

# DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

## Parshas Devarim

### The Nature of Chumash Devarim

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל

*These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Israel.<sup>1</sup>*

#### INTRODUCTION: TWO STATEMENTS FROM CHAZAL CONCERNING CHUMASH DEVARIM

As we open the final Chumash of the Torah, Chumash Devarim, there are two statements of Chazal that need to be considered in order to arrive at an understanding of the nature of this Chumash.

On the one hand, commenting on the Mishnah in Sanhedrin<sup>2</sup> which states that a person who says that the Torah is not from heaven has forfeited his portion in the World to Come, the Gemara elaborates:<sup>3</sup>

ואפילו אמר כל התורה כולה מן השמים חוץ מפסוק זה שלא אמרו הקדוש ברוך הוא אלא משה  
מפי עצמו.

*[This is true] even if he says, "The entire Torah is from heaven with the exception of such and such a verse which was not said by Hashem, rather by Moshe."*

We see that the Gemara clearly establishes that all the verses of the Torah, with no exceptions, are from Hashem and not from Moshe, and that to suggest otherwise constitutes a sin of the most objectionable nature with the direst of consequences.

In light of this, we must consider the words of the Gemara elsewhere, regarding the ruling of the Mishnah<sup>4</sup> that one may not interrupt the Torah reading which deals with the Torah's curses<sup>5</sup> to call someone up to the Torah. The Gemara<sup>6</sup> cites a qualification to this ruling. As we know there are two

1 Devarim 1:1.

2 90a.

3 Ibid. 99a, codified by the Rambam in Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Teshuvah 3:8.

4 Megillah 4:9.

5 The section detailing the punishments if the Jewish people will be unfaithful to the mitzvos of the Torah, the section commonly referred to as the *Tochachah*.

6 Ibid. 31b.

sections of curses in the Torah: the first at the end of Chumash Vayikra<sup>7</sup> and the second in the middle of Chumash Devarim.<sup>8</sup> Regarding these, the Gemara states:

אמר אביי, לא שנו אלא בקללות שבתורת כהנים, אבל קללות שבמשנה תורה פוסק.  
מאי טעמא? הללו... משה מפי הגבורה אמרן, והללו... משה מפי עצמו אמרן.

*Said Abaye, the [Mishnah's ruling not to interrupt] was taught only regarding the curses in Toras Kohanim (i.e. Vayikra), however, with regard to the curses in Mishneh Torah (i.e. Devarim), one may interrupt. What is the reason? These (the former) were said by Moshe from Hashem's mouth, while these (the latter) were said by Moshe from his own mouth.*

Needless to say these words of the Gemara require some explanation, for they appear to be saying something which the Gemara in Sanhedrin states is absolutely unacceptable, namely, that in contrast to the section of curses in Vayikra which came from Hashem, the section in Devarim came from Moshe's own mouth!

Moreover, Rashi<sup>9</sup> even highlights an element within Moshe's curses which are stated in a more lenient way than the original curses in Chumash Vayikra. The original curses said that the heavens would be like iron, emitted no rainfall whatsoever, and the earth would be like copper, exuding moisture and rotting and crops that were growing.<sup>10</sup> Moshe, however, inverted the analogy, saying that the heavens would be like copper, indicating that there would be some minimal rainfall, while the earth would be like iron, with no moisture ruining the crops!<sup>11</sup>

All of this requires our attention.

### **ABARBANEL: TWO SEPARATE DISCUSSIONS**

A classic and foundational response to these questions is presented by the Abarbanel in his Introduction to Chumash Devarim. He prefaces by saying that when we consider the matter of the source of the verses in the Torah, there are two questions we need to ask:

1. Where did these words originate from?
2. On whose authority were they included as verses in the Torah?

The answer to the first question – at least on a straightforward level – is that the words themselves could have originally been said by any number of individuals. The Torah contains words that were said by Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. It also contains words that were said by Esav, Lavan and Pharaoh. In this regard, it should not be surprising to find words originally said by Moshe as well.

The second question addresses something else entirely. Regardless of who *originally* said these words, who was the one who said they should *become part of the Torah*? To this question, there can be only one answer – Hashem. Esav's words, as well as those of Lavan and Pharaoh, become part of Torah by Hashem's instruction to include them – and the same is true for the words of the Avos, and of Moshe.

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7 26:14-46.

8 28:16-69.

9 Devarim 28:23, s.v. *ve'hayu*.

10 Vayikra 26:19.

11 Devarim loc. cit. (See also regarding differences between the two *Tochachahs* in *Bava Basra 88b*.)

The implications for Chumash Devarim is that this chumash comprises words that were originally said by Moshe to the people, as the opening verse states: “אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל” – *These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Israel.*” Indeed, in this light, all the places that the verse proceeds to mention, “*In the wilderness... opposite the Yam Suf, between Paran and Tofel etc.*” are referring to the various places where Moshe originally said these words to the people. Subsequently, Hashem told Moshe to take all these words that he had previously said over the course of the forty years in the Wilderness, and to include them in the Torah. Therefore:

- ▷ When the Gemara in Megillah says the curses in Chumash Devarim came from Moshe’s own mouth, this refers to the idea that it was him who originally said them.
- ▷ When the Gemara in Sanhedrin says that Moshe did not add even one verse to the Torah, it refers to the incorporation of anything that he (or anyone else) said into the text of the Torah. The authority to do that rests with Hashem alone.<sup>12</sup>

### **MALBIM: FORMATTING FOR INCLUSION IN TORAH**

Taking this discussion one stage further, the Malbim explains that although the contents of Devarim were originally said by Moshe, Hashem did not include them in the Torah exactly as they were originally said. A simple illustration of this idea is that the sequence of Moshe’s rebukes regarding various events as written in Chumash Devarim does not follow the chronological sequence in which those events occurred – and in which presumably the rebukes were given! Rather, in the fortieth year in the Wilderness, Hashem instructed Moshe to repeat those rebukes in a specific manner. This process is described in verse three, which reads:

וַיְהִי בְּאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּעֶשְׂרֵי חֹדֶשׁ בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר  
צִוָּה ה' אֹתוֹ אֵלֵיהֶם

*It was in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first of the month, Moshe*

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12 See Responsa of Rashbash, sec. 21 who discusses the above two Gemaras regarding Chumash Devarim in a similar manner to the Abarbanel [See also Commentary of Ran to Rif, Megillah loc. cit.]. A different distinction between Chumash Devarim and the first four chumashim is cited in the name of the Vilna Gaon. Regarding the first four chumashim, it was the Shechinah (Divine presence) that spoke through Moshe (See Zohar, Parshas Pinchas), whereas the contents of Chumash Devarim were first received by Moshe from Hashem and then subsequently transmitted by him to the people using his own voice. (Dubno Maggid, Ohel Yaakov Parshas Devarim). This approach is also adopted by the Maharal in Tiferes Yisrael chap 43, who explains, in this vein, the Gemara’s statement that the curses in Devarim were said by Moshe “from his own mouth,” i.e. that it was his voice relaying what he had heard from Hashem, as opposed to the curses in Vayikra where “Moshe said them from the mouth of Hashem,” i.e. Hashem spoke them through Moshe (see also Mishnah Berurah 428:18).

Interestingly, the Vilna Gaon’s disciple, R’ Chaim of Volozhin in Nefesh Hachaim (3:18) states that the idea of “the Shechinah speaking through Moshe” continued – and perhaps even developed – in Chumash Devarim. As a source for this, he cites the verses in Parshas Ekev which we recite in the second parsha of Shema. The verse begins by Moshe talking to the people about Hashem in the third person “If you will heed ... to love Hashem, your God and to serve Him with all of your heart” and then immediately transitions into the first person: “And I will give the rain for your land in its time.” (Devarim 11:13-14) Since it is only Hashem Who has the power to give the rain, clearly, it was He Who was talking through Moshe at that time (See also Ramban to Devarim 5:12).

Regarding this proof, it is worth noting the comment of the Chiddushei Rashba to Menachos 34a, who states that, seeing as the first and second paragraph of the Shema are both part of what is written in tefillin, which was a mitzvah we received upon leaving Egypt, it is clear these sections were already said at that earlier time and were only subsequently recorded in the Torah later on. In light of this, there is room to question whether verses from these sections are characteristic of Sefer Devarim and whether proof can be brought from them concerning the question of whether “the Shechinah speaking through Moshe” can be perceived throughout that Chumash.

*spoke to the Children of Israel, in accordance with all that Hashem commanded him to them.*

As the Malbim proceeds to explain, it was in this Divinely modified form that Hashem then instructed Moshe to write these words as part of the Torah.<sup>13</sup>

### **R' YITZCHAK KARO: THREE INTRODUCTIONS FOR A THREEFOLD CHUMASH**

As we have mentioned, according to the Malbim, verse three describes a retelling of the words of rebuke whose original transmission is referred to in verse one. However, according to other commentators, these two verses are not describing the same words. For in fact, the totality of Chumash Devarim comprises three separate categories of things Moshe communicated to the people, some exhortational and some relating to mitzvos:

1. Words of rebuke and exhortation to the people.
2. Mitzvos which are not mentioned in earlier Chumashim.
3. Explanation of mitzvos that were mentioned in earlier Chumashim.

The opening verses in Chumash Devarim likewise refer to Moshe speaking to the people three times:

Verse 1: *“These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Israel.”*

Verse 3: *“Moshe spoke to all the Children of Israel.”*

Verse 5: *“Moshe began explaining the Torah.”*

According to one of the late Rishonim, R' Yitzchak Karo,<sup>14</sup> these three verses are actually introducing the three categories within Chumash Devarim, respectively:

Verse 1 – refers to the words of rebuke that Moshe had offered throughout the years in the Wilderness, which Hashem decided should now be included in the Torah.

Verse 3 – refers to the mitzvos which had not been mentioned yet in earlier Chumashim. Like all mitzvos – and unlike Moshe words of rebuke – these were communicated by Hashem to Moshe and then transmitted by Moshe to the people, as the verse describes: “Moshe spoke to the Children of Israel, in accordance with all that Hashem commanded him to them.”<sup>15</sup>

Verse 5 – as it states, refers to Moshe’s words of explanation of the mitzvos.<sup>16</sup>

### **RECEIVING THE TORAH AND ENTERING THE LAND**

Regarding the final two categories we have mentioned, it is most interesting to consider that some of the mitzvos of the Torah were not presented to the Jewish people until just prior to

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13 The Malbim adds that Hashem’s modification of Moshe’s words included adding certain things that were not said during the original rebukes. As an example, he cites verse 22 of chapter 1 where it mentions that the idea of sending spies originated with the people. This is something that Moshe had not included in his rebuke at the time as it was common knowledge to those involved and therefore redundant. [The Malbim does not address the question of whether Hashem’s modification of Moshe’s words also impacted the phraseology of the words themselves, or whether it relates specifically to matters of order and content, with the words themselves left intact and quoted verbatim. See, regarding this question, Rav Yehuda Copperman, Pshuto Shel Mikra Chap. 95.]

14 Commentary Toldos Yitzchak, beginning of Parshas Devarim.

15 For further discussion regarding the mitzvos that are mentioned only in Chumash Devarim, see introductions of Ramban and Sefer Hachinuch to Devarim and Responsa Radvaz Vol. 6 Resp. 2,143. See also Emes le’Yaakov, Devarim 23:3 and ibid. 31:11.

16 See commentary Aderes Eliyahu of the Vilna Gaon who similarly explains these three verses as three introductions to the different parts of Chumash Devarim.

entering the Land of Israel. What is the point of “keeping them” until this final stage before entry into the land? The Kli Chemdah explains that this was in order to appraise the people of a fundamental idea – that their success and longevity in the land of Israel is a function of remaining faithful to the mitzvos of the Torah. This is the theme behind the punishment of exile from the land – as stipulated in the *Tochachah* – should they abandon the Torah. In order to impress upon the people the critical connection between the mitzvos and entering the land, certain mitzvos were “kept” in order to be presented to them as they were about to enter, so that receiving the Torah and entering the land would become fused together in their experience, and hopefully also in their consciousness.

This crucial lesson of Chumash Devarim remains for us in our time, with the difference being that the *Tochachah* which bears out this message is not something that could happen, but something that has. Indeed, experiencing Chumash Devarim through our history arguably places us in a better position to absorb Moshe’s message, as we seek to implement it and restore the fusion between the mitzvos and the land of Israel to its rightful place.