

Torah for the Table

A weekly collection of Divrei Torah for the Shabbos table

PARSHAS DEVARIM

From Bnei Yisrael to Kol Yisrael

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל

“These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Israel.”

DEVARIM 1:1

Sefer Devarim opens with a subtle but significant change in language. Throughout the first four books of the Torah, the Jewish people are generally called *Bnei Yisrael*—the children of Israel. This name emphasizes their shared ancestry: they are the descendants of Yaakov Avinu.

Here, however, the Torah says that Moshe spoke “*el kol Yisrael*”—to all of Israel.

The [Kli Yakar](#) notes that this expression appears here for the first time in the Torah. It appears repeatedly in Sefer Devarim, although it is not used in this form in the four earlier books.

Until now, the nation had been described primarily as *Bnei Yisrael*—individuals connected through a common father and a shared family history. As they prepared to enter Eretz Yisrael, however, they needed to become something more: *Yisrael*, a unified people with a shared destiny and collective responsibility.

Moshe was not speaking merely to members of the same extended family. He was addressing *kol Yisrael*—one nation whose members were responsible for one another and for the future they would build together.

This may also explain why Sefer Devarim begins with rebuke.

Rebuke is not only a review of past mistakes. It is preparation for the future. Before the Jewish people could enter the Land and establish a Torah society, they needed to confront their history and learn from it as one nation.

The [Sforno](#) explains that the places mentioned in the opening pasuk refer to locations where the people had provoked Hashem. Moshe connected each part of his rebuke to the place where that failure had occurred.

These were not merely the private failings of isolated individuals. They were national events that had shaped the journey of the entire people. Therefore, the lessons also had to be absorbed collectively.

The [Or HaChaim](#) adds that Moshe delivered these words only when the nation was approaching Eretz Yisrael. Earlier, they may not have been ready to receive such rebuke properly. Now, standing at the threshold of a new stage in their history, they were prepared to hear the truth and use it to build their future.

Rabbeinu Bachya introduces Sefer Devarim with a teaching from Mishlei: sincere rebuke will ultimately be valued more than flattery. Moshe's words were not intended to condemn the people, but to protect them. His rebuke came from love and from concern for what the nation could still become.



Together, these commentaries reveal a deeper meaning within the words kol Yisrael.

A true nation is not created by common ancestry alone. It is formed when its members accept responsibility for their shared past, their shared failures, and their shared future.

This message is especially meaningful because Parshas Devarim is always read shortly before Tisha B'Av. Chazal teach that needless hatred and division contributed to the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. The opening words of Devarim point toward the opposite ideal: not fragmented groups and isolated individuals, but kol Yisrael—one people.

The rebuilding of the Jewish nation begins when we stop seeing ourselves only as separate members of the same family and begin acting as one people responsible for one another.

SHABBOS TABLE QUESTION

What is the difference between belonging to the same family and accepting responsibility as one united people?

Sources: Kli Yakar, Sforno, Or HaChaim, and Rabbeinu Bachya on Devarim 1:1
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