



The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Devarim

Parshat Vaetchanan • Shabbos Nachamu

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Love and Fear and Lessons in Leadership

By Ari Weinberger

Moshe continues his efforts to prepare *Bnai Yisrael* to enter the land of Israel in this week's *Parsha*. He recounts the עֲשֵׂרַת הַדְּבָרוֹת, the Ten Commandments, and the first paragraph of the *Shema*. *Moshe* reminds *Bnai Yisrael* to love God. And then he tells them that they should fear God.

Reading this reminds me of a question Rabbi Rubenstein, *z'l*, asked me when I was preparing for my Bar Mitzvah. Rabbi Rubenstein asked if I loved God or if I feared God. One could infer from this question that it is an either-or proposition; you could either love God or fear God.

Our *Parsha* seems to challenge that proposition. How could *Moshe* expect *Bnai Yisrael* to both love God and fear God?

The *Ramban* offers two possible explanations. In the first, he posits that *Moshe's* warning to fear God was directed to the average member of *Bnai Yisrael*. Fearing God would prevent them from sinning. In contrast, the directive to love *Hashem* was for the pious members of *Bnai Yisrael*, those who did not need the caution of fear because they were not tempted to sin.

The *Ramban's* second explanation is that *Moshe* was directing all of *Bnai Yisrael* to both love and fear God at the same time. While it may seem that love and fear are conflicting emotions, the Talmud *Yerushalmi* reconciles the thought and explains how to manage these emotions simultaneously: *Act out of love and act out of fear. Act out of love so that if you feel hate, know that you love and one who loves does not hate. Act out of fear so that if you feel like rebelling, know that you are one who fears, and one who fears does not rebel.* (*Brachos* 9:5)

This passage suggests that *Moshe's* directive to love God was in part a directive for *Bnai Yisrael* to learn to love each other. A message that is particularly timely today, *Shabbos Nachamu*, as we have just completed the three weeks and *Tisha B'Av* when we mourned the destructive power of hate. Reading this week's *Parsha*, reminds us of the awesome power of love that is mixed with some fear.

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In addition to the important lesson of loving and fearing God, *Moshe's* actions highlight another essential principle. *Hashem* punished *Moshe* and would not allow him to enter the land of Israel. Despite his pleas to enter the land, the closest *Moshe* got was seeing the view from *Har Nevo*. And

yet, despite what must have been an immense disappointment, he stayed the course and dedicated his final days to preparing *Bnai Yisrael* to enter the land.

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Even though he never set foot in Israel, Moshe wanted *Bnei Yisrael* to achieve what he could not.

May we all merit to understand the importance of both love and fear, and may we strive to ensure that those who come after us achieve what we cannot accomplish.

Ari grew up in the Young Israel of Scarsdale. After one year in Israel and 11 years in Chicago, Ari returned to Scarsdale with his wife, Nancy. Together they have four children, Henry, 18, Max, 15, and Mille and Tessa, ages 12. You can find Ari in shul on Shabbos challenging the principles of the no-slip tallis.

One more thing ←

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag made a bold assertion in his recent Collective Conversation introductory *shiur* to *Sefer Devarim*: he argued that the popular notion that Moshe's speech, and *Sefer Devarim* as a whole, were intended to be a summary of the first four Books of the Torah was wrong, or at least significantly misleading. *Sefer Devarim* fails as a summary for many reasons, he pointed out, including the simple observation that it doesn't mention many of the most important events that are documented in the first four Books of the Torah. What's more, rather than merely repeating what was already said, much of the material presented in *Sefer Devarim* is new and does not appear in earlier *Parshiot*.

Rabbi Leibtag demonstrated that the fundamental purpose of Moshe's speech, and *Sefer Devarim*, is to acquaint us with a set of laws — *chukim u'mishpatim* — meant to govern the daily life of the *Bnei Yisrael*. Though Moshe had taught these laws many times before, to this point, they were not recorded in the Torah. Moshe, he reasoned, intended the laws to appear in *Sefer Shemot* following *Bnei Yisrael's* receipt of the *עֲשֵׂרַת הַדְּבָרוֹת* but their recording was delayed (as was *Bnei Yisrael's* entrance into the Land of Israel) due to the *חֵטְא הָעֵגֶל*.

In Rabbi Leibtag's words: These laws require constant repetition. Most importantly, these laws relate to how *Am Yisrael* can fulfill the goals of the core covenant to become God's nation: *וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סֻגְלָה מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים*, *you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples.* (*Shemot* 19:5)

Rabbi Leibtag's excellent (and short) *shiur* is available on the YIS YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBOGkW0AZeA&t=15s>).

Want to write or dedicate a Parsha essay?

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