

## Washing our Cloths White as Snow

In this weeks reading from Parsahat Devarim (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22*), Moshe retells the story on what happened that led the people to remain in the wilderness. The Hebrew name of this book in the Masoretic Text is “*Devarim*,” which is derived from the opening words in this week’s Torah portion, אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים “*Eleh ha’devarim*” meaning “*These are the words.*” The English translation of the book of Devarim is “*Deuteronomy*,” derived from the Greek translation Δευτερονόμιον (Deuteronomion) which means “*second law.*” Here the phrase אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים translated as Δευτερονόμιον shows a movement from the traditional name of the book derived from the Hebrew text which was influenced by the Greek speaking culture. According to Midrash Rabbah, the rabbis spend a considerable amount of time making halakhic decisions based upon the opening words from the book of Deuteronomy on the phrase, “*Eleh ha’devarim*” (אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים).

### ספר דברים פרק א *Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:1-5*

א אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-  
כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּמִדְבַר בְּעֵר-  
בָּה מוֹל סוּף בֵּין-פָּאָרָן וּבֵין-תּוֹפֵל וְלָבָן  
וְחִצְרַת וְדֵי זָהָב: ב אַחַד עָשָׂר יוֹם  
מִחֶרֶב דֶּרֶךְ הַר-שַׁעִיר עַד קְדֹשׁ בְּרִנֵּעַ:  
ג וַיְהִי בְּאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּעֶשְׂתֵּי-עָשָׂר  
הַדָּשׁ בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ דָּבַר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-בְּנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֹתוֹ אֲלֵהֶם:  
ד אַחֲרֵי הַפְּתוֹ אֶת סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֱמֹרִי-  
רֵי אֲשֶׁר יוֹשֵׁב בְּחֶשְׁבוֹן וְאֶת עוֹג מֶלֶךְ  
הַבָּשָׁן אֲשֶׁר-יוֹשֵׁב בְּעַשְׂתָּרֹת בְּאֶדְרֵעִי: ה  
בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב הוֹאִיל מֹשֶׁה  
בְּאֵר אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת לֵאמֹר:

*1:1 These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel and Laban and Hazereth and Dizahab. 1:2 It is eleven days’ journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea. 1:3 In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the children of Israel, according to all that the Lord had commanded him to give to them, 1:4 after he had defeated Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth and Edrei. 1:5 Across the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this law, saying, (NASB)*

According to the preface to the volume containing Midrash Rabbah Devarim, the author/editors (*Harry Freedman (Author), Maurice Simon (Editor)*) of Soncino Midrash Rabbah state that Midrash Devarim Rabbah is a collection of Halakhic (הַלְכָה) decisions on various topics rather than a verse by verse exposition as compared to the previous midrashim. So this week we will be discussing Halachah. Historically, the purpose of Halachah was to provide a way for Jewish communities to enforce civil and religious law. The Halakhic decisions were used as a basis for life, how to live, and how to serve God in the diaspora and even at home in the land of Israel. The word “*halakhah*” is derived from the Hebrew word halakh (הִלָּךְ) meaning “*to walk*” or “*to go.*” The word taken literally translates as “*the way to go*” rather than “*law.*” Halakhah constitutes the

practical application of the 613 mitzvot in the Torah, as developed through discussion and debate in the classical rabbinic literature, particularly the Mishnah and the Talmud, and as codified in Rambam's Mishneh Torah and the Shulchan Aruch.

According to the editors of Midrash Rabbah, the rabbis spend a considerable amount of time making halakhic decisions based upon the opening words (אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים) “*Eleh ha’devarim*”) from Parashat Devarim, and according *Midrash Rabbah Devarim, Parashat 1, Part 4* (מדרש רבה דברים פרשה א סימן ד) the rabbis make the following comments regarding these words, “*Eleh ha’devarim*” (אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים).

#### ***Midrash Rabbah Devarim, Parashat 1, Part 4***

*4. Another explanation, THESE ARE THE WORDS. R. Aha son of R. Hanina said, it would have been more fitting for the rebukes to have been uttered by Balaam and the blessings by Moshe. But had Balaam uttered the rebukes, then Israel would say, It is an enemy who rebukes us; and had Moshe uttered the blessings then the other nations of the world would say, It is their friend who blesses them. Therefore, the Holy One blessed be He, commanded, Let their friend Moshe reprove them, and their foe Balaam bless them, so that the genuineness of the blessings and the rebukes of Israel may be clear beyond question.*

The midrash states that the opening phrase “*THESE ARE THE WORDS*” are interpreted as a reference to the blessing and rebuking and discuss the importance of who it is that blesses and who it is that rebukes. They say that it would have been better to have Bilam do the rebuking and Moshe the blessing. However, if Bilam had spoken a rebuke rather than a blessing, Israel would say that an enemy rebukes, whereas, if Moshe had given the blessing, the nations would have said it is a friend who blesses. According to the rabbis, the way God worked in these peoples lives, bringing a blessing by the mouth of an enemy and a rebuke by the mouth of a friend, has great significance. The purpose was so we could see the genuineness of the blessings and the rebukes would not have been questioned. The Lord God rebukes us and it is not because He is an enemy but because He is a friend and He loves us. The truth is, when the Lord rebukes, a blessing is often hidden within the rebuke. The motivation of the Lord's rebuke is the “*great love of God.*” This should be the approach of a loving earthly father and is also true of the Lord God Almighty, who rebukes us with love. Rebuke is in fact a sign of love. Loving parents know they must put rules in place and rebuke their children if they disobey the rules so their children will learn to grow and to refine their ways. On the other hand, parents who do not establish rules nor rebuke their children at all, only cause them harm as we see occurring with King David's son Adonijah. David neglected to rebuke his son which resulted in tragic consequences.

### ***Summary of Adonijah***

*After the death of his elder brothers Amnon and Absalom, Adonijah*

*became heir-apparent to the throne, but Solomon, a younger brother, was preferred to him. Adonijah, however, when his father was dying, caused himself to be proclaimed king. But the prophet Nathan and Bathsheba induced David to give orders that Solomon should immediately be proclaimed and admitted to the throne. Adonijah fled and took refuge at the altar, receiving pardon for his conduct from Solomon on the condition that he showed himself “a worthy man” (1 Kings 1:5-53). He afterwards made a second attempt to gain the throne, by trying to marry David’s last woman, Abishag from Shunem, but Solomon denied authorization for such an engagement, even though Bathsheba now pleaded on Adonijah’s behalf. He was then seized and put to death (1 Kings 2:13-25).*

According to the Torah, the Lord loves us and gave us His commands. When we neglect His commands he rebukes us. Parashat Devarim (this week’s reading) can be divided into 3 sections: (i) Moshe restates the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, (ii) the people are reminded to obey God and His ways, and (iii) Moshe explains that unfaithfulness to God will cause the people to lose their right to the land. If the people neglect the commands in their unfaithfulness, the Lord will rebuke them and bring a punishment upon them that is purpose to draw them back to Him. Knowledge of the commands and having violated the command gives us the knowledge that we have sinned which leads us to repentance. Thus, repentance is an important part of remaining secure in the land as we read according to the Torah. The narrative of the exodus journey tells us that Israel entered into a covenant agreement with God, received His Torah, and then proceeded to the Promised Land.

The parallel we find today from the Torah portion is as we place our faith and trust in Yeshua the Messiah, our lives “*turn*” in repentance and we are set on a journey of living for God for the purpose of bringing glory to His Name. The question is though how do we do that? How do we live for God in a way that brings glory to His name? In the book of Revelation we are given a message from God regarding what the Lord expects of His children, how we are to turn in repentance and live for Him. Reading through the book of Revelation, in the narrative, two principal characters appear to be described, the “*Harlot-Babylon*” and the “*Bride-New Jerusalem.*” We can see this in the variety of parallels that are drawn between the Babylon (see *Revelation 17-18*) and the New Jerusalem (see *Revelation 21-22*) the author of Revelation (John) is contrasting the two, one against the other. We can see this by the way John adopts similar introductory phraseology, thematic sequences, and verbal patterns (*Jan Fekkes III, Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. 109, No. 2 (1990), pp. 269-287, Publisher: The Society of Biblical Literature*). In *Revelation 21*, the Apostle John introduces the bride (*21:9-21*) where the bride is described using terminology from the Torah to explain the marriage symbolism, relationship, and role of the faithful bride to her husband.

### ***Revelation 19:7-9***

*19:7 ‘Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the mar-*

*riage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.’  
19:8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and  
clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. 19:9 Then  
he said to me, ‘Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the mar-  
riage supper of the Lamb.’ ‘And he said to me, ‘These are true words  
of God.’ (NASB)*

Reading through this section of Revelation, it is interesting to observe the way the bride is described having “*made herself ready*” for the day of her marriage. *Revelation 19:8* states that “*It was given her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*” This is an important text because it speaks of something that was given to be used as clothing, and this thing that was given is “*acts of righteousness.*” The thing that was given occurred during Shavuot, the giving of the Torah, and the purpose of the Torah was for the righteousness of Israel.

There is a lot of confusion among believers today regarding righteousness. Some say that we are righteous because of our good works, and others say our righteousness comes by faith apart from our works. Why is there so much confusion? One reason may be that the word “*righteous*” is used in two different ways in the Apostolic Writings. In order to understand what John is writing in Revelation, we must understand the difference between the two usages. In the Apostolic Writings, there are times when the word “*righteous*” refers “*righteous acts.*” Examples may be found in *2 Timothy 2:22, 3:16, and Titus 3:5*:

***2 Timothy 2:22***

*2:22 Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. (NASB)*

***2 Timothy 3:16***

*3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; (NASB)*

***Titus 3:5***

*3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, (NASB)*

These scriptures among others use “*righteousness*” to describe “*doing what is right before God.*” Rightly so, we should do our best to live in a righteous manner before the Lord God because this honors God and Yeshua the Messiah. Another way “*righteousness*” is used in the Apostolic Writings is to describe the position of those who place their faith in Yeshua the Messiah. The righteousness described in this way has been traditionally understood to be separate from the works we do (righteous acts). Is this be the approach we should take regarding “*righteous acts*” and “*our righteousness in Yeshua the Messiah?*” How do we harmonize this hermeneutic with *Revelation 19*?

Thinking about righteousness, the “*righteous*” are described in the Scriptures as the people who stand before God justified and accepted. Traditionally this is taught as “*righteousness by faith*” that was not available before the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The difficulty is when considering all of Scripture, and for consistency sake, the “*righteousness by faith*” is understood to always be accompanied by “*righteous deeds/acts*” which the Apostle Paul describes as our “*spiritual act of worship*” in *Romans 12*. On the other hand, Paul says in *Romans 3:2-25*:

***Romans 3:20-25***

*3:20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. 3:21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 3:22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 3:24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 3:25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; (NASB)*

The issue here regarding the Torah, Righteousness, and being Justified before God is the approach some people were taking in first century Judaism. The mind-set was one could perform “*righteous deeds*” and be justified before God without the requirement of inward righteousness also known as the “*circumcision of the heart,*” which was a work of God alone. Paul is saying righteous deeds (the works of the Law) are not what brings justification before God. The reason being that we are to “*walk by faith.*” Walking by faith does not mean we are floating 3 feet above the ground, but that we are humbly seeking the Lord for our salvation, we have repentant lives, and our ways exhibit the ways of God according to the Commands. Our lives are transformed in this way by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the way in which the bride performing “*righteous acts*” and washing her cloths in preparation for the coming of her husband (Yeshua the Messiah) in *Revelation 19:7-9*. This helps our understanding the meaning of *Revelation 22:12-14*.

***Revelation 22:12-14***

*22:12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. 22:13 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. 22:14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. (KJV)*

12 και ιδου ερχομαι ταχυ και ο μισθος μου μετ εμου αποδουναι εκαστω  
ως το εργον αυτου εσται 13 εγω ειμι το α και το ω αρχη και τελος ο  
πρωτος και ο εσχατος 14 μακαριοι οι ποιουντες τας εντολας αυτου

ἵνα ἔσται ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τοῖς πυλῶσιν εἰσελθῶσιν εἰς τὴν πόλιν

*Revelation 22:14* states “*Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*” According to the last few verses in the Bible, it appears that those who “*do the commandments*” are the one’s who will have the right to the tree of life. The KJV is translated from the Textus Receptus, which states “*poiountes tas entolas autou*” ποιουντες τας εντολας αυτου translating literally to say “*doing the commandments.*” The Vaticanus and the Alexandrinus codex state:

Μακάριοι οἱ πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν, ἵνα ἔσται ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τοῖς πυλῶσιν εἰσελθῶσιν εἰς τὴν πόλιν.

*“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.” (NIV)*

These manuscripts say “*blessed are those who wash their cloths.*” Earlier, John explained the meaning of washing the cloths, and the bride who prepares herself in *Revelation 19:6-8*. This is the halachah (the way of life) that God seeks from each one of us, we are expected to make the conscious daily decision to walk in righteousness, truth, holiness, and justice. These are important verses because today we are told that all one really needs to do is to be “*nice*” to people and you are good, assuming one is exempt from the rest of the commandments and have a right to the tree of life. The point is that I know a lot of “*nice*” people who do not even know God. The command to “*love your neighbor as yourself*” was a sum of all the Torah. The definition of “*sum*” is addition, which is inclusive, additive, not subtraction. All of Torah is included in the command to love your neighbor and to love God.

The point of week’s Torah reading regarding אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים *“Eleh ha’devarim,”* “*These are the words*” from the book of Deuteronomy is that these words and all of Scripture applies to our lives today. We are called to walk humbly before God, seeking the Lord for our salvation, and to live repentant lives which are expressed by walking in God’s ways according to the Commands. Walking by faith in this way, our lives are transformed with the help and power of the Holy Spirit and we are daily seeking to intentionally bring Glory to God’s name. As His bride, we perform “*righteous acts*” because we love Him, this is a selfless action to give of ourselves to the Lord. We are called to live humble lives and part of being humble is submitting our lives to God’s Word as a guide for life (i.e. biblical halachah). Taking this approach to life and faith, we wash our cloths in preparation for the coming of our husband our Messiah Yeshua. What a wonderful and exciting thing this is don’t you think?