

As we assemble each week in the late summer to listen to the book of Deuteronomy, we have to remember that we are listening to a series of speeches. We have to imagine that Moses is standing in front of a large assembly, that he is outside with everyone, and that his voice is able to carry well enough to the thousands who are there. Visible in the distance is the land which was promised to their ancestors. The people listen to Moses as attentively as possible, perhaps with a great deal of emotion. They know that this will be the last time they see him, and that these will be his last words to them. Like any people on the verge of a momentous transition in leadership, they have tremendous awe for the great man who is standing in front of them, and tremendous apprehension for their future under a new and largely untested leader. They know intuitively that there will never be another leader like Moses. Ever. Here then is Moses, who is at the peak of his oratorical powers, lifting his voice when reaching a key phrase, and gesturing to the land which is situated behind him each time he mentions it: **this land, this Jordan. This place is where you are going. You. But not me. I will not be going there with you.**

At the beginning of the parasha, Moses recounts how he beseeched God to let him enter the land (Deut. 3:23, 25):

וַאֲתַחֲנֹן אֶל ה' בַּעַת הַהוּא... אֶעֱבְרֶה-נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה.
And I pleaded with the Lord at that time, saying... Pray let me cross over that I may see the good land.

But God denied his petition saying (Deut. 3:26):

רַב לָךְ אֵל תּוֹסֵף דִּבֵּר אֵלַי עוֹד בְּדִבְרֵי הַזֶּה.
Enough for you! Do not speak to me any more again about this matter!

Moses immediately pivots to one of the main themes of Deuteronomy, learning and transmission (Deut. 4:1):

עַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁמַע אֶל הַחֻקִּים וְאֶל הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְלַמֵּד אֲתֶכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת לְמַעַן תַּחֲיוּ וּבִאתֶם וִירִשְׁתֶּם אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם נֹתֵן לָכֶם.

And now, O Israel, hearken to the laws and to the regulations that I am <u>teaching</u> you to observe, in order that you may live and enter and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving to you.

I may not be going there with you, but you will always be able to refer back to my teachings. I am going to teach you all the laws and statutes that you need in order to have a fulfilling life in the land. Even though I won't be there with you, my teachings will be. Moses is aware that he is speaking to a new generation that was born in the desert, **Generation Desert**. After 40 years, the parents of that new generation, **Generation Exodus**, have all died off. Moses' objective in this speech is to get **Generation D**, to be as connected to the covenant as its predecessor, **Generation Ex**. To accomplish this, he performs what is nothing less than a brilliant **rhetorical sleight of hand**. First, he cites a moment that is still fresh in their memories (4:3):

עֵינֵיכֶם הָרְאוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' בְּבַעַל פְּעוֹר
Your eyes [it is] that have seen what the Lord did at <u>Baal Pe'or</u>:

As we recall from a few weeks ago, the **Baal Pe'or** incident was horrific. It rivals the Golden Calf in terms of idolatry and betrayal. As a result of their apostasy, 24,000 Israelites died there. As he stood before them, Moses was aware that he was speaking to people who were still reeling from that catastrophe and for whom the terror of that moment was still fresh. **Your eyes have seen all of this**, Moses says. **Those people who sinned at Ba'al Pe'or are dead. But you, who are here, are alive this day. You are a great people, and you must take care to heed all the laws I am giving you...** Then, he makes his rhetorical move. He collapses the 40 years that have transpired since the Exodus and Mount Sinai, and says to **Generation D**:

יוֹם אֲשֶׁר עָמַדְתָּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּחֹרֵב	...the day that <u>you</u> stood before the presence of the Lord <u>your</u> God at Horev (Deut. 4:10)
וַתִּקְרְבוּ וַתַּעֲמִדוּן תַּחַת הָהָר	<u>you</u> came near and <u>you</u> stood beneath the mountain: (Deut. 4:11)
וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלַיִם מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ	And the Lord spoke to <u>you</u> from the midst of the fire: (Deut. 4:12)
וַיְגַד לָכֶם אֶת בְּרִיתוֹ אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֲתֶכֶם	He announced to <u>you</u> his covenant which he commanded <u>you</u> to observe, (Deut. 4:13)

Notice: **You. You. You. You.** In this moment he is addressing **Generation D** as if they were the ones who stood at Sinai! Rhetorically, he is dissolving the generational boundary between **Generation D** and **Generation Ex**. He wants **Generation D** to think of themselves as if they were **Generation Ex**, the ones who were actually there. He continues dozens of times to address them in the second person plural, **You, You, You**. And then, as if to hammer the point home, he makes another brilliant rhetorical shift in his address:

ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ כָּרַת עִמָּנוּ בְּרִית בְּחֹרֵב. לֹא אֶת אֲבֹתֵינוּ כָּרַת ה' אֶת הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת כִּי אֲתָנוּ אֲנִיחֵנוּ אֵלֶּה פֶּה הַיּוֹם כָּלְנוּ חַיִּים.
The Lord <u>our</u> God cut with <u>us</u> a covenant at Horev. Not with <u>our</u> fathers did the Lord cut this covenant, but with <u>us</u>, yes, <u>us</u>, those here today, all of <u>us</u> [who are] alive! (Deut. 5:2-3)

You. You. You. Turns into **Us. Us. Us**. What does this mean? It means that rhetorically, he no longer differentiates himself from his audience. By shifting from **You** to **Us** he creates a sense of unity and trust in his audience and reinforces in them the profound sense of collectivity and peoplehood that will be necessary for them to accomplish the great tasks ahead, namely conquering and settling the land. Moreover, he is elevating them. He is placing upon them the same responsibility that had been given to their parents, and as a consequence, he is bestowing upon them

the same dignity that their parents had, as personal witnesses to all of God's miracles. **Generation Ex** was akin to the **Greatest Generation** of our own era. They experienced everything. But **Generation D** lived in its shadow. **Generation Ex** witnessed the plagues in Egypt, the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, the revelation at Mount Sinai, great, world-historical, epoch-making events. The only thing **Generation D** could boast of was the daily ration of manna. However, by rhetorically dissolving the boundary between the two generations, Moses is giving his audience a sense of dignity and a sense of responsibility. Just what they needed in order to go forward. That's what great orators do: reimagine epoch-making events and enable them to transcend time.¹ Moses was able to recast the revelation at Mount Sinai as an event that belonged to both **Generation Ex** and **Generation D**. In a few weeks, we will see Moses use this rhetorical device at the end of the book of Deuteronomy in Parashat Nitzavim. As Generation D stands before him for the final, final words, in the land of Moab, to ratify a new covenant, Moses says to them:

אתם נצבים היום כלכם לפני ה' אלהיכם... ולא אתכם לבדכם אנכי פיר את הבְּרִית הזאת ואת האֱלֹהִים הזאת. כי את אשר ישנו פה עמנו עמד היום לפני ה' אלהינו ואת אשר איננו פה עמנו היום.	<i>You are stationed today, all of you, before the presence of the Lord your God: Not with you, you-alone do I cut this covenant and this oath, but with the one who is here, standing with us today before the presence of the Lord our God, and with the one who is not here with us today.</i> (Deut. 29:9, 13, 14)
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Let's compare these two instances of conflation:

At the beginning of Deuteronomy...	At the end of Deuteronomy...
Moses recounts the Sinai Covenant	Moses enacts the Covenant in Moab
Moses conflates the Generation Ex with the Generation D .	Moses conflates the Generation D with all future generations that will come into existence.
Basic idea: <i>You stood at Sinai even if you weren't actually there.</i>	Basic idea: <i>This covenant is with those who are here and not here.</i>
The result: Generation D will see itself as equal in dignity and responsibility to the Generation Exodus .	The result: all subsequent generations will see themselves as equal in dignity and responsibility to Generation D .

Moses conflates the Sinai moment with Covenant at Moab and thereby sets the people on its way for all time.

¹ Lincoln did this at Gettysburg: *The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced...* Martin Luther King Jr. at the March on

Shabbat Nahamu. One of the themes of Tisha B'av is that it is a day of calamities: Both Temples were destroyed on Tisha B'av; The Bar Kochva revolt was defeated; the First Crusade; the Spanish Expulsion; the English Expulsion; the deportation of the Warsaw Ghetto, all took place on Tisha B'av. Last week, as we were getting ready to commemorate the fast, news circulated that Iran was going to attack Israel on that day, cynically exploiting the built in tragedies of the Jewish calendar. Whether it is illusory or coincidental, Tisha B'av is the day that conflates many catastrophes of Jewish history. This year, we included the calamity of October 7th in our commemoration of Tisha B'av. It will be interesting to see how that evolves over time. If Tisha B'av is a **conflation of calamities**, then perhaps we can look at the coming seven weeks as a **conflation of consolations** for all the catastrophes we have endured as a people. The series of the seven-haftarot-of-consolation begins with the words **נְחֻמוּ-נְחֻמוּ-Comfort, Comfort**, in Isaiah 40. Why the doubling? Well, of course doubling and repetition is a rhetorical device for emphasis. But we can also allow for some imaginative interpretation. One **נְחֻמוּ** is for the personal dimension of loss; the second **נְחֻמוּ** for the collective dimension. One **נְחֻמוּ** is for recent loss; the second **נְחֻמוּ** is for loss in the deep past. One is for physical comfort; one is for spiritual. Given that there are still 115 hostages in Gaza, many of whom that are no longer alive, we might add that one **נְחֻמוּ** is for people who can receive comfort, and move through the process of grieving, and another **נְחֻמוּ** is for people for whom grieving has not yet even begun. Abraham Ibn Ezra, one of the few commentators who offers some help in understanding the doubling of this verb, writes:

וְטַעַם פְּעָמִים - דָּרָךְ מְהִירוֹת אוֹ רֵגַע אַחֲרֵי רֵגַע: <i>And the reason why it is repeated twice is to indicate that sometimes comfort is given quickly, or sometimes it is given minute after minute.</i>
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How to interpret that? There is immediate comfort and long-term comfort. Immediate urgent care and extended long-term care. We know this from the experience of Shiva. Shiva is the urgent-care system of comfort. But there is a comfort that is required over a longer term, sometimes an entire life, which requires patience and compassion. Different calamities require different kinds of comfort. Our prayer is that all those who grieve get the comfort that they require and the comfort that they deserve, immediately, and in the long term as well. Shabbat Shalom.

TODAY IS DAY 316. WE PRAY THAT THE HOSTAGES WILL BE FREED. BRING THEM HOME NOW! MAY GOD HEAL THE WOUNDED AND SHIELD ISRAEL.

Washington: *When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.*