

Drash Va Ethannan
Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11
English Reading: 5:1-7:11
Dale Brown Aug 9,2025

I loved this portion and hope I can do it justice. Moses spoke from his heart to the people that were about to enter Israel. I'm going to do two things in this drash; talk about the portion as a whole and talk about one little verse in the entire portion which is my favorite.

First, I'll talk about his speeches. He is an elder. He is remembering a long journey with a lot of parts. As we get older and remember things from long ago, our memories are not always accurate.

He knows he is about to die. God told him that this was his punishment for striking the rock. He knows that Joshua not him will lead the people into this land. Although this saddens him, he has this last chance to talk to the people and tell them what they need to do to be worthy. And he does.

As I worked on this drash, I realized that there is an important similarity between us and Moses. We have all been on journeys in a way. We have led people. We have children of our own or in our hearts. And all of us have things that we wish to tell the people who have been with us and followed us in our life journey. And we can learn from Moses' example to actually say these things - whether in an event or in quieter conversations.

Remember he was basically talking to the next generation, the ones who would be entering the land. They did not witness the people receiving the Ten Commandments. The generation that experienced slavery and was in Egypt were to die off before entering Israel.

He asks "Has anything as grand as this ever happened, or has it's like ever been known? (4:32). He tells them the story you just heard in the English reading - the mighty voice, the burning fire, the dense clouds. He talks about how the people were afraid of being burned to

death and of dying. So they ask Moses to get the instructions from the Lord. They say, (5:24) "You go closer and hear all the Lord our God tells you, and then you tell us everything that the Lord our God tells you, and we will willingly do it."

Throughout the speech, he stresses the importance of following the commandments scrupulously. In what reminded me of today's political talk, he said, "Do not turn aside to the right or the left. Follow only the path that your Lord your God has enjoined upon you." (5:29,30)

Moses stresses the importance of our Lord being only one God and says, (6.4) Here, Oh 'Israel The Lord is our God, the lord alone." He then goes on with a verse I have loved since childhood. "You shall love the Lord with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your might." I will talk about that verse, but first I want to remind everyone how many of our customs are mentioned in the next sentences, (6) "Take to heart the instructions which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; inscribe them on the doorposts of your home and on your gates."

Now, I will talk about the verse "You shall love the Lord with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your might." That verse was inscribed on a church that I passed frequently on Chevy Chase circle and I thought about it a lot in my youth.

I always felt close to God- I had a childhood that was filled with challenges and stress because I had severe learning disabilities. But I always felt God was with me.

My parents, however, were concerned about me. I came from a family whose parents believed religion was the opiate of the masses (which in my opinion it definitely can be). My Mom would sometimes ask me how I could believe in such superstitions. My Dad was a psychiatrist. He would constantly argue with me. He did assure me

that my fantasies were normal. But, he insisted that my idea of God who helped me with homework (and handwriting it which took me hours because of my dysgraphia) was a fantasy. But I couldn't stop loving God and trying to do good deeds.

Our commentary in Etz Chaim explains that the term "love" actually refers to action- and is connected with observing God's commandments. In ancient near Eastern political terminology, "love" refers to loyalty. The words "Heart" and "Soul" refer to the interior of the body which is the seat of thought, intention, and feeling. So to do things with all of your heart and all of your soul, means you do it with the totality of your thoughts, feelings, intentions and desires. In our Western world, the word love is more of an emotion.

When I was in my earlier adulthood, my Dad got sick and thought he was dying. I would visit him and sit by his bedside and one day he said, "You know, Dale, now that I might be dying I actually understand better why people believe in God. And I remember when you were growing up and you were under stress and I tried to take that belief away from you. And I'm really sorry. I wish I hadn't."

But, Dad, I said, "You were great. I loved those talks with you. Do you think you could believe in God now? I mean couldn't you just fantasize more strongly?"

"No, Dale, I can't," he said. "My intellect is too strong." This is how I know that there are many atheists in foxholes by the way. He also lived through this bout with cancer until he was 89.

But here is the thing about my Dad. He did incredibly good things. He was Director of National Institute of Mental Health and oversaw the closing of terrible state institutions for people with mental illness and conceptualized and oversaw their replacement with community mental health centers. And he mentored so many people and was great Dad. So I believe he epitomized the action part of loving God with all of his soul, all of his heart, and all of his

might. He certainly followed the commandments. He made the world a better place. His memory is a blessing.

In today's Torah discussion, I want to touch on both Moses speeches and the verse I love. I have two questions for you:

Looking at the bigger picture, if you were to give a talk, as Moses did, to your children or people you have led, what would you tell them?

What is your personal relationship with the action part of loving God with all of your soul, all of your heart, and all of your might?