

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Ki Tavo

The Book of Deuteronomy contains Moshe's last will and testament to the Jewish people. The book can be divided into three basic sections. In the first section, Moshe implores the people to learn from their past mistakes and lead lives of spiritual and ethical purity. The section that follows both reviews many of the mitzvot taught earlier, and introduces some new ones. And lastly, the dénouement of the book is Moshe's last speech to the nation, wherein he explains the mission of the Jewish people, gives them a glimpse into their future, and bestows his final blessing upon them.

Our Parsha (Deut. 26: 16) belongs to the second section of the book, where it records Moshe speaking to the people about the general attitude one should take regarding the mitzvot.

“This day, the Lord your G-d commands you to do perform all of these decrees and the statutes, and you shall observe and perform them with all your heart and all your soul.”

The medieval commentator Rashi is troubled by an obvious question. Hashem gave the Torah thirty eight years prior to this event. By the time this took place, Moshe has been teaching the Torah and its mitzvot throughout their time in the desert. Why did Moshe say, “*This day*, the Lord your G-d commands you?”

Rashi clues us in to a statement made by early rabbinic authorities (“Chazal”), in the Midrash, who tell us that Moshe's word choice is deliberate. He is teaching us an important element in how one should approach the mitzvot. “Our relationship to the Torah and its mitzvot, should always be *kichadashim* (new).”

We find a similar instance of peculiar wording a bit later in the Parsha. In this case, the verse addresses the *relationship* that we, as a nation, have with G-d.

“Moshe, and the *kohanim*, the Levites, spoke to all of Israel saying, “Be attentive and hear, O Israel: This day you have become a people to Hashem your G-d. You shall hearken to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, and you shall perform all his commandments and His decrees, which I command you *today*” [27:9-10].

Again, Rashi is troubled by the seeming inaccurate dating used in the text. The people became a nation, at the very latest, at Sinai, when G-d gave them the Torah. Why does the verse state, “*This day* you have become a people to Hashem your G-d?”

The Talmud (Berachot 63b) teaches that Moshe was inspiring the people with an important concept. “Every single day, it should appear in your eyes, as if *today* you joined together under the covenant.” That is to say that the covenant renews itself and is not old and stale.

Rabeinu Bechaye, expands on the idea brought by Rashi. He quotes a Midrash that uses slightly different language than the Midrashim Rashi utilized. “*Hayom* – this day” connotes (*Chavivin*) preciousness. The Torah and its *mitzvot* should be as precious to you, as if, today, you received them at Sinai.



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What are we to make of the fact that the terms *new* and *precious* are used by the Midrash? Why is newness a constructive way of establishing ourselves in our relationship with Hashem and His mitzvot and what does this have to do with preciousness? One idea is that newness spawns preciousness. New things, new ideas and new concepts generate excitement and wonder. Many of us can recall the first day of school, or perhaps have children experiencing that now. Everyone arrives at school wearing new shoes, carrying brand new backpacks and sporting the latest hairstyles. It is an exciting time. Last year's travails and stresses are forgotten. This year is a brand new opportunity. We, as a people, are bound to Hashem by a special covenant He made with us. A bond described by King Solomon as a marriage. We are married to each other. Married for better or for worse, in sickness and in health. We are G-d's people and He is our G-d.

The challenge is that marriages change over time. At times, relationships might struggle to survive. But in the first moment, at the time of the *chuppah* (wedding canopy) the future possibilities seem endless. The promise of what is to come is breathtaking. The good fortune of having found "the One" is truly inspiring.

The High Holiday season, beginning with the month of *Elul*, is a time of renewal. It is a time of commitment. It is a time to go back to square one. Rosh Hashanah celebrates the birthday of the creation of the year. The world itself is in a state of renewal.

Moshe inspires the people with an important and eternal message. "This day" you become a nation. Your relationship, your covenant with Hashem is renewable on a daily basis. Moshe was telling them to live in "the here and now."

I can start anew, regardless of my past missteps. Today is a new day. Today, I can reestablish my relationship. Today, I can start fresh. Today, I can renew myself. Today, I can reconnect with G-d.

For many people, the task of "change" is so daunting that we abandon the quest before even beginning the journey. This may be for a number of reasons. For some, the thought of how much there is to improve upon is overwhelming. For others, inertia is easier than absolute change.

The key is to focus in on a few "minor" challenges and work slowly. Some suggest working on one mitzvah that is interpersonal, a second that is between G-d and me, as well as one challenge that we face in the intrapersonal realm, the world is in our hands. We don't fully appreciate our abilities. We underestimate the significance of our actions.

G-d trusts us so much. Let's live up to the challenge.

Shabbat Shalom!

