

## Parshat Devarim: The Power of Goodbye Rabbanit Michal Kohane - Class of 2020

The opening scene in the classic movie “Hair”, although set back in Oklahoma, those last minutes between father and son in the quiet foggy early morning, awaiting for the rickety bus to appear around the corner, always remind me of Moses in the last of the Five Books.

- You got all your stuff?
- Oh yeh
- When you get there, be sure to give us a call so we know where you are
- Fine (silence, except the sound of their footsteps echoing as they walk to the nearby junction, the son flags the approaching bus to stop)
- Let me give you some money
- Oh, I’m ok
- Just take it, in case you run into amount of trouble, you never know what can happen
- Thank you
- Well boy (slap on shoulder) It’s just the smart people who got to worry; the Lord will take care of them idiots (a chuckle, a semi-very awkward hug) well, see you.

And off he goes to a world his parents know not.

The Book we’re beginning this week is unlike any other: according to tradition, what’s left in our hands is the actual farewell speech Moshe gave the People. It is *his* own way of organizing the Teachings for us, with some repetition, some adjustments and some new nuances.

Unlike Claude Hooper Bukowski’s dad, Moses has lots to say; so much so, that the book is called *Dvarim*, literally “things” or “words”. It is also known as “*Mishne Torah*”, “Second Torah”, and it might be tempting to see it as a repetitious lecture of a bitter, old man, rambling on and on, sorry for himself for not fulfilling his one and only dream: going with the People into The Land.

But, Moses is not a modern movie scene, and although he is 120 years old, until his very last moment, he maintains his strength and never stops being “Moshe Rabeinu”, using everything he has, including not only God’s words, but his own experiences, frustration, anger and shortcomings in order to teach us.

Take for example, the first chapter of this Book. If this is Moses’ reminiscing about the journey, shouldn’t he start early on, let’s say in Egypt, or maybe with the Golden Calf? But since the purpose is to teach, it is the Sin of the Spies that is most critical right now. As the People are about to enter the Land, what if they “chicken out” again? What if they ask to send another set of spies? Will they miss this opportunity, or will the promise be fulfilled this time?

It is now that we hear Moses’ version of what happened 40 years ago, and interestingly, it’s a different story from what we read when it occurred, in Numbers 13-14. Back then, when the spies came back, it was Caleb and Joshua who responded to the People, encouraging them to be strong and go for it (13:30; 14:6), while Moses and Ahron kept quiet. Here, Moses tells us that he did respond, and this is what he said (Deuteronomy 1:29-30):

*I said to you, “Have no dread or fear of them.*

*נאמר אֵלֵיכֶם לֹא־תַעֲרָצוּן וְלֹא־תִירָאוּן מֵהֶם:*

*None other than the LORD your God, who goes before you, will fight for you, just as He did for you in Egypt before your very eyes,*

*יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הִהְיֶה לְפָנֵיכֶם הוּא יִלָּחֶם לְכֶם כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֶתְכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֵיכֶם:*

