLIBILITY TO EACH BELIEVER!**
- 5) *Sola Scriptura* is NOT Biblical
 - a) The most damaging criticism of *sola scriptura* is the reality that the Bible does not teach it.
 - 1] **This leads to an absurdity**—the adherents of *sola scriptura* claim that every thing that is essential for a (Believer) to know is clearly taught in the Bible, and only in the Bible—but the Bible does NOT teach us that this is the case.

6) Examples:

a) Leviticus 23:3

"There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. **You are not to do any work**; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the LORD.

1) **WHAT IS "WORK?"**

Is it gainful employment? No? Why not? Because, according to the Rabbis, work must be defined in such a way that it applies equally to every member of the community.

Does "work" depend of the amount of energy expended or the fatigue involved?—No. Otherwise, the Sabbath would vary according to the physique, skill and stamina of each individual.

Is work for one, pleasurable for another?—Perhaps, but that does not determine what "work" is either. The early Rabbis **formulated a comprehensive classification** of the categories of labor forbidden on the Sabbath from the various references of prohibited types of work mentioned in the Bible (M. Shab. 7:2).

b) Leviticus 23:9-11

⁹The LORD said to Moses, ¹⁰"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. ¹¹He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it **on the day after the Sabbath**.'

1] Does this refer to the "day after the *weekly* Sabbath" or "the day after a *holiday* Sabbath" (which could be any day of the week).

2] Leviticus 23:24-25

²⁴"Say to the Israelites: '**On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of sabbath rest**, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. ²⁵Do no regular work, but present a food offering to the LORD.'

3] Leviticus 23:39

³⁹"So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the LORD for seven days; **the first day is a day of sabbath rest, and the eighth day also is a day of sabbath rest**.

c) 2Timothy 3:14-17

¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Messiah Yeshua. ¹⁶**All Scripture** is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (*mitzvah*).

1] The "Scripture" with which Timothy has been acquainted "from childhood" (v. 15) refers to the Hebrew Bible—does this mean that Paul taught that the Hebrew Bible was the ONLY source needed to know what Yeshua taught?

d) In Romans, Paul argues that (Yeshua's) death and resurrection has made Gentiles and Jews full and equal partners in the eyes of Israel's God.³

But that's not the problem. The problem is how Paul backs up that claim with his interpretation of the Bible.

In Romans 9:25-26, Paul quotes two passages from the book of the prophet Hosea (1:10 and 2:23), where God says those who are "not my people" will be called "my people" and will be "children of the living God."

Paul reads "not my people" as Gentiles who are then called by God to become "my people"—making Gentiles equal partners with Israel which has been on God's mind all along!

Only, Hosea isn't talking about God having mercy on Gentiles. "Not my people" refers to the rejected and stubborn Israel whom God will restore as his beloved people after a period of punishment.

The way that Paul interprets these texts is not what Hosea meant to say. Not at all.

e) In 1Corinthians 10:1-22, Paul recounts the Israelites and their period of desert wandering as a warning to his reader to be faithful to God today. According to the (Hebrew Bible), God provided water to the Israelites from a rock—at the beginning of the forty years of wandering (Exodus 17) and at the end (Numbers 20).⁴

There are some Jewish interpreters that handled this scripture in a creative way by claiming that the two rocks that

3 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/3-reasons-why-apostle-pau_b_5942792

4 Ibid.

supplied water were in fact one and the same. They also believed that the rock *accompanied* the Israelites through the desert like a moveable water fountain.

Enter Paul. In verse 4 he connects not only this (Hebrew Bible) episode to (Messiah) ... **but the moveable rock idea too**. And so, in Paul's interpretation, (Yeshua) is the "spiritual rock *that followed*" the Israelites in the desert.

Also, in Galatians 3:19, Paul says that the Law on Mt. Sinai given through Moses was "ordained through angels." (Acts 7:52-53 and Hebrews 2:2-3 say something similar.)

You can read the (Hebrew Bible) upside down, backwards, or in Klingon, and you won't find any mention of a rock following the Israelites in the desert or angels involved in the giving of the Law.

However, it should be noted that Paul isn't just using his imagination in his own interpretive flair. An angelic presence on Mt. Sinai when God gave Moses the Law **is part of Paul's Jewish heritage**. This is where keeping the where and when in mind during Biblical interpretation is key.

And so, **Paul accepts interpretations from outside sources of the (Hebrew Bible) that aren't in the (Hebrew Bible)**—an act that ruffles many conservative Christian readers that believe Paul shouldn't endorse this sort of nonsense. Instead, Paul is supposed to correct it, i.e., the "misinterpretation" and get the Bible right.

f) 2Timothy 3:1-9

¹But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.

²People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—

⁵having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people ... ⁶Just as **Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses**, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. ⁹But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.

1] Tanhuma,⁵ *Ki Tissa*, #19; Tanhuma B, *Ki Tissa*, 13; Shabbat 89a; Exodus Rabbah⁶ 41:7.

"And when the people saw that Moses delayed (*boshesh*) to come down from the mount" (Exod. 32:1). "Six hours (*ba'u shesh*) of the day⁽⁸²⁸⁾ have passed," they said, "and Moses has not yet come down, even though when he went up on high he promised, 'After forty days, at the beginning of the day's sixth hour, I will be back.'" At the end of forty days, there gathered forty thousand [of the mixed multitude]⁽⁸²⁹⁾ that had come up with Israel, **together with two of Egypt's magicians, whose names were Jannes and Jambres⁽⁸³⁰⁾—it was they who performed all those acts of witchcraft in Pharaoh's presence**, as is said, "They also, the magicians of Egypt, did in like manner with their secret arts" (Exod. 7:11). All of them gathered against Aaron and said, "Moses will not come down again." Aaron and Hur responded, "Any moment he will be coming down from the mount." But the mixed multitude paid no attention to them.

(828) Twelve noon—thus, six hours have passed of the fortieth day, the day Moses promised he would be back.

(829) See Exod. 12:38.

(830) See *JE (Jewish Encyclopedia)* 7:71.

2] Jannes and Jambres

Jannes and Jambres was composed in Greek by a Jew sometime in the first or second century. A brief quotation of this work is found in Philostorgius, *Hist. eccl.* 9.2. **The legendary figures Jannes and Jambres were thought to have been two of Pharaoh's magicians who opposed Moses. This tradition is alluded to in 2Tim 3:8-9.** In *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* they interpret a dream of Pharaoh in which Moses' birth is predicted (*Tg. Ps.-J.* Exod 1:15), and they later reappear as Balaam's helpers (*Tg. Ps.-J.* Num 22:22). In his commentary on Matthew (on Matt 27:9) Origen (third century) refers to an apocryphal book enti-

⁵ Midrash Tanhuma is the name given to three different collections of Pentateuch *aggadot*; two are extant, while the third is known only through citations. These midrashim bear the name of R. Tanhuma because they consist partly of homilies originating with him and partly of homilies by aggadic teachers who followed his style.

⁶ Exodus Rabbah (or *Shemot Rabbah*) is the "great" midrash to Exodus. It was thought to have been written c. 10th-12th century CE although it contains material that is considerably older.

tled the *Book of Jannes and Jambres*. Other ancient authors knew of these magicians. It seems clear that there was such a book in late antiquity, but only Greek and Latin fragments of it have survived. **Of interest is Jannes's return from the dead through necromancy to warn his brother Jambres of the consequences of evil.**⁷

2. The **Oral Torah**, on the other hand, is **a continuing dialogue of constant growth, analysis, and application**. The Oral Torah goes back and forth in discussions and conclusions, adapting to situations as they arise.

a. Matthew 23:1-3

¹Then Yeshua said to the crowds and to his disciples: **"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you.** But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach ...

3. We are no longer like a student mechanically writing notes on a professor's lecture, but rather one so bound up with his personal mentor that the student's words spontaneously reflect the ideas, positions, and philosophies of his teacher.

a. Jeremiah 31:31-33

³¹"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. **"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.** I will be their God, and they will be my people.

4. In order to be truly personal, G-d's message had to be universally accessible. Thus the Sages tell us that Moses did not speak only these words of Devarim, but that **he also translated the entire Torah into the seventy languages of the original seventy nations of the world.** (Bereishit Rabbah 49:2)

- a. The ideal of the religion of the Rabbi was **the extension of God's Kingship over all the peoples of the world**, and the Jews had a constant reminder of it in the regulation, 'A benediction which contains no reference to the Divine Kingship is no benediction' (Ber. 40b). That means that the benediction had to be introduced by the

formula, 'Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, *King of the Universe*.' It followed from this that the doors could not be bolted against any Gentile who desired admittance from pure motives.

Genuine converts were welcomed and highly esteemed. 'Proselytes are dear (to God), for they are described in the same terms as the Israelites. The children of Israel are called "servants," as it is said, "For unto Me the children of Israel are servants" (Lev. xxv. 55), and proselytes are called "servants," as it is said, "To love the name of the Lord to be His servants" (Is. lvi. 6). Israelites are called "ministers," as it is said, "Ye shall be named the priests of the Lord, men shall call you ministers for our God" (ibid. lxi. 6), and proselytes are called "ministers," as it is said, "The strangers that join themselves to the Lord to minister unto Him" (ibid. lvi. 6). The children of Israel are called "friends," as it is said, "The seed of Abraham, My friend" (ibid. xli. 8), and proselytes are called "friends," as it is said, "(God is) the friend of the proselyte" (Deut. x. 18). The word "covenant" is used in connection with Israel, as it is said, "My covenant shall be in flesh" (Genesis. xvii. 13)," and similarly with proselytes, as it is said, "Who hold fast by My covenant" (Is. lvi. 6). The word "acceptance" is used in connection with Israel, as it is said, "That they may be accepted before the Lord" (Exod. xxviii. 38), and with proselytes it is said, "Their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar" (Is. lvi. 7),' (Mech. to xxii. 20; 95a). There is more to the same effect, which goes to demonstrate that the Israelite and the convert were placed on exactly the same level.

On the verse, 'And the souls that they had gotten (the Hebrew is literally *made*) in Haran' (Genesis. xii. 5), we are told, **'Abraham made proselytes among the men and Sarah among the women.** Whoever brings a heathen near (to God) and converts him is as though he had created him' (Genesis. R. XXXIX. 14). **One Rabbi even declared: 'The Holy One, blessed be He, did not exile Israel among the nations for any other reason than that proselytes should be added to them' (Pes. 87b).**⁸

b. Matthew 28:19-20

¹⁹Therefore go and **make disciples of all nations** ... ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

7 Craig A. Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies*, (Hendrickson Publishers), p. 52.

8 Dr. A Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, (E.P.Dutton & Co., 1949), pp. 63, 64.