

Finding Our Voice

I just heard a story about a man who was running late for a very important meeting downtown. There was a lot of traffic and the only way he was going to make it to his appointment on time would be to get a parking spot right near the building he was headed to – basically impossible to get at 10 o'clock in the morning.

The man was speeding through traffic weaving in and out of lanes and a block away from his destination he starts a desperate prayer, pleading, "Hashem, please help me! My entire career depends on this appointment and I absolutely cannot be late. Please, please, please help me!! Please help me get a parking spot near the building."

Just as he finishes his prayer a car pulls out from a parking spot directly in front of the entrance to the building. In excitement, the man yells, "Never mind Hashem – I've got this! I don't need your help anymore."

We are not *Nevi'im* (prophets), but Hashem speaks to us all the time. We just need to be open to connecting with Him, listening to and watching out for Him. How often are we thinking of something and it happens? Or we need something, and we get it? Hashem is communicating with us every day. Let's attune ourselves to hearing Him and finding our voice to speak with Him, to have conversations with Him.

Our parsha Devarim begins with the words (1:1) אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל – *These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Israel*. In his final weeks, Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest of all prophets, reviewed and taught all the laws of the Torah and the complete history of Israel to the entire nation.

The Vilna Gaon teaches that the first four Books of the Torah were heard directly from Hashem through the throat, the voice box, of Moshe. That is, it was Hashem's "voice" funneled through Moshe's mouth. Though it seemed as if Moshe were uttering the words, it was actually the "voice" of Hashem that the people were hearing. Not so with Devarim.

In Devarim, Moshe chose the words and conveyed the commandments as he understood them using his own voice. From this point Hashem would speak with Moshe and Moshe would relate to B'nai Yisrael at a later time as he understood the message.

It is especially because of this that Moshe is referred to as Rabbeinu – *our teacher*. For he was not only the conduit through which Hashem's words were transmitted verbatim to B'nai Yisrael, but he was also the teacher who explained those words.

Therefore, Moshe was the speaker as we see that it now says (1:42) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי – *Hashem spoke to me*, whereas up until now the Torah writes וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה – *Hashem spoke to Moshe*.

Sefer Devarim is a stern book. Our parsha is a rebuke Moshe Rabbeinu gave at the end of his life. However, we have to understand that the purpose of the rebuke is that B'nai Yisrael should merit to do mitzvahs and ultimately merit not to have curses, but rather brachas (*blessings*). Although the overt message of Devarim is about warnings and potential curses, the inner message is the ability to merit receiving bracha through observing the Torah and mitzvahs.

Rabbi Daniel Glatstein shares a remarkable finding from Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandl (1903 – 1957), a scholar and expert of Hebrew manuscripts who was known for his outstanding discoveries of codes in the Torah before the accessibility of using computers. In his sefer *Maaseh Chemed*, he teaches that if you go to the ב in the word דְּבָרִים at the beginning of the parsha and from that *bet* count 613 spaces it takes you to a ר. Count 613 spaces from there and you arrive at a כ. And from there finally count another 613 spaces and you will find the letter ה. Together, the letters spell ב-ר-כ-ה, (*bracha* – blessing).

This indicates that the whole purpose of Devarim is that we attain bracha. How do we attain bracha? By fulfilling תרי"ג (*Taryag* – the 613 mitzvahs), by fulfilling what we learn in the Torah – בתורה (*BaTorah* – *in the Torah*) which has a gematria of 613. If we fulfill the mitzvahs and follow what's in the Torah, then we should be *zoche* (merit) to a life of bracha.

The Midrash Rabbah presents another interpretation of the word הַדְּבָרִים (*HaDevarim* – the words) which can be read as דְּבוּרִים (*Devorim* – bees). Just as it is the nature of individual bees to follow the leader of their swarm, so too, B'nai Yisrael follows the lead of the righteous men and prophets among them.

The Midrash explains that just as the bee's honey is sweet, so are the words of the Torah sweet. Just as with the bee, whatever honey it stores away, it stores it away for the benefit of its owner as bees have little use for all the honey they produce. Their efforts are thus mostly for their owner who harvests the honey for his own benefit. So too, whatever mitzvahs and good deeds B'nai Yisrael “stores away”, we store them away for the sake of Hashem.

Rav Avigdor Miller (1908 – 2001, a longtime communal rabbi in Brooklyn and early *Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin) maintained that the most important word to concentrate on when reciting a bracha is אַתָּה (*Atah* – You). Even if we say all of the other words of the bracha with the best *kevanah* (concentration) in the world, we must think about *who* we are speaking with and realize we are talking to Hashem, our Creator, the King of the Universe.

The Rebbe, Reb Zusha of Anipoli and his brother the Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk (the Noam Elimelech) were prominent disciples of the holy Maggid of Mezeritch. These 18th Century *tzaddikim* used to go from town to town in disguise. People did not know who they were, they never slept in the same place twice, and they brought back thousands of Jews to *Yiddishkeit*.

Rav Moshe Weinberger (listen to any of his shiurim [here](#) – I guarantee you will be uplifted) shares a story from a *sefer* that's over 100-years-old, that the brothers were once traveling and came to a certain house of a very sweet, simple Jew who took them in for the night.

In the morning, this simple, unlearned Yid is davening a shacharis like the *tzaddikim* have never seen for 3 or 4 hours. The brothers couldn't understand what was going on.

After he was finished davening, Reb Elimelech goes over to him and says that they're very impressed asking, “What are you davening for 4 hours? Do you do that every day?”

The simple Yid responds, “Yeah.”

Reb Elimelech then asks, “So what takes you so long?”

He replies, "It takes a long time."

"What are you thinking about?"

"To tell you the truth, I'm not really thinking about anything. I don't really understand too many of the words."

"So then what takes you so long?"

The Yid shows them his siddur and says, "This is very fat. It takes a long time."

They respond, "What do you mean? You say the *whole thing* every day?"

He answers, "Yes. Why are you not supposed to?"

He was such a simple, unlearned man that he was saying weekday davening, Shabbos davening, Rosh Chodesh, yom tov davening, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Chanukah, Sukkot, and everything else printed in his siddur cover to cover.

The brothers responded that they must get to another town that evening, but they'll spend the day learning with him. They explain to him that there is *shacharis* – morning davening, *mincha* – afternoon davening, *maariv* – evening davening, and there's special davening for shabbos and the holidays, and *tefillot* for other occasions.

They taught him over the course of the day, but it was getting late and the brothers needed to get to their next destination to help some other people that evening. When they left this town, they came to a huge river on its outskirts. They looked around and there was nowhere to cross. And to be on time, they needed to get across the river right away and travel quickly.

So, the two *tzaddikim* looked around to make sure no one was there. Reb Zusha took a handkerchief out of his pocket and he put it on the water and the two brothers were able to cross the water like that with the handkerchief.

They get to the other side and they hear someone yelling, "Rebbes, Rebbes!" They turn around worried that someone saw them and it's that simple Yid. He's running and he comes to the river on the other side. He saw what they did, so he also took out a handkerchief, placed it on the water and crossed over to them.

The brothers are looking at him and they can't believe what they're seeing. He comes across and he says, "I don't remember what you told me. What's that I'm supposed to do again in the afternoon? I don't remember exactly. Please show me again."

The brothers look at each other and respond back, "Forget it. Whatever you were doing, it's fine. Just keep on doing it. It seems to be working."

Can we relate to this kind of *temimus* (wholeheartedness) as someone who does what he is supposed to do with pure emunah? That service before Hashem with purity of motive, namely, for the sake of Hashem's service alone and not for any other motive. It's so hard for us to be so simple and innocent in that way.

Last month I tried saying the daily portion of Tehillim – I lasted two days. I get excited about not having to say *tachanun* on certain days in shacharis. Having basic *kevanah* is a strain to keep up.

I've heard that the easiest way to get someone to start daydreaming is to hand them a siddur. You give me a siddur and all of a sudden I'm imagining going on vacations. What's the next car I want to get? How many emails do I have to respond to? Anything, but the words in front of me to speak to my Creator. To have *kevanah* is a tremendous exercise.

So, how do we connect with Hashem, to speak with Him, and to hear Him when He's speaking with us? That everything we do with Hashem is alive and well even if we don't see it with our eyes. Now, we don't have to see something for it to be real. Take for example gravity, our emotions, or our neshamas. Although we are not able to see Hashem directly, we can find His presence throughout our daily lives when we look for it.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Bender (1897–1989, a leader of the Breslov community) said that he had read in an article that there was a lost old-world painting from one of the greatest artists that had disappeared for many years. Somebody found it – it had been in some basement – and sold it for a tremendous amount of money.

Rabbi Bender read in this article that the person who found the painting was going to throw it away because he saw there were so many cracks in it and that it was damaged. But then he saw the signature at the bottom and realized that he was going to become a multi-millionaire.

Rabbi Bender said that a Jew also has all kinds of cracks, all kinds of the things that happened to us over time. But if we have faith, and we believe, and we search, then we are able to find the signature of Hashem, the Creator of the whole world, Who created us, Who painted us – a magnificent masterpiece in His image.

Imagine if we had a closer relationship with Hashem. What could that look like?

Moshe was given his voice back in parshas Devarim and used it to relay the messages of Hashem to B'nai Yisrael. Although we are very far away and not even inching close to the level of Moshe Rabbeinu, we do all have a little bit of Moshe Rabbeinu inside each of us. Hashem is communicating with us every day. Let's have faith, listen for Him, look for Him, speak to Him.

Please let me know about a time you found yourself speaking with Hashem. I am interested to hear about it.

How can we each find our own voice and seek opportunities in our day to say hello to Hashem?