

**Va'ethanan Selected Shorts – Number 40**  
**Rabbi Eliot Malomet Shabbat Nahamu 15 Av 5781 July 24, 2021**

**דברים ג': כ"ג**

(כג) וְאַתְחַנֵּן אֵלֶיךָ בְּעֵת הַהוּא...

**Deuteronomy 3:23**

(23) *I pleaded with the LORD at that time... more than anything, Moses wanted to enter the land. The fact that God doesn't let him adds pathos to his life and constitutes a great truth: there will always be unattainable objectives in life.*

**דברים ג': כ"ז**

(כז) עָלָה רֹאשׁ הַפְּסָגָה וְשָׂא עֵינָיו יָמָה וְצָפֹנָה וְתִמְנָנָה וּמִזְרָחָה וּמִמְּוֹלָה כִּי לֹא תַעְבֵּר אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה:

**Deuteronomy 3:27**

(27) *Go up to the summit of Pisgah and gaze about, to the west, the north, the south, and the east. Look at it well, for you shall not go across yonder Jordan.* Moses gets to see the land. But no scent, no sound, no taste, no touch. Only one dimension of human experience, arguably the most significant, yet nothing like being there with your whole body. Some Torah trivia: can you think of other texts and contexts listing directions? Note the different ordering in each:

Source	Context	Order of Directions listed
Deut 3:27	Moses to gaze at the land from the "pisga":	West, North, South, East
Gen. 13:14	Abraham to gaze at the Land after Lot departs:	North, South, East, West
Gen. 28:14	Jacob at Bethel dream of the ladder - וּפְרַצַת	West, East, North, South
Num. 2	Tribal encampment around the mishkan:	East, South, West, North, clockwise
Num. 3	Levite encampment:	West, South, North, East
Sukkot custom	Lulav Shaking directions:	East, South, West, North. Up, Down, Clockwise
	Lulav shaking, according to the "Ari":	South, North, East, Up, Down, West

I have no good theory for all these differences.

**דברים ד': א'**

(א) וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁמַע אֱלֹהֵי הַחֻקִּים וְאֱלֹהֵי הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְלַמֵּד אֶתְכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת לְמַעַן תִּהְיוּ יְרֵשֶׁתֶם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם נָתַן לָכֶם:

**Deuteronomy 4:1**

(1) *And now, O Israel, give heed to the laws and rules that I am instructing you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.* Recounting that he will only get to see the land, Moses pivots to the main theme of the book, namely how the people will live on the land. **שמע** – **hearing** is the primary modality for receiving the commandments. Moses is now the teacher,

not only the prophet and leader. **teaching** – למד is now a prominent feature of his discourse. **למען** – **so that you will live**, Moses, who will soon die, is overwhelmingly concerned with **their life** and survival. **Choose life** will effectively be his last words to them.

**דברים ד': ו'**

(ו) וְשִׁמְרַתֶּם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם כִּי הוּא חֻקְתְּכֶם וּבְיַנְתְּכֶם לְעֵינֵי הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמְעוּן אֶת כָּל־הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה וְאָמְרוּ רַק עִם־חַקְּכֶם וְנָבוֹן הַגּוֹי הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה:

**Deuteronomy 4:6**

(6) *Observe them faithfully, for that will be proof of your wisdom and discernment to other peoples, who on hearing of all these laws will say, "Surely, that great nation is a wise and discerning people."* Moses presents a new and profound idea: Israel not only possesses a body of laws, but the wisdom embedded in these laws. Thus the study, interpretation and application of the law, becomes the primary means of demonstrating wisdom. Israel will be distinguished by the other nations of the world, not by military might, power, athletic prowess, plastic arts, music, science, technology, industry, but by wisdom.

**דברים ד': י"א**

(יא) וּמִתְקַבְּיוּ וּמַעֲמִידוּן תַּסַּחַת הַהָר וְהָהָר בְּעֵר בְּאֵשׁ עַד־לֵב הַשָּׁמַיִם הִשָּׁפַע עָנָן וַעֲרַפֵּל:

**Deuteronomy 4:11**

(11) *You came forward and stood at the foot of the mountain. The mountain was ablaze with flames to the very skies, dark with densest clouds.* The scene of revelation is not placid; it is violent and terrifying. The people stand literally "under" the mountain prompting the rabbis to interpret that they had no choice but to accept the Torah. But reading the account in Exodus carefully, they were so terrified, they wanted Moses to be their interlocutor.

**דברים ד': מ"ד**

(מד) וְזֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם מִשֵּׁה לְפָנַי בְּגִי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

**Deuteronomy 4:44**

(44) *This is the Teaching that Moses set before the Israelites.* Lifting and presenting the Torah to the congregation is the most dramatic moment of the entire synagogue service. An ancient custom going back to the rabbinic era, it conveys immediately to those assembled that **this** Torah is

identical to the Torah that Moses presented to the Israelites. We add על פי ה' ביד משה *at the command of God at the hand of Moses* which is taken from Num. 4:37. The shul custom conflates two verses from two entirely different contexts. Conjecture: this custom is not contrived and, to this day, it feels as if it is a spontaneous demonstration of the holy community that craves its concrete connection to its authentic historical past. The choice of verses was arguably spontaneous and organic. Seriously, can you think of anything more appropriate to say when you lift the Torah?

דברים ה':ג'

(ג) לֹא אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ כָּרַת ה' אֶת־הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת כִּי אֲתָנוּ אֲנִיחֶנּוּ אֲלֶהָ פֶה הַיּוֹם פִּלְגֵנוּ חַיִּים:

### Deuteronomy 5:3

(3) *It was not with our fathers that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, the living, every one of us who is here today.* The is a moment of genius. Of course it was *with our fathers* that God made the covenant! This generation wasn't even born yet! But in this great rhetorical moment, Moses enables his audience to identify with its ancestors. In one sentence he demolishes the potential claim of descendants: we had nothing to do with it, we weren't there. On the contrary: you indeed were there! We were all there! We, all who are alive and **all who ever will descend from us**, we were all there! Every Jew was present at Sinai. The covenant is binding on all of its descendants, and those who join it voluntarily.

דברים ה':ד'

(ד) פָּנִים | בְּפָנִים דָּבָר ה' עִמָּכֶם בְּהָר מְתוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ:

### Deuteronomy 5:4

(4) *Face to face the LORD spoke to you on the mountain out of the fire—* In a fascinating article, Joshua Berman cites this depiction of Pharaoh and the goddess Mut to interpret this verse:



Pharaoh (left) is looking directly into the eyes of Mut (right) and they are exactly “face to face.” Berman: *In Egypt, the gods communicated face to face with the kings alone. In the Torah, God communicates that way with the entire people. The people are elevated to the status of kings.*

דברים ה':ה'

(ה) אָנֹכִי עֹמֵד בֵּין־הָאֵשׁ וּבֵינֵיכֶם בְּעֵת הַהוּא לְהַגִּיד לָכֶם אֶת־דְּבַר ה' כִּי יִרְאֶתֶם מִפְּנֵי הָאֵשׁ וְלֹא־עֲלִיתֶם בְּהָר לֵאמֹר: {ס}

### Deuteronomy 5:5

(5) *I stood between the LORD and you at that time to convey the LORD's words to you, for you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain—saying:* This is a crucial detail of the revelation. While the people are elevated to the status of “kings” there is still a difference between them and Moses. The people are terrified of God and only Moses can mediate God's message to them. Moses was singular.

דברים ו':ה'

(ה) וְאַהֲבַתְּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדְךָ:

### Deuteronomy 6:5

(5) *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* While God issues the commandments, Moses instructs Israel to love God. God is the One and the Only. The basic commitment that you must have is allegiance to God which is expressed in “love” but also “loyalty”. You are to love and be loyal to God **with the totality of your being: your heart (thoughts), your very life, and every aspect of your life, your might.**

דברים ז':ב'

(ב) וּנְתַתֶּם ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְפָנֶיךָ וְהִכִּיתֶם הַתְּהָרִם תִּהְרִים אֹתָם לֹא־תִכְרַת לָהֶם בְּרִית וְלֹא תִחַנְּנֶם:

### Deuteronomy 7:2

(2) *and the LORD your God delivers them to you and you defeat them, you must doom them to destruction: do not enter covenants with them and do not be gracious to them.* This verse refers to the seven nations – Hittites, Girgashites, Emorites, Canaanites, Perizites, Hivites, and Jebusites who dwell in the land. But if you destroy them, who would you make a covenant with? They would be defeated populations. You would be prohibited from covenanting with them most likely because of the threat of idolatry, intermarriage and the threat that they will attack and kill you. What constitutes the correct approach to one's mortal enemy? When your enemies seek to kill you, should you be gracious to them? When they declare their intent to destroy you, should you make a covenant with them?

נחמו נחמו נחמו a new season of seven weeks begins - May we have a Shabbat of comfort and Peace!