

# DEVARIM

## STONE OF VOICE

God is angry with the spies, not only for the negative things they say and the way they demoralize the rest of the people, but also for their tone of voice. Respect actually involves more than just the words we use. How are you affected by the tone of voice of others? What can you do to fix that?

## LISTENING TO ALL SIDES

Moshe emphasizes the importance of listening – paying close attention and patiently listening to all sides. A qualified judge must ignore external factors and do his best to learn as much as he can about the litigants and their arguments. Try not to jump to conclusions. Listen, evaluate and consider.

## MAKING GOALS

Since Moshe is unable to go into the land, he gives a pep talk to the people for their future. Moshe told the Jewish people what they might fear and what obstacles they might face. He told them that they have the talents to overcome any obstacle. He gave them clear focus and aim. Whenever you are about to embark on something big, something important, a new stage in life, don't "wing it" or say that you'll worry about it when you get there. Make objectives and plan ahead.

---

# VETCHANAN

## TAKING CARE OF OUR BODIES

The Torah regards our bodies as 'holy' objects because they are tools for doing great things. We have all this potential within us that can only be accessed when we take proper care of our bodies. How much do you value your physical health?

## TEACHING ETHICS

Moshe is told that he will not be able to enter the Promised Land, but is to teach the people of Israel a body of ethics to guide them in their new lives and into the future, with each new generation. Whether it's honesty, commitment, kindness to one's neighbor, giving to the poor, or gratitude, the ethics we instill in others will travel a great distance. What does it mean to you to be ethical?

## ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

Moshe deals with the consequences of his actions—only getting a glimpse of the Promised Land, because of his moment of sin. In the moment when we react quickly, it is unlikely that we are running through all possible scenarios of action in our minds. So what happens when we are later faced with the consequences of those actions? There are times when apologies can make things right, and there are times when, like Moshe, we simply need to accept the consequence of our sin.

# EIKEY

## CONTROLLING ANGER

This parsha talks about the obligation to destroy idol worship in all its forms, even physically destroy idols. Sometimes though, the 'idol' isn't really an image or sculpture; it is ourselves. Anger is a self-centered indulgence, a modern form of idolatry. What are ways to handle feelings of anger?

## THE VALUE OF GRATITUDE

Moshe instructs the Israelites to be grateful for all the blessings in their lives, especially for each meal. We lead blessed lives and it is easy to overlook what we have to be thankful for. Why do you think it is hard to be grateful sometimes?

## THE ROLE OF A ROLE MODEL

The words of the Shema tell us that we should teach the words of the Torah wherever we are. Each and every one of our actions is a teaching moment, an educational opportunity. What can others learn from our actions?

---

# RE'EH

## FREE WILL

Moshe tells his people he is settling a blessing and a curse. The people have a choice; they can obey the commandments and reap blessings, or they can fail to listen to the commandments and suffer. We have impulses, but we also have the freedom of choice. What kinds of choices are hard for you?

## TZEDAKAH

The parsha says we should not harden our hearts or shut our hands in response to the needy. Charity/tzedakah is not just a matter of feeling philanthropic, but an act of justice in our world. A perfect theme for a Mitzvah Project! There are plenty of volunteer opportunities in our society to participate in!

## GIVING OF OURSELVES

We give 10 percent of our income in money, time, or products. Even though we are encouraged to be generous in our giving, the text indicates that we should not give more than 20 percent. This law is trying to model a balance between taking care of others and taking care of ourselves. What is important is not how much we give, but that we give sufficiently in relation to our means.

# SHOFTIM

## PRESERVING THE ENVIRONMENT

This parsha presents the mitzvah to protect fruit trees from destruction. This mitzvah is the foundation for the Jewish value of ba'al tashchit, which teaches us not to be wasteful and to care for the environment. How can you care for the environment?

## FAIRNESS

The parsha talks about the court system and urges us repeatedly to pursue justice. We can do the best we can to navigate fairly in all the situations at home when a concern of fairness is raised. That can be the modest beginnings of coming to know what justice means in the wider world. What does it mean to be fair?

## RESPECT TOWARDS ELECTED OFFICIALS

This parsha talks about appointing a king and having a monarchy. There are certain rules to govern the leadership. The king is not allowed to have too many horses, too much silver, or too many wives, etc. There needs to be a certain level of respect for our elected officials.

---

# KI TETZEI

## RESPECTING GOD'S CREATIONS

The parsha forbids us from plowing with an ox and a donkey together because it would be painful to the smaller animal. This shows the Torah's humanitarian concern for animals. Why do you think it is important to be kind to animals? What can you do to be kind to animals?

## DECEIVING OURSELVES

We are instructed to return lost objects that we may find lying on the street. It is not always an easy mitzvah to fulfill when you are the finder; however, we must be truthful to others and to ourselves.

## REMEMBERING OUR HISTORY

We are commanded to remember Amalek. Even though this was a difficult time for the Jewish people, it is still imperative for us to remember our history and learn from it. If we don't remember our history and pass it down from generation to generation, our history will be lost. The past needs to inform the future.

# KI TAVO

## BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE

God promises that blessings will pursue one who chooses the path of growth. Part of the assurance of blessing here is that the blessing and goodness will “pursue us” even though we may perceive it as unfair or difficult while it happens. Things come our way in life that don’t always seem like blessings. When have you ever experienced something that seemed bad at first, but turned out to be very good?

## FIRSTS

The parsha gives the laws of the first fruits. We give them to the Kohanim. There are many laws in the Torah regarding “firsts.” This can teach us the significance of firsts and beginnings. At this time, it is the beginning of the academic year, the beginning of a job year, and almost the beginning of the Jewish year. The beginning gives us a new chance at something. We start fresh. We have a clean slate. We have the opportunity to think about what we would like to accomplish, what our goals may be and how we can get to where we want to be. This is a beautiful blessing we have in our lives, and we must take advantage of it!

## CHALLENGES

We’re all faced with adversity, hardship, and challenge. They define us as a people. We should not be ashamed of it, we should not be upset about it, we should not let it take over; rather, we need to embrace it! We will overcome our obstacles with time, patience and perseverance. What is one challenge you face?

---

# NITZAVIM

## INHERITENCE AND CONTROL

God has made a covenant, not only with the current generation, but with generations that came before and future generations. Our lives depend on those who came before us and bear responsibility to those who come after us. We may be born with a Jewish identity, but what will we do with that? What are things you inherited and what are things you can control?

## ASPIRATIONS AND GOALS

The parsha says, “It is not in the heavens”; in other words, what the Torah instructs is not beyond us to accomplish. Some struggle is inherent in accomplishment; however, striving for something important is rewarding. What is something new you would like to try?

## ENSURING JUDAISM’S LONGEVITY

We are instructed by Moses to choose life. The Torah recognizes that, although we may very well know what is good for us and what is not, we still need to be reminded to make the right choices. Sometimes, we can’t comprehend the long-term consequences of our actions. How can we learn to “choose life” when challenged?

# VAYELECH

## DISCOMFORT

Moshe nears the end of his old and frail life, but this does not stop him from making the most of his days. He uses his time to impart final words of guidance and wisdom. It isn't easy for him, but it is his last chance. We should certainly enjoy the world in which we live, but there's much more to life than comfort. It takes effort to accomplish our goals. Apply yourself to reach your goal.

## DISOBEDIENCE AND UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

God tells Moshe that God's people will be disobedient and violate the covenant. Nevertheless, God keeps faith in the Children of Israel, and despite their misbehavior, he brings them into the Promised Land. God does not abandon His people. Perhaps this is the oldest example of unconditional love. We remain faithful to our loving relationships, and that is why it's important to set limits. Do you remember when and why you have broken rules?

## FINAL PREPERATIONS

Moshe is nearing the end of his life and must prepare for it. He needs to prepare himself and his people by setting them up for their future. Although it may seem upsetting when something is ending, but we must accept that nothing is forever. Once we accept this, we can prepare for our next stage, our next endeavor and our next journey. Do you have things set up for your future? How can we stay positive through this?

---

# HAAZINU

## FACING PERSONAL FEARS

The Children of Israel were afraid of their enemies and of being teased or judged by the larger nations. As they wandered in the wilderness, there were times when they lost hope in themselves and when they stopped believing in Moshe and God. We too have moments when we're overpowered by our fears. At moments like these, our greatest resource is our internal strength. How can you use your strengths to overcome your fears?

## THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

The parsha gives the injunction to "give ear", to listen. If one feels listened to, and feels that they can shape their own environment, they are likely to be open to listening to what we have to say. When is it hardest for you to listen?

## SELF-JUSTIFICATION

Moshe reminds us that when we do things that are wrong, we must focus on the imperfection in ourselves and not try to blame others. People judge themselves by their motives, not by their actions, which is why all people think they are basically good. However, there is no way to correct our bad actions if we do not see them as wrong. Think objectively. Suppose the other person really is wrong: why is it helpful to focus away from them and onto yourself?

# V'ZOT HABRACHA

## SELF IDENTITY

Moshe gives his parting words, his last wishes to the Jewish nation. He gives blessings, instructions, and directions. His job as a leader never ends, and near his death he continues to inspire. Think about the messages you would like to be known by. We can each have a profound impact on our world.

## COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

Moshe blesses the tribe of Zebulun and Issachar, and he tells them to rejoice in their journeys and in their tents. The ability to rejoice is another blessing in our lives. Focusing on the overwhelming number of positives rather than on the fewer negatives can foster better perspective and balance. The capacity to feel joy is tied directly to being able to enjoy the blessings we do have. Our own joy is contagious. What are five blessings in your life for which you are thankful? Why do you think it is sometimes easy to take them for granted?

## THE IMPORTANCE OF A NAME

The parsha lists all the tribes of Israel and their corresponding jobs. A name is no random thing. Our names have meaning. Some people are named after a loved one, the month they were born in, a character from the bible, and some are named simply because of its beautiful meaning. Who named you? What does your name represent? Can we find a way to connect the meaning of our names to our personality or our lives?

