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**Is Hashem Punishing Us**

**Or Waking Us Up from**

**Our Spiritual Slumber**

**By Rabbi Ozer Alport**

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**Rabbi Ozer Alport**

The book of Devorim begins with Moshe’s review of Jewish history from the time of the Exodus until the present. Much of Parshas Devorim revolves around Moshe rebuking the nation for sins they committed during this period, in an attempt to ensure that they would not continue in their erroneous ways.

Rashi writes that Moshe waited to censure the people until the end of his life, just as Yaakov delayed reproaching his children until just before his death because he was afraid that his criticism may cause them to abandon him and follow in the path of his wicked brother Eisav.

This approach seems difficult to reconcile with the ruling of the Rema (Yoreh Deah 334:1) that when a person is deserving of admonishment and punishment, it must be carried out even if doing so may cause him to adopt sinful practices. If so, how could Yaakov and Moshe push off their reprimands for so many years instead of delivering them immediately without worrying about the potential ramifications?

Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman explains that the Shulchan Aruch is discussing punishments that are meted out by beis din, which must be given promptly and without concern for the consequences. On the other hand, when an individual wishes to convey words of reproof, he can – and should – wait to express them at a time when they are most likely to be effective.

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**Rabbi Yisroel Reisman and Rabbi Aharon Leib Shteinman**

Applying this distinction between punishment and reproach to the current period on the calendar, Rav Yisroel Reisman points out that Tisha B’Av is a day of rebuke, when Hashem tries to get our attention and wake us up spiritually.

Contrary to conventional wisdom that views Av as a month when Hashem is hidden, Rav Tzaddok maintains that Av is a time when Hashem reveals Himself and it is even easier to connect to Him. Rav Tzaddok explains that if a person borrows money, he does not need to repay the loan until he encounters the lender, but once they meet, he must return the amount that he borrowed.

During the month of Av, Hashem reveals Himself and “encounters” us to facilitate repayment for our transgressions. Although the suffering that we have endured as part of that process has been painful and bitter, the silver lining is that these meetings are a time when Hashem’s presence can be felt.

After the Holocaust, the Klausenberger Rebbe was renowned for imparting strength to those who had lost everything through messages of emunah and encouragement that enabled them to rebuild. He was once asked how he was able to maintain his belief and trust in Hashem after everything he had seen and lived through.

The sagacious Rebbe reversed the question and explained that when one sees extraordinary circumstances transpiring around him, in which an entire nation is brutally persecuted in a manner that defies logic, the only possible conclusion is that it must be the result of a guiding hand acting for reasons that escape us, but which certainly exist.

It is never pleasant when reimbursement is forcibly extracted from a debtor, but it is also incontrovertible evidence of the presence of the lender – Hashem – Who has come to collect payment. With this introduction, we now understand that the tragedies that we mourn in the month of Av should not be viewed as punishments for the sake of punishment, but as messages of rebuke to wake us up from our spiritual slumber and remind us that our loving Father is here with us and cares deeply about our actions. (Parsha Potpourri)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Devarim 5783 email of whY I Matter, the parsha sheet edited by Yedidye Hirtenfeld for the Young Israel of Midwood in Brooklyn, NY.*

**Why Does the Shomer “Watch” the Dead?**

**By**[**Yehuda Shurpin**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/15169/jewish/Shurpin-Yehuda.htm)

When a Jew passes away, it is a mitzvah for another Jew to watch over the body from the time of death until burial. This duty is known as being a *shomer*, a “guard” or “watcher.” This [mitzvah](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1438516/jewish/Mitzvah.htm) is so important that if a *shomer*cannot find a replacement, he or she should not pause even for prayer or reciting the Shema.1

Here’s why it’s done:

**Not Abandoned**

Firstly, having a *shomer* demonstrates that the departed is not abandoned. Even though the soul has departed, the body is honored, and cared for with dignity and respect.2

**Guarding the Void**

Secondly, when the soul departs, it leaves behind a vacuum.

As an empty jar can attract unwanted pests, a body that has lost its holy soul becomes susceptible to negative spiritual forces until properly buried. Having a *shomer*present, particularly one who recites prayers and psalms, safeguards the body until it can be laid to rest.3

**Unwanted Animals**

A practical reason for the *shomer* is to prevent critters or rodents from defiling the body. This was especially important in times when people lived in closer proximity to nature and refrigeration was not possible.4

Brief Guidelines For the Shomer

**Recitation of Prayers:**A *shomer* should spend the time reciting prayers and [psalms](https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/15770/jewish/Tehillim-Psalms.htm), as it brings great merit to the departed soul during its journey to the next world.5



***Art by***[***Sefira Lightstone***](https://www.chabad.org/3159160)

**Minimum of Two Watchers:** Ideally, there should be at least two *shomerim*present, ensuring that if one needs to step out, there is always someone watching over the body.6

**Regardless of Physical Protection:**The presence of a *shomer* is required regardless of whether the body is in a physically protected place, such as a secure morgue, as the purpose of a *shomer* extends beyond physical protection to honor the deceased.7

**Shabbat and Holidays:**The responsibility of being a *shomer* applies even on Shabbat and holidays.8

**Shomer for Multiple Bodies:**A person may be a *shomer* for multiple bodies at the same time.9

**Prayers and**[**Shema**](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/705353/jewish/The-Shema.htm)**:**A *shomer*is not permitted to recite Shema or prayers (other than those said out of respect for the body, such as psalms) within approximately 6 feet (4 cubits) of the body.10 (According to many, indoors, the prohibitions extends to the entire room11 ). If there are two *shomers*, they should take turns stepping away to recite the Shema or prayers when necessary.12

**Eating and Drinking:**Ideally, eating and drinking should not be done near the body. In case of great need, the *shomer*can turn away from the body briefly to have a small snack or drink.13

**Respectful Environment:**Friendly greetings and frivolous conversations should be avoided in the vicinity of the deceased, maintaining a solemn and respectful atmosphere.14

May we merit the time when we will be reunited with our loved ones through the coming of Moshiach and the Resurrection of the Dead.

**FOOTNOTES**

[1.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6001982/jewish/Why-Does-the-Shomer-Watch-the-Dead.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef1a6001982) *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim*71:3; *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deiah* 341:6.

[2.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6001982/jewish/Why-Does-the-Shomer-Watch-the-Dead.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef2a6001982) See Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot 3:1.

[3.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6001982/jewish/Why-Does-the-Shomer-Watch-the-Dead.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef3a6001982) See Zohar 3:88b; *Maavor Yabok* 2:9, 3:9; *Gesher Hachaim I* 5:4.

[4.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6001982/jewish/Why-Does-the-Shomer-Watch-the-Dead.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef4a6001982) See *Gesher Hachaim I* 5:5.

[5.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6001982/jewish/Why-Does-the-Shomer-Watch-the-Dead.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef5a6001982) See *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deiah* 344:17; *Maavor Yaabok, Siftei Rinanot,* 4,9.

[6.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6001982/jewish/Why-Does-the-Shomer-Watch-the-Dead.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef6a6001982) See *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 71:4 and *Kaf Hachaim* 24 *ad loc*.

[7.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6001982/jewish/Why-Does-the-Shomer-Watch-the-Dead.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef7a6001982) See *Nitei Gavriel, Hilcot Aveilut I* 9:3 and fn. 5.

[8.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6001982/jewish/Why-Does-the-Shomer-Watch-the-Dead.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef8a6001982) See *Rama, Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deiah* 373:5.

[9.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6001982/jewish/Why-Does-the-Shomer-Watch-the-Dead.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef9a6001982) Nitei *Nitei Gavriel, Hilcot Aveilut I* 9:11.

[10.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6001982/jewish/Why-Does-the-Shomer-Watch-the-Dead.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef10a6001982) See S*hulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 71:7.

[11.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6001982/jewish/Why-Does-the-Shomer-Watch-the-Dead.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef11a6001982) See *Shach, Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deiah* 344:11. See, however, *Mishnah Berurah* 45:1 where he cited some who permit doing so.

[12.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6001982/jewish/Why-Does-the-Shomer-Watch-the-Dead.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef12a6001982) See *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 71:4

[13.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6001982/jewish/Why-Does-the-Shomer-Watch-the-Dead.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef13a6001982) See *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deiah* 341:1.

[14.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6001982/jewish/Why-Does-the-Shomer-Watch-the-Dead.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef14a6001982) See *Maavor Yabok, Siftei Rinanot*, 4,9.

**The Purpose of a Descent**

**For the Cause of an Ascent**

**From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



The Torah portion of Devarim (the first portion in the book of the Torah known as Deuteronomy) is always read on Shabbat Chazon (literally "The Sabbath of Vision"), the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av - the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av. As nothing in Judaism is coincidental, the Torah portion of Devarim and Shabbat Chazon must be interconnected.

The Book of Deuteronomy is unique in that, unlike the first four Books of the Torah, it was transmitted by Moses to the generation of Jews that was about to enter the Land of Israel.

**Not Necessarily the Smartest who Merit the Prize**

The generation of Jews that wandered through the desert is known as "the generation of knowledge." Because they occupied such a high spiritual level, commensurate with Moses', they merited to lead a completely spiritual existence. The generation that entered Israel, by contrast, began a whole new chapter in Jewish history. Because they had to involve themselves in more mundane affairs, their spiritual level is considered to be lower than that of the generation that preceded them.

Nonetheless, it was precisely the generation that entered Israel that was able to successfully fulfill G-d's Divine plan. G-d wants us to serve Him within the context of the material world, establishing a "dwelling place" for G-liness in the "lower realms."

Accordingly, although the Jews who entered Israel were spiritually inferior in comparison with their parents, they possessed a certain advantage over their elders: The Jews who entered Israel merited to attain a level of "peace and security" that was denied the previous generation.

Shabbat Devarim is thus a resolution of two opposites. On the one hand, the Jews' entry into the Land of Israel was a very great descent, for it signified the need for daily contact with worldly matters. On the other hand, it was precisely by means of this descent that they were able to attain the highest ascent of all: the fulfillment of G-d's plan.

Likewise, Shabbat Chazon is a study in contradiction. Shabbat Chazon occurs in the middle of the Nine Days, a period in which we mourn the destruction of the Holy Temple. Yet, at the same time, as the famous Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Barditchev explained, on Shabbat Chazon every Jew is shown a vision of the Third Holy Temple, an edifice that will be infinitely superior to the two Holy Temples that preceded it.

Thus, Shabbat Chazon expresses the same theme of descent for the purpose of ascent as Devarim: It is precisely through the descent which caused the Temple's destruction in the first place that we will achieve the highest ascent of all: the establishment of the Third Holy Temple by Moshiach, may it happen at once.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Devorim 5760/2000 edition of L’Chaim. (Adapted from Likutei Sichot, volume 2.)*

**Thoughts that Count for the Parsha**

These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel (Deut. 1:1)

The Torah portion of Devarim begins with Moses chastising the Jewish people for their misconduct during the years of wandering through the wilderness. Despite Moses' overwhelming love for his brethren, he did not hesitate to use harsh words if he considered it necessary. However, this was only when addressing the Jews directly; whenever Moses spoke to G-d, he was the Jewish people's greatest advocate. This contains a lesson for every Jew, and particularly for Jewish leaders. (Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Barditchev)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Devorim 5760/2000 edition of L’Chaim.*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on Diplomatic Rabbis and Changing Congregations**

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**Question:** Should a rabbi speak about controversial matters to his congregation such as having big families, tznius, the truth about the State of Israel and things like that, if he’ll run the risk of being expelled from his position?

**Answer:** Should a rabbi run the risk of being expelled by talking about matters that the congregation doesn’t want to hear?

And the answer is that it’s the job of a rabbi to win his people over gradually. So, it’s not good sense that the first Shabbos that he speaks he should immediately talk about things that anger the people; because what will he accomplish when he is outside, when he is on the other side of the door?

**Let Him First Show the**

**Happiness and the Good Times**

So therefore, let him first bring the people in and celebrate with them Shabbos, shalosh seudos, melave malkah, simchas Yom Tov; let him show the happiness, the good times. Let him explain the hashkafa of Torah and little by little let them develop a pride of being Jews,

After a while, these people themselves will be more amenable. Now, it might take years but it’s worth it. I know a rabbi who had a congregation, a choshuve congregation, and after three years he became so disgusted that he left; he went to Eretz Yisroel. I told him he made an error. He should have remained. It’s just a question of time when you will win out. First of all, the malach hamavess is a תניא דמסייע ליה – the old ones in the course of time will stop being members. Secondly, some of the people are going to leave. The undesirable ones will leave anyhow. They won’t like your tone — undesirable ones leave eventually and better ones will take their place; better ones will be attracted after a while. And in the course of the time, you’ll see what’s going to happen.

**The Reluctant Rabbi**

I remember years ago – this was about twenty years ago – I was urging a young man to go into the rabbinate. He said to me, “If I had a congregation like yours, I’d go in.” I told him what the Chasam Sofer said. The Chasam Sofer once urged a Jew to go into the rabbonus so this Jew said, “If I had a kehilla like Pressburg, I’d go into it.”

The Chasam Sofer told him, “I also didn’t have a kehilla like Pressburg. When I became a rav, it wasn’t a kehilla like Pressburg. It became Pressburg subsequently.” It took a lot of work. There were a lot of rich Jews in Pressburg and they were all leaning to the Reform in those days; they were all interested in Reform. The Chasam Sofer, little by little, got them into the right mood and it became a yeshiva town. And today when you say Pressburg, we think about the Pressburger Yeshiva.

**Every Rabbi’s Responsibility**

And so, every rabbi has to make it his business to develop his kehilla. Of course, if he can get a very good kehilla in the beginning he should take it; but if he gets any kind of kehilla he should dedicate himself to winning them over. Of course, if he has to break laws of the Torah in the beginning – nothing doing! There should be no concessions, no yielding! But if it’s possible to come in without any open breach of the Torah, only that he has to guard his tongue for the first few years and be diplomatic, that’s his job; it’s the ratzon Hashem to do that.

TAPE # 364 (June 1981)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Korach 5783 email of Toras Avigdor based on Rabbi Avigdor Miller’s Tape #364 (June 1981) from his classic Thursday night lectures.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Dvarim 5783**



This week’s parsha, Dvarim, is a continuation of last week’s parsha of Maasei. This is because it also forms a narrative review of events that occurred to the Jewish people during their forty years of life in the desert of Sinai.

Just as last week’s parsha reviewed for us the stations where the Jews encamped during those forty years, so does this week’s parsha review for us key events that befell the Jewish people during those decades of supernatural life and wanderings.

  But there is a fundamental difference between these two narrative views of past events. The review in parshat Maasei is essentially presented in an objective, even detached manner. It is full of facts, names and places but it is basically an unemotional and factual report regarding a long forty-year journey of the people of Israel. This week’s parsha contains a review of facts and events by Moshe. It is a personal and at times emotional and painful review of those years in the desert. Moshe bares his heart and soul and shares his frustrations and emotions with us.

Parshat Dvarim, in fact all of Chumash Dvarim, is a record of how Moshe personally saw things and it records his impressions and feelings regarding the events of the desert of Sinai. In many ways it is one of the most personal and emotional books in the entire canon of the Bible. It is not only Moshe’s words that are on display before us in the parsha. It is his viewpoint and assessment of the Jewish people and its relationship to G-d that is reflected clearly and passionately in his words.

Opinion and passion are key to the service of G-d according to Jewish tradition. Judaism does not condone “holy rollers” in its midst but the entire idea of the necessity of *kavanah*/intense intent in prayer and the performance of *mitzvoth*speaks to a personal view of the relationship to G-d and Torah and a necessary passion and viewpoint. Everyone is different and everyone’s view of events is also different one from another. Thus, everyone’s service of God and Torah, albeit within the parameters of established and recognized *halacha,* must contain nuances of difference.

The importance of the Torah emphasizing to us that the book of Dvarim is Moshe’s personal record of events is to stress to us this recognition of individuality that exists within every human being and how that affects one’s view of everything, spiritual and physical, in life.

Moshe’s recorded personal anguish at witnessing the sins of Israel in the desert is a greater indictment of those sins than just the description and listing of the sins themselves would have been. Life is personal, never objective. Moshe’s personal view of the events of the desert makes these events real and tangible to us. We are also involved in the narrative because of our empathy with Moshe. This is what makes the entire book of Dvarim so real and important to us. People speak to people. Moshe speaks to us.

Shabat shalom.

*Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com*

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You have dwelt long enough at this mountain (Deut. 1:6)

Even though Mount Sinai was the place where the Torah was given, the Jews were not allowed to stay there but were commanded to move on. This teaches that a Jew must never content himself with his own Divine service, but must endeavor to have a positive influence on others, even those who are far from "Sinai." (Likutei Sichot)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Devorim 5760/2000 edition of L’Chaim.*

**More Thoughts that Count for the Parsha**

May the L-rd G-d of your fathers make you a thousand times as many more than you are (Deut. 1:11)

The famous Chozeh of Lublin was once sitting with his Chasidim when he began to berate himself very harshly for his "misdeeds." Immediately, the Chasidim were seized with panic: If the Chozeh was such a transgressor, what could be said for them? Seeing their fear, the Chozeh reassured them and gave them a blessing: "May G-d help that your grandchildren turn out no worse than me." Similarly, when Moses rebuked the Jewish people and saw how their hearts were broken, he immediately offered them encouragement: May G-d increase the number of Jews just like yourselves in the generations to come. (MiMa'ayanot HaNetzach)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Devorim 5760/2000 edition of L’Chaim.*

**Two Brothers**

**By Rabbi Israel Rubin**

Before Tisha B’Av, the day on which the Holy Temples in Jerusalem were destroyed, I like to tell the story from the Midrash of “The Two Brothers.”

Two brothers had each inherited half of their family’s farm. One of the brothers was married and had a large family; the other brother was single. They lived on opposite sides of a hill.

One night during harvest season, the single brother couldn’t sleep. “How can I rest comfortably and take half of the yield, when my brother has so many more mouths to feed?” He arose, gathered bushels of produce and climbed the hill to bring them over to his brother’s barn.

**Worrying About His Older Brother**

Meanwhile, his brother across the hill also couldn’t sleep. “How can I enjoy my share of the produce and not be concerned with my brother. He is alone, without a wife or children; who will support him in his old age?” So, he arose in the night and quietly brought over bushels of produce to his brother’s barn.

When the next morning dawned, each brother was surprised to find that what they had given away had been replenished. They continued these nocturnal treks for many nights. Each morning they were astounded to find that the bushels they had removed had been replenished.

Then one night it happened. The brothers met on the top of the hill. And there, they embraced.

**An Unusual Expression of Brotherhood**

G-d looked upon this expression of brotherhood and said, “On this spot of mutual love I wish to dwell. Here My Holy Temple will be built.”

I would like to pose the following questions and offer insights about the two brothers and their personalities.

Did these two brothers always think and act alike? Did they ever have disagreements and differences? Did they always approve of each other, always share the same ideals and values?

Perhaps the two brothers did not live in harmony. They may have lived at the base of the same hill, but they may not have had very much in common. One brother was married with a large family; the other was single. They probably pursued different goals and might have had contrasting personalities. Perhaps the hill was a physical manifestation of their up-and-down relationship.

**What Did the Brothers Have in Common?**

The single brother may well have enjoyed the bachelor’s life. What did he understand of child rearing, pediatricians, schooling and other parental concerns? These were not relevant to him. What then, aside from the farm, did he and his brother have in common?

On the other hand, the “family man” may have been totally in the dark about his single brother’s lifestyle. Perhaps he could not even comprehend such an existence! And yet, these two brothers were sensitive to each other despite their differences. Rather than increasing the friction because of differing philosophies of life, they tried to fill each other’s special needs, the very lifestyles they were not in touch with. They may have had strong ideological, philosophical or even religious differences. Yet they remained caring and empathetic.

I will not pretend that this simple story has all the solutions to what is taking place in the global Jewish community today. But it certainly does teach us what our general attitude must be. For once we have a positive attitude toward each other, and a willingness to work things out, the details tend to fall into place.

*Reprinted from last year’s Parshat Devorim edition of L’Chayim.*