



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

11 – 12 Aug, 2005

7 AV, 5765

Parashat Devarim
(Deuteronomy 1:1–3:22)

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We Begin A New Book! The Hebrew Name is Devarim, or Words!

Words! We all know about the power of words! Perhaps, to be fair, most of us experience occasions when we give less attention to what we may be saying than we might. And of course, such moments can become “teaching moments” that remind us of word power. The word Deuteronomy (from the Greek, meaning second law or perhaps repetition) has a profoundly different meaning than the Hebrew, Devarim. In fact, **d'var**, the **singular** and **devarim**, the plural, not only mean words, they may also mean event, or events.

Moses is not only repeating words, he is also recalling events, and using words to transform certain past events into law. In the Conservative Movement's brilliant Torah commentary, “Etz Hayim,” Moses uses words in this way to add 70 laws to the approximate 100 laws recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy, laws not found in any of the other books that we know as the Five Books of Moses.

Next week we shall have a powerful example of how “Devarim” punctuates our lives as Jews. In Chapter 5, we will be able to review the second rendition of the Ten Words, yes, these too are the words usually called by the name Ten Commandments. And there is something different about them from the Ten Words that appear in Exodus. I shall leave that for next week.

However, when we speak of the power of words, it is here in the Book of Words, in Devarim, that we locate the Shema, and the familiar first paragraph that we know from our Siddur. Once again, you know as do I that these words are powerful events in the life of the Jew. Many rabbis assert that to speak of the “Oneness of God” is to proclaim Judaism's only doctrine. Finally, I leave you with the possibility of a walk in “The Garden” of words.

PaRDeS, the Hebrew word or acronym for garden, or perhaps, paradise, is the key to understanding the historical love affair that Jews have had with the study of Torah. In many ways it provides challenge and stimulus to the preparation of a Davar Torah. It is also the guide or the essential term for understanding how Jews have kept the Torah alive and expanded its insights and values. The capital letters represent four ways of understanding Torah. Consider the following:

P= P'shat - the simple and obvious meaning of the text as one reads it.

R=Remmez – a clue, (in the textual passage) and asserting the meaning of this clue (often subjective) to uncover the meaning of what you have studied (perhaps the meaning is found in metaphor)

D=Darush – An exposition or explanation. The reader sees a special meaning in the text, but needs to expound this meaning through connections or associations with other ideas or texts of Torah, and perhaps discovers explanations for contemporary events. The purpose is to establish meaning in the present, or perhaps to recover an ancient meaning.

S=SOD - The secret meaning of the text, SOD is the interpretative area for the Jewish mystic. One who seeks out these secret meanings must, according to tradition have the following qualifications. He/she must married, be over 40 years old, and possess a thorough understanding of Jewish law and teaching. And remember, the power of words as events.

Shabbat Shalom
6 Av 5765

11th August, 2005