



THE SHALOM BAYIT JOURNAL



Parashat Devarim

The Stories We Tell Ourselves

Understanding the Torah and the Human Experience

Every one of us has a story about our lives. We replay conversations, revisit disappointments, celebrate successes, and ask ourselves what it all means. Over time, these stories become the lens through which we see ourselves, others, and our future.

Psychologists have long recognized that the meaning we assign to our experiences often shapes us more than the experiences themselves.

Neuroscientists have identified a network of brain regions known as the Default Mode Network, which becomes active during self-reflection and autobiographical memory. One of its roles is to weave our experiences into the narrative we tell ourselves about our lives.

Parashat Devarim opens as Moshe begins recounting the forty-year journey through the wilderness. Rashi, quoting the Sifrei, explains that many of the locations Moshe mentions are subtle references to Israel's past failings, expressed in a way that preserved their dignity, "מפני כבודן של ישראל."

Moshe's words invite the nation to reflect on their past, learn from it, and prepare for the future.

Later in Sefer Devarim, Moshe tells the nation:

זָכַרְתָּ אֶת-כָּל-הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הוֹלִיכָה 'אֱלֹקֶיךָ זֶה!
"אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בַּמִּדְבָּר לְמַעַן עֲנֹתְךָ לְנִסְתָּךְ"

"You shall remember the entire journey that Hashem your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you and to test you." (Devarim 8:2)

Throughout the Torah, remembering or zachor is more than recalling the past, it comes with purpose. The stories we tell ourselves often shape the people we become. However those stories are shaped by the meaning we make of our experiences.

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shape the people we become.*

Psychologists often refer to this process as meaning-making. While we cannot always choose the circumstances we face or change the past, we can choose the meaning we assign to it.

The stories we tell ourselves can become a source of discouragement that keeps us trapped in yesterday's patterns, or a source of encouragement that helps us continue growing. What matters most is the meaning we choose to carry forward.



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As the Jewish people stood on the threshold of the Land of Israel, Moshe retold the story of their journey. Through that retelling, the wilderness became a source of purpose and meaning that prepared the nation for the next chapter.

Both psychology and the Torah recognize that our memories do more than preserve the past—they shape our future. The meaning we assign to our experiences becomes part of the story we carry with us into the next chapter of our lives.

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Our own journeys are often filled with moments we would never have chosen. The purpose of each chapter is not always clear while we are living it. Yet with time and reflection, many of those experiences become the very moments that shape our character, deepen our faith, and prepare us for what lies ahead.

The question is not simply what happened along the way, but who we are becoming, as individuals and as a nation.

Devarim reminds us that growth is shaped by the meaning we discover within our own journey. When we view our lives through the lens of growth and purpose, the story we tell ourselves becomes a source of strength, giving meaning to the past and hope for the future.

Every one of us is writing the next chapter of our story. The way we understand yesterday's challenges often shapes the way we prepare for tomorrow. Perhaps one of the most important questions we can ask ourselves is whether the story we are telling ourselves is helping us grow or keeping us stuck.



About The Shalom Bayit Journal

The Shalom Bayit Journal explores the intersection of Torah, psychology, relationships, and the human experience. Through thoughtful essays and practical reflection, the Journal seeks to make timeless wisdom meaningful and accessible for everyday life.

