

# Eternal Heritage

## Ki Tavo – 5782/2022

The notion of what genre the Torah falls into is deeply poignant when we come to this week's Parasha. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks explains that the Torah is not a history book but rather a book of ethical and spiritual instruction<sup>1</sup>.

The Jews are standing on the precipice, transitioning from a place of wandering to a place of stability in the Land of Israel. Moshe is speaking one final time to the Jewish people, and in doing so he recounts the history of the Jews.

The Torah brings down the words that will be made famous nearly a thousand years later in our Pesach Haggadah<sup>2</sup>. We go down to Egypt, we are enslaved, we cry out, God rescues us with a mighty hand and outstretched arm. We journeyed through the wilderness, and we have reached the Land of Milk and Honey. We are reminded of the gift we are about to receive, the bounty of the land, the reaping of the harvest, the eternal reward that was promised to our forefathers and mothers. And then Moshe declares that the commandments and the Torah itself was given "to you, on this day"<sup>3</sup>

The commentators Ramban<sup>4</sup>, Seforno<sup>5</sup> and Abarbanel<sup>6</sup> look at this verse and tell us that 'hayom hazeh' represents the trajectory of Moshe's teachings to the Jewish people. Each day, from the time when the Jewish people received the Torah at Mount Sinai, until this moment, Moshe would sit and share the commandments, they would be passed from him to Aaron, and Aaron to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, setting up the opening Mishnah from Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of our Fathers<sup>7</sup>.

And now, Hayom ha zeh, he has finished. There is nothing new to speak of, rather now it is time for Moshe to instruct the Jewish people of the importance of observance, of fidelity to halacha and the Torah's teachings.

For the Ramban, Arbarbanel and Sforno, suddenly, and somewhat out of character to their other commentaries on the Torah, the Torah became a book residing in the genre of law. A rule book.

There is a great problem with this. In thinking this way, these commentaries have effectively removed the democratisation of Torah, they have minimised the importance of 'losh b'shamayim hi' that the Torah is no longer in heaven, and can be accessed and understood, toiled over, and loved, by both the scholar and the laity. A book of law, places it in the camp of the sages, divorced from the emotional connection between the people and Hashem.

Rashi, however, comes with a different explanation<sup>8</sup>. Rashi is the democratic voice of Torah learning. He tells us, learn from these words 'hayom hazeh' that the Torah should be explored day in and day out, not because it is full of laws, but because there is always something new. Grasp hold of it, not because God commanded you to observe, but because of your emotional connection between you and your creator, a connection that drives you to want to explore, to analyse, and experience the teachings of God, because each time you learn something new you can connect more deeply to the world around you.

For Rashi, the words hayom hazeh, move the Torah out of the genre of Law, and into the genre of emotional experience, moving from the hands of the scholar to the embrace of the people. Moving it from being a series of laws that shape the Jewish people in their journey from being a nomadic family group, a collective of slaves, a free people entering their own land, to a book that is the eternal heritage of the Jewish people. All citations can be found in **A New Page of Talmud**