

וַאֲתַחֲנַן

VA'ETCHANAN/AND I BEGGED Devarim/Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11

The book of **Devarim** is a **book of preparation** for **entry** into the **Promised Land**. Over and over again throughout the next couple of weeks, **Moshe** will speak of the **imminent encounter** with the **Land**. The **greatest threat** to the **taking of the Land**, however, is not the enemies with whom they will war, but their **tendencies toward idolatry**. For this reason, we will find **Moshe warning** the children of Israel of the **different forms of idolatry** that they must learn to recognize.

In our parasha this week, Moshe teaches **two roads** which both lead to a type of **idolatry**:

- **Cultural assimilation**
- **Spiritual confusion following revelation**

What part does the **culture** play in **idolatry**? It is easy to see, especially in the **United States**. There is a **movement** for **greater religious unity** and even **common worship**. We might refer to this as **ecumenism** which **Wikipedia** defines “in its broadest sense, a **worldwide religious unity** by the advocacy of a greater sense of **shared spirituality** across the **three Abrahamic faiths** of **Judaism, Christianity, and Islam**”. Often this occurs because people want to **affiliate themselves** with **others** in the name of “**tolerance**”. We saw it **after 9/11** when **prayers** were **jointly made to God and Allah**. In our own city, there is an **inter-faith movement** which is working on **bringing together the Catholics, Protestants, Moslems, and the Jews**. In a recent conversation I had with the **local rabbi**, he was more interested in speaking with us for the **purpose of drawing us into this movement**, rather than hearing about our **Torah-keeping beliefs**. This is the **idealistic attraction** to **idolatry**. It is **not** that one feels he is being **drawn into another religion**, but it is the **desire to associate** with **another culture** which just happens to have **another god**. It is the need to **merge into the cultural expressions** of another **friendly group**.

Our parasha contains a few verses specifying **יהוה's** **viewpoint** on **merging** with the **nations**:

Devarim 7:1 "When יהוה your Elohim brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, ² "and when יהוה your Elohim delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. ³ "Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. ⁴ "For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of יהוה will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. ⁵ "But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire.

The above verses **focus** on the **cultural environment**. The **Israelites** were **NOT** to **intermarry** or **make covenants** with the **nations**. **Why** was this? “*For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods*”. The **culture** of **other nations** is **potentially harmful** to the **Israelites**. יהוה

warns His people against a **tolerant cultural environment** which **invites intermarriage and joint worship**. This path will lead away from the Elohim of Israel, arouse His anger and lead to their destruction.

The **Israelites** were to be a **nation** with a **unique culture**, charged by the **Creator of the Universe** to reflect His **“light to the nations”**. The responsibility of **living out that identity** came with **heavy consequences for disobedience**.

Isaiah 42:5 Thus says El יהוה, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it, And spirit to those who walk on it: ⁶ "I, יהוה, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations,

Devarim 28:58 " If you do not carefully observe all the words of this Torah that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, יהוה Your Elohim, ⁵⁹ "then יהוה will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues -- great and prolonged plagues -- and serious and prolonged sicknesses.

Spiritual confusion is another type of **idolatry**, but this type **cannot be blamed** on **another nation or culture**. It comes as a **result** of **how one responds to revelation**. The **Israelites** were **given much revelation** on **Mt. Sinai**. However, now **Moshe** warns this **2nd generation** of the **danger** of an **idolatrous response**:

Devarim 4:9 "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the Words (devarim - דְּבָרֵי) your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, ¹⁰ "especially concerning the day you stood before יהוה your Elohim in Horeb, when יהוה said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My Words (devarim - דְּבָרֵי), that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.' ¹¹ "Then you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven, with darkness, cloud, and thick darkness. ¹² "And יהוה spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the Words (devarim - דְּבָרֵי), but saw no form; you only heard a voice. ¹³ "So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. ¹⁴ "And יהוה commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess. ¹⁵ "Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when יהוה spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, ¹⁶ "lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, ¹⁷ "the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, ¹⁸ "the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth. ¹⁹ "And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which יהוה your Elohim has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage.... ²³ "Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the

covenant of אלהים your Elohim which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which אלהים your Elohim has forbidden you.²⁴ "For אלהים your Elohim is a consuming fire, a jealous Elohim.

It was a **powerful moment** on the Mountain, a “*face-to-face*” meeting with יהוה:

Devarim 5:4 "אלהים talked with you face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire.

It would have been **exhilarating!** It would have **overloaded the senses!** Who would have wanted to go **back** to a **mundane life** after that?! We know that for many, their **response** to this **revelation** was an **idolatrous golden calf**. They simply **wished to continue** the **elevated emotions** they **experienced** when the **Almighty spoke to them**. To **counteract** this possibility of **future idolatry following revelation from above**, Moshe instructs them to **teach their children and grandchildren the experience on the Mountain as if they were there**. In **Devarim 4:9**, he **stresses** that they are “*not to forget the “Words” which your eyes have seen*”. These “Words” are what will **keep them from idolatry**. The “Words” are what their **forefathers forgot** when they got caught up with **idolatry**.

Moshe’s fear was that the **nation** may be drawn to **represent the experiential high of Mt. Sinai** with **images that represented the form of יהוה** or **images of the sun and moon**. The **intention** of these **images** would be to **continue the emotions experienced on the Mountain**. **Images meant to stir the emotions are completely forbidden**. It is the WORDS that are to be the **testimony, not the images**. It is incredible that the **very experience of יהוה** which is **so positive** can **potentially stimulate future idolatry** when one is **caught up** in the **emotions of a spiritual encounter** with the **Almighty**.

Revelation is a **necessity**. **Man** must have that “*face to face*” **encounter** with יהוה. **Nothing man can make**, however, was **equal** to the **revelation** of the Word. **Two thousand years ago** the **most important spiritual revelation** of the Word occurred:

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Yeshua pointed to faith in the Word and **belief in the Father** which in turn would lead to **eternal life**:

John 5:24 " Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My Word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

John eloquently gave a **testimony** of his “*face to face*” **encounter with the Word**:

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life --² the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us --³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Yeshua the Messiah.

Throughout the **Brit Chadasha**, **Yeshua's** focus is always on the **Word**. The Scripture does **not go into detail** about what **He** looked like. **Yeshua** made it clear that the **Words** that were **spoken by Moshe** were **Words** spoken about **Him**:

John 5:46 "For if you believed Moshe, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.

Some may struggle with the thought that the **Words** **Yeshua** spoke seemed to **"add to"** the **Word** that had **already been written**:

*Devarim 4:2 "You shall not add to the **Word** which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of יהוה your Elohim which I command you.*

In fact, **Moshe** himself seems to **contradict his very own words** when he **takes the 4th commandment** of the **Sabbath** and **"adds to"** and **"takes away"** from what was given on **Mt. Sinai**:

Shemot 20:8 "Remember (zakor - זָכַר) the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work,¹⁰ but the seventh day is the Sabbath of יהוה your Elohim. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.¹¹ For in six days יהוה made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore יהוה blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Devarim 5:12 ' Observe (שָׁמַר) the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as יהוה your Elohim commanded you.¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work,¹⁴ but the seventh day is the Sabbath of יהוה your Elohim. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.¹⁵ And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and יהוה your Elohim brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore יהוה your Elohim commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

It is **obvious** that **when Moshe repeats the commandment**, he uses **different words** and **different reasons** for **keeping the Sabbath**. Jewish commentator **Ibn Ezra** helps us to **understand this apparent contradiction**. **Quote** (emphasis added) – **"Realize that the words are like material bodies while the message is like the Spirit, for the body is to the soul only a vehicle."** Thus **individuals who teach from the Scriptures** must **PRESERVE THE MESSAGE** while **not being so concerned** about using the **exact same words**, since the **message** is the **same**.

Ibn Ezra goes on to **explain** that whenever there is a **repetition in a Biblical text**, **different words** may be **used** in that **second version**. The **purpose** of the **repetition** is always to **instruct the reader** and **lead him** to the **Spirit behind the words**. **Moshe** did **not change** the **essence** of **יהוה's** **commandments**, he only **elaborated upon them**. The **commandments in Shemot** are the **original**

version spoken from the **Mountain**. Then when **Moshe repeats** them in **Devarim**, they **include a bit of commentary**. The **Words** themselves are only the **vehicle communicating the Spirit of the Torah**. Likewise, **Yeshua never “added to” or “took away”** from the **Word of Torah**. Instead, He “**correctly interpreted**” the **Scriptures**, which is the **meaning of the word “fulfill”** in His **teaching in the Sermon on the Mount**:

*Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Torah or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to **fulfill**.¹⁸ "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, **one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the Torah till all is fulfilled**.¹⁹ "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

Now we have digressed some, but I'd like to **return** to the **two distinct routes to idolatry** that we began with. The **first** was **motivated by cultural assimilation**. Those on this **route** began to **take on** some of the **worship of the gods** of the **other nations**. We actually read that **this occurred** in the book of **Shoftim** (Judges):

Shoftim 2:12 and they forsook יהוה Elohim of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked יהוה to anger.

But the **second route to idolatry** took a **totally different direction**. This route is **not** about **strange gods**. Rather, what the **Bible calls idolatry** is the **worship of יהוה** performed in an **inappropriate manner**. The **golden calf on Mount Sinai** was **inappropriate worship** to the **Elohim who led them out of Egypt**. The **golden calves of Jeroboam** at Beth El and Dan were **also worship of יהוה** in a **forbidden manner**.

Rav Mordecai Breuer divides the **Ten Commandments** to **reflect these two levels of idolatry**. This perspective sees the **Ten Commandments** as **aware of the dual roads to idolatry**:

Devarim 5:6 ' I am יהוה your Elohim ...⁷ ' You shall have no other gods before Me.

- Guards against **1st level of idolatry**
- **Relates to serving יהוה**. One must **accept Him only** as **one's deity** and **not turn to any other god**.

Devarim 5:8 ' You shall not make for yourself a carved image -- any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; ⁹ you shall not bow down to them nor serve them...

- Guards against **2nd level of idolatry**
- **Relates to the adoption of images as objects of worship, even if one's intention** is for them to be a **medium for serving יהוה**.

So we have discussed **two ways of straying** from the **Almighty**. The **1st** is a **journey towards other cultures**. Today we see this occurring as the **result of tolerance of other cultures** within our **midst**.

The **2nd** type occurs when we **distort our revelation of who יהוה is and attempt to use worldly images or icons in our worship of Him.** This road usually places **less emphasis** on the **Word** and **more on things** they use to **enhance worship.**

We all want to become **more spiritual.** We want something that **gives us a high and takes us beyond our everyday activities.** But we **cannot misrepresent the Almighty.** The focus should be on **His Word** and **our obedience** to it. The **Father gave to us Yeshua, the Word in the flesh** who also **pointed us back to the Word** and **obedience.** Instead of **meditating** on a **visual of Yeshua,** we should be “*meditating*” on **His Word.** Scripture repeatedly teaches this:

*Joshua 1:8 "This **Book of the Torah** shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may **observe to do** according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*

Psalms 1:1 Blessed is the man ...his delight is in the Torah of יהוה, And in His Torah he meditates day and night.

Rav Sha’ul has another way of putting it:

*Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things.⁹ The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, **these do**, and the Yah of peace will be with you.*

Rav Sha’ul spoke to Timothy of the **importance of the Word:**

*1 Timothy 4:13 Till I come, give attention to **reading, to exhortation, to teaching**...¹⁵ Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.¹⁶ Take heed to yourself and to the teaching. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.*

The **Word** points us to **Yeshua, the Messiah.** We see **His power** when we **understand that the Word** is **living and active** (Hebrews 4:12). The **Word** is where our **focus** should be:

2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

I love the **encouragement** given to the **faithful congregation** of the assembly in **Philadelphia** because they **knew Him and did not deny His Word:**

*Revelation 3:7 "And to the angel of the church in **Philadelphia** write...⁸ "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, **have kept My Word**, and have not denied My Name.*

Now, “just one more thing”...I’ve tried to make the argument that it is **meditation on** and **faithfulness to the Word** that will **keep us** on the **straight and narrow path away from idolatry**. Most of us are **not interested in worshipping other gods**, but it is the **2nd level of idolatry** that we can easily be sucked in to. If **instead of meditating on the Word**, we are **emotionally anticipating a divine show of power** we may be **easily deceived**. In fact **Yeshua warned us** about this:

Mark 13:22 "For false messiahs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."²³ "But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

Why will the elect be deceived? Because they were **anxious for “signs and wonders”!** When might He **“have told us these things beforehand”?** Could it have been **when we were warned against this type of idolatry in the Ten Commandments of Devarim?** The **commandments teach us** that we must **only worship יהוה Elohim** through the **ways prescribed in His Word**. This was also **Yeshua’s message**:

Luke 4:8 And Yeshua answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship יהוה your Elohim, and Him only you shall serve.' "

If we allow ourselves to be **drawn to images and icons**, then we will be **easily deceived** by the **evil one** in the **last days**. **Yeshua prayed for His followers** shortly before His arrest. Let’s finish with **His Words**...and do **notice the emphasis HE places on the Word** and its **power to protect us from the evil one**:

John 17:6 "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your Word."⁷ "Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You."⁸ "For I have given to them the Words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me."⁹ "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours."¹⁰ "And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them."¹¹ "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your Name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are."¹² "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your Name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled."¹³ "But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves."¹⁴ "I have given them Your Word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."¹⁵ "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one."¹⁶ "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."¹⁷ "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is truth."¹⁸ "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."¹⁹ "And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth."

Shabbat Shalom!

Ardelle