



PARASHAT D'VARIM



על פי ה'

By G-d's Word

■ Vis-à-vis the Nations

Throughout the 120 years of Moshe Rabbeinu's life, in which he consistently exhibited unparalleled courageous leadership, he never knew fear of a fellow mortal – except for once. As he himself recalls in his parting speech to Israel in the Book of D'varim:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי אַל תִּירָא אֹתוֹ כִּי בְיָדִי נִתְּתִי אֹתוֹ...

*G-d said to me: Do not fear him [King Og of Bashan],
for I have delivered him into your hand...* (D'varim 3,2)

It is perhaps surprising that Moshe was in need of extra encouragement in the war against Og, given the Divine command he himself relayed when he charged the nation to war fearlessly for Eretz Yisrael:

וְאָמַר אֲלֵכֶם לֹא תִעְרָצוּן וְלֹא תִירָאוּן מֵהֶם.
ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הֵהָלֵךְ לִפְנֵיכֶם הוּא יִלָּחֶם לָכֶם...

*I told you at the time, do not be broken or fear them;
Hashem your G-d Who walks before you,
He will fight for you...* (1,29-30)

What happened in the war with Og that caused Moshe to fear? Let us review the entire story.



As we begin the last of the Five Books of the Torah, Bnei Yisrael are poised to enter the Land of Israel, and Moshe Rabbeinu is beginning his parting speech. He recounts how they journeyed through the desert, and how they encountered several nations blocking their way on the eastern side of the Jordan River. The nations were Edom, Moav, and Amon, as well as the two Emorite kingdoms of Sichon and Og.

Moshe tells of the detailed instructions G-d gave him regarding how Israel should approach each of these nations. These instructions, and the precisely accurate manner in which they were carried out, are recounted both here in the beginning of D'varim, and in Parashat Chukat in Bamidbar. A comparison of the two accounts will give us a complete picture of all that took place.

Let us begin with Edom. Hashem issued a stern warning to Israel not to provoke the Edomites, the descendants of Yaakov Avinu's brother Esav, and certainly not to start a war against them. G-d declares openly that Mount Se'ir was given as an exclusive inheritance to Esav, and Israel should not expect to be allowed to pass through:

אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים בְּגִבּוֹל אֶחֱיֵיכֶם בְּנֵי עֵשָׂו הַיֹּשְׁבִים בְּשֵׁעִיר...
אַל תִּתְּגֹרוּ בָּם כִּי לֹא אֶתֶן לָכֶם מֵאֶרֶצָם...
יִרְשָׁה לְעֵשָׂו נְתַתִּי אֶת הָהָר שֵׁעִיר.

*"You are passing the borders of your brothers, the sons of Esav,
who dwell in Se'ir... Do not provoke them,
for I will give you no part of their land;
for I have given Mt. Se'ir to Esav as an inheritance."* (2,4-5)

G-d added another order, concerning the finances of the journey:

אֲכַל תִּשְׁבְּרוּ מֵאֲתָם בִּכְסֶּף וְאַכְלֹתֶם, וְגַם מַיִם תִּכְרוּ מֵאֲתָם בִּכְסֶּף וּשְׁתִּיתֶם.
*"Food you will procure from them for money and you will eat;
and water, too, you shall dig from them for money
and you will drink."* (verse 6)

In D'varim, Moshe recounts G-d's instructions, while in Bamidbar, we read how these instructions were faithfully carried out:

וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה מְלָאכִים מִקְדֵּשׁ אֶל מֶלֶךְ אֲדוֹם...
*Moshe sent emissaries from Kadesh to the King of Edom,
saying:*



נַעֲבְרָה נָא בְּאַרְצָךְ, לֹא נַעֲבֹר בְּשָׂדֶה וּבְכַרְם וְלֹא נִשְׁתֶּה מִי בְּאֵר,
דֶּרֶךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ נִלְךָ לֹא נֹטֶה יָמִין וּשְׂמָאוֹל עַד אֲשֶׁר נַעֲבֹר גְּבוּלְךָ.

*“... Let us, please, pass through your land,
but not through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water
from [your] wells... We will not stray right or left,
until we pass your border.”* (Bamidbar 20,14-17)

Edom refuses the request, leading Moshe to sweeten the offer, in accordance with Hashem's instructions:

בְּמַסְלָה נַעֲלֶה. וְאִם מִיְמֶיךָ נִשְׁתֶּה אֲנִי וּמִקְנִי וְנָתַתִּי מַכְרָם,
רַק אֵין דָּבָר בְּרִגְלֵי אֶעְבְּרָה.

*“We will remain on the cleared path,
and if we or our livestock drink from your water,
we will pay its price. There will be no harm,
we only want to pass through on foot.”* (verse 19)

But the Edomites continue to firmly refuse, and Israel is forced to detour around them. Israel then encounters two more nations: Moav and Amon. Once again, Hashem warns against provoking them in any way, as Moshe tells Israel:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי אַל תִּצֹר אֶת מוֹאָב
וְאַל תִּתְּגֹר בָּם מִלְחָמָה כִּי לֹא אֶתֶּן לָךְ מֵאַרְצוֹ יְרֵשָׁה ...
*G-d told me: “Do not attack Moav and do
not provoke them to fight, for I will not give you
an inheritance from his land...”* (D'varim 2,9)

G-d tells Moshe the same thing yet again regarding Amon:

אַתָּה עֹבֵר הַיּוֹם אֶת גְּבוּל מוֹאָב אֶת עַר.
... אַל תִּצְרֹם וְאַל תִּתְּגֹר בָּם כִּי לֹא אֶתֶּן מֵאַרְץ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן לָךְ יְרֵשָׁה ...
*“You are passing today the border of Moav and Ar...
Do not attack them and do not provoke them,
for I will not give of the land of the sons of Amon
to you for an inheritance...”* (verses 17-19)

The People of Israel, under Moshe's guidance, follow all of these Divine instructions to the letter.



■ Words of Peace

When Israel encountered King Sichon of the Emorites, however, something changed.

As we know, every step of Israel's journeys through the desert was taken in accordance with G-d's command. No military or political maneuver was carried out without direct and clear instructions from Hashem. As is written:

עַל פִּי ה' יִחַגּוּ וְעַל פִּי ה' יִסְעוּ, אֶת מִשְׁמַרְתִּי ה' שָׁמְרוּ עַל פִּי ה' בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה.
By G-d's word they encamped and by G-d's word they traveled,
preserving their trust in G-d,
according to G-d's word via Moshe. (Bamidbar 9,23)

Given this very tight Divine Providence throughout the entire period, how could it be that when it came to King Sichon, Moshe did not follow G-d's command? Hashem had told him clearly that he must deal with Sichon differently than he dealt with Moav and the others:

רְאֵה נָתַתִּי בְיָדְךָ אֶת סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ חֲשִׁבוֹן הָאֱמֹרִי וְאֶת אֶרְצוֹ.
הֵחֵל רֶשֶׁת וְהִתְגַּדֵּר בּוֹ מִלְחָמָה.
"See, I have delivered into your hands Sichon...
Start taking over! Provoke him into war!" (D'varim 2,24)

Yet Moshe does the opposite. Instead of preparing for war, he sends a delegation to offer a "peace proposal!" As he told Israel in his final speech:

וְאֶשְׁלַח מְלָאכִים מִמִּדְבַּר קִדְמוֹת אֶל סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ חֲשִׁבוֹן דְּבַרִי שְׁלוֹם לֵאמֹר.
אֲעֵבְרָה בְּאֶרְצְךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ אֵלֶיךָ לֹא אֶסּוּר יָמִין וּשְׂמָאוֹל.
I sent emissaries from the Kedemot Wilderness to Sichon with
words of peace, saying: "[Let us] walk through your land, only
on the straight path, I will not stray right or left. (verses 26-27)

"Words of peace" – in direct contrast to what G-d had commanded! And even stranger is the fact that Moshe tells this story as part of his rebuke of Israel for its sins. Doesn't Moshe wish to provide a personal example??

Rashi and Ramban both provide answers to this question. Rashi says that Moshe learned from G-d Himself to act this way – for when He offered the Torah to Israel at Mt. Sinai, He did so only after first offering it to the sons of Esav and Yishmael, even though He knew they would not accept it. Similarly, Moshe first offered peace to Sichon.

The Ramban takes a different approach, saying that Moshe made this peace offer to Sichon *before* G-d told him to provoke an attack.



In any event, the difficulty still remains: In the space of three verses (D'varim 2,24-26), the Torah first spells out G-d's command and then how Moshe does the opposite.

The question is all the stronger in light of two other verses in the Torah. One is what Moshe told Korach and his gang of rebels: *With this you will know that G-d sent me to do these things; they are not of my own volition* (Bamidbar 16,28). And the second verse was said by Hashem Himself, about Moshe: *Moshe is different; he is trusted throughout My house* (Bamidbar 12,7). Given this background, how can we possibly explain why Moshe did not follow Hashem's instructions regarding Sichon?

And let us note yet another difficulty in Moshe's words to Sichon:

אֶכֶל בֶּכֶסֶף תִּשְׁבְּרֵנִי וְאַכְלֵתִי, וּמִים בֶּכֶסֶף תִּתֶּן לִי וְשָׁתִיתִי, רַק אֶעְבְּרָה בְּרַגְלִי.

*Supply me with food in exchange for money, and I will eat;
and water for money give me and I will drink;
just let us pass through by foot,*

כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ לִי בְנֵי עֵשָׂו הַיֹּשְׁבִים בְּשִׁעִיר וְהַמּוֹאָבִים הַיֹּשְׁבִים בְּעֵר...

*just as the sons of Esav in Se'ir and
the Moavites in Ar did for me...* (D'varim 2,28-29)

How can Moshe say that Edom acceded to Israel's request, when we know that Edom and Moav refused flat-out (Bamidbar 20,20-21) to allow them to pass through!

In fact, however, this second question answers the first one. By telling Sichon that Edom and Moav had allowed them to pass, Moshe was speaking sarcastically, provoking and daring the Emorites into refusing! He was saying: "Let's see you stop us from passing through as Edom and Moav did! Let's see if you're brave enough to do what they did!"

Though they may look like "words of peace," these are not words of appeasement at all. Moshe is following G-d's instructions perfectly, goading Sichon and provoking him into refusing, thus leading to war. G-d did not want war with Moav or Edom, but He did want Israel to capture the lands of Sichon – and Moshe knew that this was the way to provoke Sichon:

... כִּי הִקְשָׁה ה' אֶל־לִהְיוֹת אֶת רוּחוֹ וְאִמָּץ אֶת לִבּוֹ לְמַעַן תִּתֶּן בְּיָדְךָ כִּיּוֹם הַזֶּה.

*For Hashem your G-d hardened his spirit and strengthened his
heart, so as to deliver him into your hands this day.* (D'varim 2,30)

In other words, G-d hardened Sichon's heart – by instructing Moshe to provoke the Emorites and maneuver them into war with Israel.



A similar series of events occurred with Pharaoh in Egypt, when Hashem hardened the king's heart and caused him to chase Israel – directly into the Red Sea. There, too, Hashem explained how He did it:

וַיָּשְׁבוּ וַיַּחֲנוּ לִפְנֵי פִי הַחִירֹת... וַאֲמַר פַּרְעֹה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נִבְכִּים הֵם בְּאֶרֶץ,
סָגַר עֲלֵיהֶם הַמִּדְבָּר. וַחֲזַקְתִּי אֶת לֵב פַּרְעֹה ...

*“... Have Israel return and encamp before Pi HaHirot...
and Pharaoh will say that Bnei Yisrael are lost in the area and
trapped in the desert. I will then strengthen his heart and he
will run after them...”* (Sh'mot 14,2-4)

That is, it was critical to have Bnei Yisrael turn back on their tracks, in order to trick Pharaoh into thinking they were lost and vulnerable. This was how Hashem “hardened his heart” into chasing them. In both cases, it was the Divine command – to confuse Pharaoh and to provoke Sichon – that hardened the enemy's heart and brought about the desired confrontation.

■ Do Not Fear

We now return to our original question, concerning Moshe and King Og of Bashan. We saw above that Hashem told Moshe not to fear King Og, as the Torah tells us in Bamidbar 21,34. Moshe himself said as much in his parting speech in D'varim 3 – right after he told them that they must not be frightened in their war to conquer Eretz Yisrael. How can it be that Moshe tells them not to fear, yet reminds them that he himself felt fear before the King of Bashan? And why does Hashem not rebuke Moshe for this fear, just like Moshe reprimanded Israel for the same?

And furthermore: This was happening just after Moshe had led Israel to a miraculous and decisive victory over Sichon; why was he afraid!?

A careful look at the verses provides the answers. King Og of Bashan was different than the other nations Israel encountered on their way, in that G-d did not tell Moshe how to deal with him! This could mean that Israel was supposed to simply detour around his kingdom and proceed towards Eretz Yisrael. In the end, what happened was that Og started the battle:

וַנִּפְּן וְנָעַל דֶּרֶךְ הַבָּשָׁן וַיֵּצֵא עוֹג מֶלֶךְ הַבָּשָׁן לִקְרָאתֵנוּ
הוּא וְכָל עַמּוֹ לַמִּלְחָמָה אֶדְרֵי.

*And we turned and ascended through the Bashan,
and King Og of Bashan came out towards us,
he and his entire nation, for war at Edrei.* (D'varim 3,1)



Fear then crept into his heart. For Hashem had told him clearly that the nations would not initiate hostilities against Israel:

... אֶחָל תֵּת פַּחַדְךָ וַיִּרְאֶתְךָ עַל פְּנֵי הָעַמִּים תַּחַת כָּל הַשָּׁמַיִם
אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמְעוּן שְׁמֶעְךָ וְרָגְזוּ וְחָלוּ מִפָּנֶיךָ.

*“... I will begin to put your dread and fear upon the nations
under the entire heavens, who will hear reports of you and
shake and fear before you.” (D'varim 2,25)*

How, then, does King Og dare to openly start a war against Israel? Could it be that G-d's hand is specifically hardening his spirit, as it did with Sichon? As we read:

וְלֹא אָבָה סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ חֶשְׁבּוֹן הָעֲבֵרִי בּוֹ כִּי הִקְשָׁה ה' אֶל־לִהְיוֹת אֶת רוּחוֹ
וְאִמַּץ אֶת לִבּוֹ לְמַעַן תִּתֵּנוּ בְיָדְךָ כִּי־וַיִּחַזַּק ה'.

*...and Sichon, the King of Cheshbon, did not want to allow us
to pass through, for G-d hardened his spirit and strengthened
his heart, in order to give him into your hand this day. (verse 30)*

The answer is no, it cannot be that Hashem hardened Og's heart in this way – for Moshe did not receive a specific command to provoke Og. Hashem would not toy with Moshe by hardening the enemy against him while leaving Moshe on his own.

For Moshe, the bottom line is that the giant King Og is preparing to attack Israel and Moshe must prepare the nation for war! But Hashem is “hiding His face” and not providing instruction. It is thus no wonder that Moshe was afraid; this was the first time he was forced to lead the nation in war without Divine guidance.

It is now clear why Moshe saw fit to tell Bnei Yisrael that the upcoming war with Og caused him to fear. He wished to emphasize that the wondrous, decisive triumph over Sichon and the Emorites did not lead him to delusions of his own grandeur. The string of victories over the Canaanite kings was achieved only with Divine help, Moshe teaches Israel, and the only way to perpetuate such success is to make sure to keep G-d's precepts, so that He will continue to walk in their midst.

This also explains the momentary “hiding of G-d's face:” It was done to emphasize the need to perpetuate the bonds between Israel and Hashem, and especially during war time. Once this goal was achieved, the ties were renewed, and G-d told Moshe:



אַל תִּירָא אֹתוֹ, כִּי בְיָדְךָ נִתְּתִי אֹתוֹ וְאֶת כָּל עַמּוֹ ...

*Do not fear him, for I have delivered him
and his nation into your hands...* (D'varim 3,2)

■ Missing Nothing

We have seen that the hardening of Sichon's heart was effected via Moshe's words of provocation that G-d commanded him to say. That is, G-d utilized His emissaries, the Prophets and the Nation of Israel, to wage a form of military strategy. Similarly, G-d equips Israel and its leaders with wisdom and boldness, for the purpose of achieving the objectives He set. Further evidence of the truth of this approach is found in the Divine instructions regarding the encounter with Edom:

אֲכַל תִּשְׁבְּרוּ מֵאֲתָם בֶּכֶסֶף וְאֶכְלֵתֶם וְגַם מִיַּם תִּכְרוּ מֵאֲתָם בֶּכֶסֶף וּשְׁתִּיתֶם.

You may purchase food from them, as well as water,

כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בֵּרַכְךָ בְּכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדְךָ. יָדַע לְכַתֶּךָ אֶת הַמַּדְבָּר הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה,

זֶה אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ עִמָּךְ לֹא חָסַרְתָּ דָּבָר.

for Hashem your G-d has blessed you in all your endeavors;

He knows your way in this great desert; G-d has been with you

for 40 years and you have lacked nothing. (D'varim 2,6-7)

There appears to be a contradiction here: How can they be *lacking nothing* if they have to purchase food and water?

The answer lies in the very words of these remarkable verses: *Hashem your G-d has blessed you in all your endeavors*. The fact that you have money with which to buy what you need is a great blessing from G-d. If you have the wherewithal to purchase that which you want, it is as if you are *lacking nothing!*

This is an important insight for each of us as individuals. It is a great mistake to think that a blessing from G-d means that He delivers everything we want right to our doorstep. Hashem supplies us with life, wisdom, strength and talents. We must utilize them as efficiently as we can in order to achieve our desires and fulfill our needs. One who does so is considered to be *lacking nothing*.

But, it is conditional: When we ultimately achieve our goals, we must remember G-d's role:



וזְכֹרֶתְךָ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי הוּא הִנִּיחַ לְךָ כֹּחַ לַעֲשׂוֹת חֵיל...

*Remember Hashem your G-d, for it is He Who gives you
strength to accomplish... (8,18)*

Hashem gives us the strength with which we accomplish our goals. If Hashem were to do everything for us, what would be left for us to do? Why would He have given us talents and strength?

This is the source for our Sages' brilliant derivation from the following famous verse: *Hashem is my shepherd, I shall not want* (Psalms 23,1). The Medrash explains:

This is what is meant by the verse, 'Hashem your G-d has blessed you' (D'varim 2,7). Does this mean that you will be blessed even if you sit and do nothing? No, for the Torah continues, 'in all your endeavors,' meaning that if a person works towards a goal, he will be blessed - but if not, he will not be blessed. (Yalkut Shimoni 690, Psalms 23)

In other words, you are lacking nothing: Hashem has prepared for you everything you need so that you can use your abilities and see blessing in all that you do.

