

Parashat Devarim - A new beginning, a new voice. (5776-2016)
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The first book of the Torah starts with the letter “Bet”. The Bet of Bereshit and the “b” of beginning. If you look closely at each of the three books that follow in the torah, you will notice that all of them start with the letter “Vav”: 1) *Veele Shemot* (And these are the names), 2) *Vaikra el Moshe* (The lord called to Moses) and finally 3) *Vaidaber Hashem el Moshe Bamidbar* (The Lord spoke to Moses in the tent of meeting in the Desert of Sinai). There is a patron that is broken in the final book of the Torah which starts with the aleph: *Ele HaDevarim* (These are the words). The last book of the Torah starts with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

This week we are starting this last book of the Torah, the book of Deuteronomy. According to Rabbi Elie Munk, this phenomenon comes to teach us that “the book of Deuteronomy is not tied to the past, although the past nonetheless belongs to it”. Following his steps, I say that in Deuteronomy there is an entirely new beginning. In this book we see an entirely new way to express our Judaism. All the other books of the Torah are told in “third person” and there is a relater that tells stories. Deuteronomy is a kind of autobiography, maybe one of the first ones in humankind. In this book there is no relater that tells us what Moses felt, thought, or did; instead we have Moses’ take in the first person. That is why this book starts with an “Aleph”. Is the Aleph of Ani or Anochi, the Aleph of “I” or “myself”.

According to the Talmud (Megilah 31b) Moses spoke “these words” (the book of Deuteronomy, or at least part of it) on his own. And this is perhaps one of Moses’ most important lessons; we should all connect to the past, and the past that began in Genesis and every generation adds a new “Vav” (a new “and”), with new stories, new laws and traditions, but finally every one of us should tell his own story. Every Jew should add his own voice and perspective to our national history. This is one way to understand why many times, the book of Deuteronomy does not correlate 100% with the versions of the “same” stories or laws that appear in the previous books; because every time we tell the story of our people we add our special “touch”, our unique perspective and voice.

Remember, this is the path: Bet, Vav and Aleph. **BET**: The beginning when God created the world. **VAV**: everlasting stories of our past. **ALEPH**: our own perspective and voice.

Shabbat Shalom