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# Devarim

**T**he GR”A explains the fundamental difference between *Sefer Devarim* and the rest of the Torah is the level of prophecy. He says that, for the first four books, God spoke directly through the throat of Moshe Rabbeinu in real time. *Sefer Devarim* was prophecy on the level of the other prophets who usually had their prophecies at night while sleeping and then told them over to the people the next day while awake.

It doesn't make *Devarim* any less authoritative, which anyhow is mostly a review of the *mitzvos* from the previous four books. But it does raise the question, “Why the difference?” Doesn't it sound like a going down and not a going up?

Some say, just the opposite. For the first four books, Moshe was still learning how to be the great person he became. As Rashi will later say, it takes forty years for a student to fully understand their teacher; and the other books were from those forty years. *Sefer Devarim* is the last day of Moshe's life, by which time he had become the model student. When he spoke on his own, God could rely on his speaking for Him.

Another explanation might have to do with the message of the book. *Bereishis* through *Bamidbar* is concerned mostly with learning the word of God and living by it. It was really meant to be between God and the Jewish People, and would have been had they not deferred the task to Moshe. *Devarim* is Moshe Rabbeinu's farewell address to the nation he had led for forty years, which included preparing the people for Torah life beyond his own. It had to be personal.

But what about the last eight lines? They're the ones that discuss Moshe Rabbeinu's final moments, and his personal greatness. Those had to have come directly from God because they wouldn't sound very good coming from Moshe himself, and it certainly wasn't like Moshe Rabbeinu to blow his own horn.

They also have a different status, but for seemingly a different reason. The Gemora (*Bava Basra* 15a) asks how Moshe could mention his death, and then keep writing as if he were alive. Every word has to be true, which is why one opinion holds that Yehoshua *bin* Nun received and wrote the last eight lines of the Torah, from his rebi's death onward.

God forbid one word of Torah not be from Moshe Rabbeinu himself! That's the other opinion, especially since it is called "*Toras Moshe*." Rather, this opinion holds that Moshe was told by God to write it, which he did in tears. The fact that God commanded it makes it true because it is prophecy, just like other prophets wrote in the present about future events.

The GR"A found a way to bridge the gap between both opinions, saying that the Hebrew for "tears" (*b'dema*) can also mean "confused." In other words, as the Ramban explains, the entire Torah was given to Moshe Rabbeinu letter-by-letter from start to finish at *Har Sinai*. But what had yet to transpire was left as letters with no breaks, which God provided when the time was right.

Thus, it could be Yehoshua who broke up the letters of the last eight verses after Moshe died, not Moshe himself. But having received them in the first place, they technically had still come through Moshe, the words only becoming distinct and "truthful" from the time of his death.

It is an interesting discussion that does not end here. But one takeaway is how the obvious stops becoming less so once you think into what is really happening. This usually leads to questions that, ostensibly, can appear to surface difficulties and even contradictions. But thinking further into those often leads to answers and deeper insights into the ideas themselves, and life.

Last Shabbos, I was part of a conversation that questioned the ways of God regarding certain negative events in their lives. It was nothing new under the sun because man has been doing *that* ever since he left *Gan Aiden*. Over the millennia, some have left the discussion with answers they could work with, others with additional complaints about their *hashgochab* (providence).

As we grappled with the issue, I knew that the answers to their questions lay in areas of Torah learning they had yet to enter. But rather than say, "Tell us what we need to know," they argued that such knowledge shouldn't be necessary to answer such fundamental questions of everyday life. We didn't really make any progress by the time we ended late at night.

The truth is, they were right. . . if they are prepared to have *emunab*. If they are willing to let go of all such questions and trust God about everything He does, especially

in their own personal lives, then yes, you need not go much deeper. Their *emunab pesbutab*—simple faith—would be enough to maintain a close connection to God and feel blessed in life no matter what the circumstances.

But like so many others, they were not. That was clear by how they could be so blessed in life and yet feel so denied. They lacked the vision to see their blessings because they lacked the knowledge of how this world actually works, and God through it. I can say so because I have seen firsthand such knowledge has had on my own outlook on life.

And believe it or not, though such an issue can seem relatively harmless from afar, in the end, it can and does lead to spiritual self-destruction, and even national. And as the Nine Days teach us, eventually it even makes it into the physical world with terrible physical results.

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Have a great Shabbos,

Pinchas Winston

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