

Torah Portion Va-et'chanan

Shabbat beginning August 12, 2022

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This week's portion is one of the most quoted in all the Torah, providing two pillars of our faith: the Ten Commandments and the Sh'ma. Commentators pick different perspectives. The great medieval Rashi indicated contradictions from earlier text. Our movement's Plaut discussed how the differences reveal two different traditions. The Conservatives' *Etz Chaim* mentioned Moses' human weakness. The *Jewish Study Bible* emphasized how the Babylonian exile inspired the Deuteronomy writers to form Judaism as a religion independent from a single earthly land. But in their comments on Va-et'chanan, we find that the *Women's Commentary* edited by Tamara Eskenazi and Andrea Weiss, to be the most refreshingly creative. When it asserts that "the parashah's emphasis on education (6:20-25) invites readers to assess women's role in ancient Israel," it shows how education is a modern context for all the other comments. Teachers invite investigation using contradictions; comparison using multiple traditions; opportunities for progress using weakness in a great ancestor; and examination of our own cultural embeddedness using historical context. But as Nina Beth Cardin, one of this portion's *Women's Commentary* Voices wrote, "Where the Torah came from is not as critical as what it means to us." Our lives give it life.

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