

Parshas Devarim

Sanhedrin 91a relates the story of Alexander (of Macedon, i.e., the Great), in which various nations of the world came before Alexander to challenge the Jewish position, namely their claim to the legitimacy of the Jews' claim to Israel and other items (which parallel the narrative of antisemitism in 2026). Geviha ben Psisa suggested to sages to send him, an ordinary person, to answer the claims, saying that if they defeat him, then you can say the nations challenged an ordinary person, but if he defeats them, then you can say that the Torah of Moshe our teacher defeated you. The added profundity here is that the truth of the Torah is so simple that even a "regular person" can defeat the claims (which suggests that, in our time, to counter antisemitism, we must use the Torah, which will be elucidated further). In the end, Geviha refuted the claims using the Torah, and all challenges were thrown out.

Devarim is called Mishnah Torah, the repetition by Moshe of the Halachos and ways to live and use the Torah, especially as the Jews entered the Land of Israel, which would usher in the era post-Matan Torah, when they could harness the full capabilities of the Torah to build the Beis Hamikdash and ultimately bring the Geula. If the whole Sefer is Mishnah Torah, then surely there is a reference to Bereishis in this Parsha. A critical

element of Bereishis is that it is the foundation of how the Jews got to where they are, and it is the basis for asserting that, since Hashem created the world and all the nations, they are where they need to be according to His plan. We know this because of the first Rashi in Bereishis, where Rashi asks why the Torah didn't begin with the birth of the Jewish nation to tell us, "For should the peoples of the world say to Israel, "You are robbers, because you took by force the lands of the seven nations of Canaan", Israel may reply to them, "All the earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it and gave it to whom He pleased. When He willed, He gave it to them, and when He willed, He took it from them and gave it to us" (Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 187). (from safari.org). In this week's Parsha, Hashem told Moshe to relay to the Jews that you cannot war with Ammon and Moav and Seir (Esav's lineage), as the Posuk says, for almost the same reason: "do not incite them because I have given this [land] as an inheritance to [them]" (2:5,9,12,19). Esav is called your brother, and Rashi explains the reward of Ammon and Moav, but the pesukim and Rashi state that these lands, even though the progenitors came from other lands, were bestowed by Hashem to them as an inheritance, and therefore the Jews must not wage war (incite) with them. Meaning, since Hashem put the people where they need to be, especially nations that had historically been antagonistic to the Jews,

nevertheless, Hashem says where we belong as opposed to where we decide to belong, and we must not refute or contradict that.

Good Shabbos.

Even Geviha ben Psisa was able to see how simply the plan was laid out, namely where the Jews belong, because he based his response on the Torah. Furthermore, it was plainly obvious, even to the adversaries, that the Torah lays the foundation for where they belong and for the rights of the Jews, and that they walked away from the claims. The Torah tells us where we belong and where the others belong, and we have no right to their land, as they do not have a right to ours. Parshas Devarim therefore parallels the elements of Bereishis, which lays the foundation that the entire creation of the world is by Hashem, and that everyone needs to be so, as Rashi explains the reason for the whole first Sefer. Parshas Devarim similarly does the same.

Now we also have a basis for responding to haters. The Torah tells us this is an old story, and, like Geviha, we can respond that just as our G-d gave you your place, so too He gave us ours, and there is no arguing this. But take it one step further: by living with the Torah in all facets of our lives, we also tell those outside our community the truth and spread the light, so that we can make a “dwelling place for Hashem in this world...” and ultimately be redeemed with the coming of Mashiach, now!