

If you had your life to live over again ...

An invitation - to ponder that for a moment ...what would you keep,

and what would you change?

What would you do differently, if you were so blessed -- with a Second Time Around?

This week we began the reading of Sefer Devarim,
literally, the Book of Words,
or the Book of Things.

From translation into Greek, we obtain the more commonly known name: the Book of Deuteronomy.

While from the Rabbi's of old, we obtain the less commonly known name: Mishneh Torah.

At the simplest level, these two names translate roughly the same.

Deutero - duo - two - second nomy - nomos - law.
Deuteronomy: 2nd Law.

Mishneh Torah : Mishneh - from sheini - Second. Mishneh Torah: The second telling of Torah - or - a Second Torah.

But Mishneh Torah goes quite a bit deeper ...

because, in truth, the Hebrew root of the word Mishneh has a dual meaning ... and on the surface, at least, those meaning might appear contractory:

for they are: to repeat, and - to change

sheini - second, to do something a second time, or repeatedly

“v’shinantam levanekha” ... “teach them diligently- repeat over and over”

and - **l’shanot** - to change ...

In seven weeks, we will observe Rosh HaShanah - inviting us to examine our lives and once again ask the questions:

what to repeat, and what to change.

In our Torah journey, our archetypical spiritual teacher, Moshe Rabbeinu, now begins to offer us a recap of gleanings of the learnings of his life. And what a life! From the ark of his basket floating on the Nile, to Pharaoh's palace, to the wilderness of Midian, where he led the life of a simple shepherd, until called one day - by the flames of an unquenchable passion, at the burning bush ...

And yet, back then, at the time of his early glimpses of the divine, it was all he could do to stutter, stammer, and say: "*Ein ish devarim anochi*" - Not a person of words am I.

Ah, Moshe - how you've grown in these long and arduous past 40 years. And here you are today, standing before all the people, and all of us, singing an entire Book of Devarim - the song of your heart to their heart, and to ours

How fitting, that we always begin your book of Devarim on Shabbat Hazon - the Sabbath of prophetic vision - of seeing beyond - both past and future ...

So begging your permission, I invite those who wish to turn to the contents page of your chumash, and I will offer my gleanings from your song in the form of a three-minute tour of the entire book of Deuteronomy, parsha by parsha - perhaps we can think of it as sort of a Jewish 11-step program:

Ok, here we go:

1) **Devarim** - words / things : take time to take stock, where have I been - what is essential, what do I really need? ... what do I value the most? - and how do the words I say, and the things I do -- to myself - and to others - affect my reality?

2) **V'etchanan** - "and I prayed / I pleaded / I beseeched" - or - "I sought grace" - an invitation to realize that even when the results seem very far from that for which I fervently hope, the passion of prayer itself has the power to bring me closer to G*d, and to alignment with my highest truth

3) **Eikev** - that which follows on the heels - [source of the name of Ya'akov] - Eikev - consequences - consider them well

4) **Re'eh** - See! - see the potential for blessing and renewal in all places and at all times

- and - be seen - show up just as you are now, and with all the gifts that are you

5) **Shoftim** - judges and guardians - position them at each of your gates - let them guard and watch over all that you take in - and everything that you put out into the world

6) **Ki Teitzei** - when you go out ... here Moshe speaks to us specifically of going out into battle ... what is the greatest battle which any of us ever face? - our sages pegged this one ages ago - "Mi Gibor?" they asked, "Who is strong, who is valiant?", and responded "haKoveish et Yitzro" - the one who has gained dominion over one's lesser inclinations - for such a person has the free choice - to make the right decision in every moment.

and from Ki Teitzei - when you go out, to

7) **Ki Tavo** - when you come in ... when you come into the New Land, the Land of Promise, the Land of your True Inheritance

... when you, like Moshe Rabbeinu - even for a moment - fully and completely realize and become the person you are

intended and destined to be ...

then - in great gratitude - you will bring offerings of the fruits of your harvest - and recount your personal story of deliverance from slavery to freedom - from deep darkness to great light.

[Indeed, it is from these directions in Ki Tavo that we, the Jewish people receive our first paragraph of communal liturgy and ritual, and the seeds of the the maggid / the telling retold in the hagaddah each year at Passover seders around the world.]

8) **Nitzavim** - you, yes *you!*, are standing -- take this moment to notice -- poised at the precipice between past and future -- the present moment -- the choices are yours - yes yours -- right here, right now -- Nitzavim - you are standing here / now - it's time - now - take your stand

9) **VaYeileikh** - "and he went" ... one might think that, with all the wisdom which our teacher Moshe had gained, he could by this time just sit in his tent, and folks would flock to him to learn ... but rather - perhaps in his humility, perhaps from his yearning to give back - va'Yeilekh -he walked, he went out ... according to a midrash, he personally visited each one of the people - perhaps because Moshe realized that to fully connect - to love ones fellow person as one's self - one must begin by meeting each person - right where they are, right now ...

then, and only then can he begin to sing the song of his teaching ...

10) **Ha'azinu** -- give ear, oh heavens and I shall speak -- and may the sayings of my mouth fall to earth like dew drops -- give ear, listen well -- and speak well -- realize that the whole earth depends upon you, and the consequences - are cosmic

11) **V'zot haBrakhah** - and this is the blessing -- look for the blessing in all, find the blessing, recognize the blessing -- and follow what I like to term the "Jewish prime directive" given so long ago to the progenitors of our spiritual heritage - **v'heyeh berachah** -- you, yes you -- BE a blessing.

This coming Monday night and Tuesday, we will gather in observe of the Ninth of Av - in recognition and mourning and lament of the many cruelties and tragedies which have befallen the Jewish people.

But on this Shabbat of Vision I invite each of us to consider whether perhaps the cruelest tragedies of all are the avoidable ones which have, perhaps through lack of sufficient vision, been brought upon us by those closest to us, and which, sadly, we may even have brought upon ourselves, and those whom we love most.

How would you live your life differently,
given a Second Time Around?

I'll close with an offering of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, as fitting today as when he first taught it over 200 years ago.

The reading of the Book of Eicha concludes with a most familiar verse:

Hashiveinu adonai eilekha v'nashuvah ...Hadeish Yameinu k'kedem. ...

He asks - what does this mean, really ... and how do we do it?

First, Levi Yitzhak reminds of a saying of our sages: that whenever we encounter in Torah the phrase "and now", the true reference is to none other than the power of Teshuvah.

and he suggests this answer:

breathe in, he says go ahead, do it

now ... trace that breath to it's source, the Breath of All Life

now ... as you breath out, ... and say thank you ...

realize ...that truly, there is new life being breathed into you, right now - in each and every moment ... right now

right now, Levi Yitzhak reminds us again, as have our teachers for generations ... you are a new person, with new life, and new possibilities

Hashiveinu eilekha v'nashuvah ...

breath new life to us, and we, in turn, will return, to You

What will you do differently, blessed -- with a Second Time Around?

An invitation - to ponder that for a moment

- and then begin again

- with your very next breath.