

1. The entire Book of Devarim, when compared with the first four Books of the Torah, is found to have a unique character, a personality all its own. Whereas in other Books the laws of Judaism are expressed in more or less legal form, and where the accompanying narrative is factual in nature, this fifth Book of Moses is noted for its sweeping sentimentality, for its appeal to the heart and to the soul. The words LEIV and NEFESH appear more often here than in all the other books combined. We are charged to uplift our hearts and souls, to give of ourselves emotionally, to experience Torah ecstatically, to feel it personally and intimately.
2. In fact, the one word most characteristic of the Book of Dvarim is AHAVAH - love. We are to do more than obey G-d and follow Him. We must also love Him, we must experience His presence with our deepest emotions. We read this morning VE'AHAVTA ES HA'SHEM ELOHECHA, thou shalt ~~th~~ love the Lord thy G-d. Further, VE'ATA YISRAEL MAH HA'SHEM ELOHECHA DORESH ME'IMACH KI IM...L'AHAVAH OSO, G-d asks of us to love Him. And again in the Book of Dvarim, tho not in this morning's Sidra, the clarion call of the SHMA: V'AHAVTA..B'CHOL LVAVCHA.... (translate).
3. But lest anyone here this morning believe that this is merely gaudy sentimentalism, a sort of fatherly advice, let him be corrected quickly. The Halachah insists that AHAVAS HA'SHEM is a Mitzvah, a commandment. And as such it is a guiding principle of Jewish Life. We are commanded to love G-d.
4. And yet, this very idea, the idea that we are commanded to love, is a most perplexing notion. Maimonides and other Jewish philosophers were puzzled by it. They ask a simple, but a pointed question: how can you possibly "command" someone to love. Love is an emotion, a deep emotion, and as such is above, independent of and detached from volition or will. You can command me to do or give or act or walk, and I can obey; but you cannot possibly ~~expect to~~ command me to love or hate and expect me to obey, no matter how much I want to. I either love or I do not love. Many a parent has learnt that lesson the hard way! How, therefore, do you account for terming the love of G-d a MITZVAH, a commandment?
5. Perhaps one of the most beautiful answers given to this question is the one offered by the author of the SFAS EMESS, the renowned Gerer Rebbe. It is an answer which bespeaks AHAVAS YISROEL, and which gives us a key to understanding the entire Sefer Dvarim. The Gerer maintains that the question itself offers a clue to the answer. Since you cannot command love where it does not already exist, he says, and since the Torah does command such love, then the

only logical conclusion is that there is ingrained in every Jewish heart a deep and abiding love for G-d and for Torah. There exists in every Jewish heart, as he calls it, a NEKUDAH, a "dot" or spark of love for things Jewish. But sometimes that NEKUDAH is too small to be of value, it is covered up with superficial rust, it is hidden by material desires and pursuits - but it's there. And the VE'AHAVTI is the command to each and every one of us to be conscious of it, to develop the NEKUDAH, to nurture it, to fan the spark until it becomes a flame, to magnify it to bring it out and express it. But the initial spark, the Nekudah, is already there. Every Jew has it, whether he knows it or not. It is just that sometimes we must get rid of the dross and the drapes to be able to see it and appreciate it.

6. The story is told of the famous sculptor, Michelangelo, who was at work on his great statue of Moses. As he was working, someone who was observing him was moved to remark, "How wonderful to watch a master at work. Here you take a mere slab of stone and make a Moses of it". But the artist turned to him and said: "you're mistaken. What happens is that I see Moses inside that stone, and I merely chip away the unnecessary parts of the stone so that you can see clearly what I saw in there before." So it is with the Nekudah of Love for Torah - it already exists in every Jewish heart. But we must strive to chip the hard rock that so frequently encases it. For the love of G-d we must do it.
7. Our modern thinkers have come to adopt the same technique. Educators no longer browbeat a child into learning something for which he has almost no natural aptitude. Instead they look for his possibilities, for his capacities, for his NEKUDAH, and work on that, try to develop it and give it direction and expression. They don't beat it into him; they pull it out of him. Psychology, ~~also~~ too, under the influence of Freud and psychoanalysis, speaks of a Nekudah, of a basic desire in every human being which reaches out in love. They call it the Libido. That is the desire for love and affection which exists in every human being. In a child it is expressed as love for parents, then as love for playmates, and finally as love for a life-long mate. Judaism merely goes one step further and maintains that in addition to this libido, with its physical and sexual ramifications, there is also a Spiritual Libido - the Nekudah of Ahavas Ha'shem and Ahavas Ha'Torah.
8. With this in mind we need never despair of the future of Torah Judaism either here or in Israel. Prophets of gloom have forecast the demise of Torah Judaism as much as two thousand years ago when the Pharisees were regarded as "done for". Assimilation was then supposed to win the field, Then Reform and other deviationist sects. Now we are told that we are all done for, and that "cananism", a primitive form of Near East jingoism, which has caught the fancy of some unhappy young sabras, will replace Judaism and Torah altogether. Perhaps from a superficial analysis they are right. But so were the Sadducees right two thousand years ago, from a superficial analysis. The trouble is that they fail to reckon with the NEKUDAH. It's only a dot, that bit of love for Torah - but can it grow! How often have we seen people seemingly infinitely far from Torah, return with a love and devotion that are amazing.

Who knows when the Nekudah will break out, when the spark will be fanned into great flames of Ahavas hashem and ahavas hatorah. The Nekudah is unpredictable - but it's always there. No wonder we so often resort to the Yiddish expression: MEN KEN NISHT UP'SHATZEN DIE YIDDISHE N'SHAMAH.

9. But, having gone this far and ascertained that in every Jewish heart there exists this Nekudah of Ahavas Ha'Shem, let us proceed joyfully to the next happy thought. And that is, that no matter how stern G-d is with us, no matter how strict and demanding He may seem at different times in history, He - so to speak - always has His Nekudah - and that Nekudah is: Ahavas Yisroel. G-d loves Israel, and shall some day prove it even more obviously, even as Israel loves G-d. For does not legend relate that just as Jews put on the Tefillin in which it is written SHMA YISROEL...ECHAD, so does G-d, figuratively speaking, put on Divine tefillin, in which is written, SHMA HASHEM, YISRAEL AMCHA YISRAEL ECHAD.
10. Yes, there is a Nekudah in G-d too. And insofar as we develop the Nekudah of Love for Torah within us, does G-d develop the nekudah of love for Israel within Him. But whatever may be - the spark is there. And it is that which insured our survival.
11. Nowheres can we find this lofty idea more beautifully expressed than in the inspiring words of Isaiah, with which we began today's Haftorah: VATOMER TZION AZAVANI HA'SHEM VA'SHEM SHE'CHEI'CHANI, Israel despairs of ever gaining G-d's love and says, the Lord has forsaken me, G-d has forgotten me. But Zion has forgotten the Nekudah. For it is an eternal "dot", and it is the Nekudah of G-d's guardianship over and love for Israel. HA'SISHKACH ISHAH ULAH MEI'RACHEIM BEN BITNAH, GAM EILA SISHKACHNA VE'ANOCHI LO ESHKACHEICH. No more than a mother can forget her child, the fruit of her womb, can G-d forget Israel; for even if these be forgotten, I will remember you.
12. For as long as Israel lives there will burn in every Jewish heart and soul the Nekudah of Love for G-d. And for as long as there exists for G-d the Nekudah of Love for Israel will Israel live. And may that be forever.

BENEDICTION: We bless Thee and ask for Thy blessings O G-d ASHER NASSAN LANU TORAS EMESS VE'CHAYEI OLAM NATA BESOCHEINU, who hast given us a true Torah and who has planted in us the seed, or nekudah, of eternal life. Help us to nourish, to love and care for, to gently and greatly develop that Nekudah in us implanted by Thee.

*Note = incorporated this in
Reimann 1956*