YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

**PARASHAT DEVARIM**

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**IN LOVING MEMORY OF**

**Jeffrey Paul Friedman**

**August 15, 1968 – July 29, 2012**

**לע"נ**

**יהודה פנחס בן הרב שרגא פייוועל**

**כ"ב אב תשכ"ח – י' אב תשע"ב**

**ת.נ.צ.ב.ה**

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**This shiur is dedicated to the memory of   
Muriel (Malka) Norman Wallick on her *yahrtzeit*, 7 Av**

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**Morality and World Politics**

**Rav Shimon Klein**

**Introduction**

In our *parasha*, Moshe delivers a speech in which he sums up *Bnei Yisrael*’s encounters with the nations on the eastern side of the Jordan River. As in the speeches that follow, he reviews events of the past, considering them from a different perspective and shedding new light on them. In view of the imminent confrontations with the inhabitants of the land, we might have expected this summary of the clashes thus far to take the form of a fiery military pep-talk. However, a review of Moshe’s words reveals a different picture. We will attempt to decode the unexpected spirit of his sermon.

**Your Brothers, the Children of Esav**

And the Lord spoke to me, saying: […] “And command the people, saying: You are to pass through the border of your brethren, the children of Esav, who dwell in Se’ir, and they shall be afraid of you. Take good heed to yourselves therefore; do not meddle with them, for I will not give you of their land, not even so much as a foot breadth, because I have given Mount Se’ir to Esav for a possession. You shall buy food from them for money so that you may eat, and you shall also buy water from them for money so that you may drink. For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your walking through this great wilderness; these forty years the Lord your God has been with you, you have lacked nothing.” And when we passed by from our brethren the children of Esav, who dwelled in Se’ir, through the way of the Arava, from Eilat, and from Etzion-Gever, we turned as passed by the way of the wilderness of Moav. (*Devarim* 2:2-8)

Moshe begins with a description of the encounter with the children of Esav and the Divine command in anticipation of it. The children of Esav are referred to first as “your brethren” and only afterwards explicitly by name. This expresses the closeness between the two nations, imposing the obligation on *Am Yisrael* to avoid harming them.

Beyond the family connection, there is another reason to avoid provoking them: “For I shall not of their land even so much as a foot breadth, because I have given Mount Se’ir to Esav for an inheritance.”[[1]](#footnote-1) There is no point in arousing or engaging in any hostility, since you will not receive any part of their land. God then goes on to impose more conditions: food and water are to be purchased from them for money.[[2]](#footnote-2) Finally, Moshe once again refers to the children of Esav as “brethren,” emphasizing the fraternity that remains even after the parting of ways: “And we passed by **our brethren**, the children of Esav, who dwelled in Se’ir…” (v. 8).[[3]](#footnote-3) Thereafter, “we turned as passed by the way of the wilderness of Moav” – *Am Yisrael* now approach the land of Moav.

**Do Not Vex Moav**

And the Lord said to me: “Do not vex Moav, nor contend with them in battle, for I will not give you of their land for a possession, because I have given Ar to the children of Lot for a possession.” (*Devarim* 2:9)

In contrast to Esav, Moav is not a “brother” of Israel. Moshe’s words in their regard therefore include no expressions of closeness or sensitivity towards them, nor any warning to “take good heed.” What is common to the attitude towards Moav and Esav is the unequivocal command not to engage them in battle. *Bnei Yisrael* must not fight against Moav; God has given this land to the children of Lot.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In the verses that follow, Moshe speaks about the former inhabitants of the land of Moav:

The Emim had dwelled there in earlier times – a people that were great, and numerous, and tall, like the Anakim, who also were considered Refaim, like the Anakim, and the Moavim called them “Emim”. The Chorim had also dwelled in Se’ir previously, but the children of Esav succeeded them, and they destroyed them from before them and dwelled in their place, as Israel did to the land of his possession which the Lord gave to them. (ibid. vv.10-12)

In addition to the Emim, the previous inhabitants of Ar, the land of Moav, and the Refaim, Moshe also speaks of two other populations who were conquered and taken over by others: the children of Esav had destroyed the Chorim and inherited Se’ir from them, while a similar conquest is carried out by *Am Yisrael* against the nations dwelling in “the land of their possession,” which God has given them.[[5]](#footnote-5)

What is the place of this historical description? What purpose does it serve? It seems that what Moshe presents here is a “bird’s-eye view” of Divine morality and world politics. In ancient times, there were tribes or nations – Emim, Chorim, Refaim, Anakim, Zuzim – that cast their terror on those around them (“a people great and numerous, and tall, like the Anakim,” “who also were considered Refaim, like the Anakim and the Moavim call them ‘Emim’ [literally, ‘terrors’]”). These nations represent a world of chaos, of aggression and terror; they are sometimes mentioned together with Amalek and the Emori, who represent immorality and corruption.[[6]](#footnote-6) With the progress of history, the “rules of the game” of civilization gradually changed. Morality and culture developed and became more firmly established among the nations of the world. Accordingly, the ancient peoples became “outdated,” and were forced to make way for others who were more moral and enlightened.

Attention should be paid to the structure of these verses. First come the facts: the Emim had previously dwelled in Moav, and the previous inhabitants of Se’ir, the Chorim, had been conquered by Esav. Then, the text compares these to Israel – “as Israel did to the land of his possession.” “Israel” serves here as a model; the Torah uses them as a sort of anchor for the attribution of other nations to their lands.

**“For the Sin of the Emori is Not Complete”**

This moral principle concerning the succession of nations is not new; it is to be found already in *Sefer Bereishit*. In the Covenant Between the Parts, God promises Avraham that the land will be given to his progeny, but the realization of the promise is delayed by four generations because of the moral behavior of the inhabitants of the land, which does not justify their removal: “But in the fourth generation [Avraham’s descendants] will return to here, for the sin of the Emori is not yet complete” (*Bereishit* 15:16). Only when the Emori have lost all merit and entitlement to the land will the descendants of Avraham be able to inherit it.

This promise given to Avraham guides his conduct in the years that follow, and especially his attitude towards the process of inheriting the land. Again and again, the Torah describes his recognition of the Canaanites as the legal owners of the land.[[7]](#footnote-7) He wanders from place to place without settling anywhere,[[8]](#footnote-8) and only near the end of his life does he make the first move towards ownership of any part of the land: he purchases a family burial plot. He insists on buying this plot for its full price, thereby showing the Hittites that he considers them the “people of the land” – the rightful owners and inhabitants of the land. God has promised the land to his descendants, but that is a future promise that will be realized through a complex historical process, which Avraham has no intention of rushing.

**“Men of War”**

The next station on the way to the land is Nachal Zered. After crossing it, *Bnei Yisrael* find themselves confronting the children of Ammon. Before describing the encounter, however, the Torah presents a sort of summing-up:

And the days in which we came from Kadesh-Barne’a until we crossed over Nachal Zered were thirty-eight years, until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the Lord had sworn to them. For indeed the hand of the Lord was against them, to destroy them from among the host, until they were consumed. So it came to pass, when all the men of war were consumed and dead from among the people…” (*Devarim* 2:14-16).

The route described here is from Kadesh-Barne’a – the place from which the spies had been dispatched, thirty-eight years previously (*Bamidbar* 32:8) – to Nachal Zered. During this period, all of the previous generation had died out. The reader is struck by a sense of the strict justice meted out to this generation, who are twice referred to as the “men of war,”[[9]](#footnote-9) and of whom Moshe asserts that “the hand of the Lord was against them, to destroy them.” What is signified by these descriptions? What is the context of this summing up of the journey through the wilderness?

The context would seem to be the same moral principle that we have been discussing. In order to understand its significance, we must go back to the three nations in relation to which the principle was established and pay attention to the differentiation among them:

The Emim had dwelled there in earlier times – a people that were great, and numerous, and tall, like the Anakim […]

The Chorim had also dwelled previously in Se’ir, but the children of Esav succeeded them and they destroyed them from before them […]

As Israel did to the land of his possession, which the Lord gave to him. (*Devarim* 2:10-12)

Three different formulations are used to describe the transition from a previous nation to a successor nation. With regard to Moav, Moshe speaks of the Emim, who lost their claim to the land, but no mention is made of any conflict or war between them and Moav. With regard to Se’ir, Moshe speaks of the Chorim and of Esav, and records a confrontation during which the children of Esav succeeded the Chorim and destroyed them. In the third description, there is no direct reference to the Canaanites who dwelled in the land. The subject is *Am Yisrael*, who undertake a conquest of the “land of his possession,” and God gives it to them.

This variety of descriptions of conquest creates a different focus in each case. In the first instance, the subject is the Emim, whose historical role has come to an end, such that the arrival of Moav in their land might be envisaged as a settling into a vacuum. In the second instance, we find a confrontation, in which the children of Esav prevail over the Chorim. Here the focus is the question of who will have to give way to whom. In the third instance, the focus is *Am Yisrael* and the land of its inheritance. By ignoring the Canaanites, Moshe points to *Am Yisrael* as the active party that takes possession. This perception, echoed in many places in *Tanakh* in different forms, entails an equation. The dwelling of *Am Yisrael* in its land is conditional: “If you will diligently hearken…” – then you will live your lives upon the land; if not – “you shall die off quickly from upon the land…”

We now return to our question about the “men of war” and the historical description of the journeys of *Bnei Yisrael*. It seems that through this description, Moshe imbues the thirty-eight years of wandering in the wilderness with new meaning. Over the course of this long journey, the “men of war” died out; they are no more. Who are these “men of war”? Why are they referred to by this appellation?

“Men of war” is a reference to *Bnei Yisrael*, in the wake of the story of the *ma’apilim*.[[10]](#footnote-10) After it was decreed that the nation would not enter the land, they rebelled against God’s decision:

Then you answered and said to me, “We have sinned against the Lord. We will go up and fight, according to all that the Lord our God commanded us.” And you girded on every man his weapons of war, and ventured to go up into the hill. And the Lord said to me, “Say to them: Neither go up, nor fight, for I am not among you, lest you be smitten before your enemies.” So I spoke to you, and you would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord and went presumptuously up into the hill. And the Emori, who dwelled in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you as bees do, and beat you down in Se’ir as far as Chorma. (*Devarim* 1:41-44)

Moshe used these expressions of war in the previous chapter (*Devarim* 1) in his description of the *ma’apilim*. The essence of the situation that he describes is lack of acceptance of God’s decree. The people go out to war, thereby showing that they have not understood the fundamental equation that makes the inheritance of the land dependent upon the moral situation of the nation. The nation is not worthy; accordingly, God is not in their midst, and the result is the reaction on the part of the Emori, who live in that mountain and who fight and pursue them.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Further context for the expression “men of war” is to be found in the juxtaposition of the description of their death with the description of the appeal to the children of Ammon:

And it was, when all the men of war were consumed and dead from among the people, that the Lord spoke to me, saying, “You are to pass over through Ar, the border of Moav, this day. And when you come near, opposite the children of Ammon, do not harass them, nor contend with them, for I will not give you of the land of the children of Ammon any possession, because I have given it to the children of Lot for a possession.” (*Devarim* 2:16-19)

The “men of war” are those who believe that inheritance comes by virtue of and as a result of war. They do not understand that the inheritance of *Eretz* *Yisrael* is a matter of their own moral standard, not one of military might. Thus, their deaths opens up the possibility of the nation drawing near to the children of Ammon and conducting itself in a proper and worthy manner in relation to them.

**“When You Come Near, Opposite the Children of Ammon”**

The Lord spoke to me, saying, “You are to pass over through Ar, the border of Moav, this day. And when you come near, opposite the children of Ammon, do not harass them, nor contend with them, for I will not give you of the land of the children of Ammon any possession, because I have given it to the children of Lot for a possession.” (That also was considered a land of Refaim; Refaim dwelled there in previous times, and the Ammonim call them Zamzumim – a people great and numerous and tall, like the Anakim – but the Lord destroyed them before them, and they succeeded them, and dwelled in their place, as He did to the children of Esav, who dwelled in Se’ir, when He destroyed the Chorim from before them, and they succeeded them, and dwelled in their stead until this very day. And the Avvim who dwelled in Chatzerim, as far as Aza – Kaftorim who came from Kaftor, destroyed them and dwelled in their stead. (*Devarim* 2:17-23)

As in the case of Moav, *Bnei Yisrael* are warned not to vex or provoke Ammon, since their land is given as an inheritance to the descendants of Lot. Here, too, the land had previously been home to ancient peoples whom the children of Ammon referred to as “Zamzumim;” they had been annihilated and were succeeded by Ammon. Once again, Moshe describes the process of succession by means of a comparison (“as He did to the children of Esav”), but this time an example is also provided: Kaftorim had previously dwelled in Aza, which lies on the border of *Eretz Yisrael*,[[12]](#footnote-12) in place of the Avvim, who had dwelled there originally. This example is significant, since it moves into the boundary of Israel and awards status to a different nation in the cities of the Negev. This is not a coincidence, but rather part of the moral justice according to which God runs the world.

**“Words of Peace”**

“Rise up, take your journey, and pass over Nachal Arnon. Behold, I have given into your hand Sichon the Emori, king of Cheshbon, and his land; begin to possess it, and contend with him in battle. This day I will begin to put the dread of you and the fear of you upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of you and shall tremble and quake because of you.” (*Devarim* 2:24-25)

Moshe is told here to launch a war against Sichon and to conquer his land. God does not suffice with a practical instruction, but also reveals the logic behind it. Israel’s battle against Sichon will be big news, and will create deterrence and fear.

Moshe’s reaction to the command is rather surprising:

So I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemot to Sichon, king of Cheshbon, with words of peace, saying, “Let me pass through your land. I will go along by the highway; I will neither turn to the right hand nor to the left. You shall sell me food for money, that I may eat, and give me water for money, that I may drink; only I will pass through with those who follow me (as the children of Esav who dwell in Se’ir, and the Moavim who dwell in Ar, did to me), until I shall pass over the Jordan into the land which the Lord our God gives us.” (*Devarim* 2:26-29)

Moshe sends messengers to Sichon, king of Cheshbon, bearing “words of peace.” He appeals to Sichon to allow the nation to pass through his land, with the understanding that *Bnei Yisrael* will purchase food and water on their way. As a model for such an agreement, Moshe mentions the children of Esav and Moav. How are we to understand the discrepancy between the military command issued by God and the peaceful diplomacy undertaken by Moshe? The following *midrash* addresses this question:

Although God had told Moshe, “Begin to possess it,” Moshe did not [immediately] do so, but rather sent messengers. Although God had told him, “Contend with him in battle,” he sought peace. For so it is written in the Torah: “When you come near to a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace to it” (*Devarim* 20:10). Therefore, he sent Sichon words of peace, as it is written, “I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemot” – hinting: Out of words that preceded (*kadmu*) the Torah, the words of the Holy One, blessed be He. Therefore it says, “words of peace.” (*Devarim* *Rabba*, *Devarim* 28)

There is a discrepancy between the Divine command and Moshe’s action. God tells him, “Begin to possess it,” but Moshe did not do so; instead, he sends “words of peace.” In response to this discrepancy, the *midrash* points to a different unit that was guiding Moshe – the proclamation of peace, which Moshe preferred despite the explicit command to initiate a war against Sichon.[[13]](#footnote-13) We might have expected some Divine rebuke over this violation, but there is no hint of any displeasure in the verses, nor in the *midrash*. Moreover, the next verse records the result of Moshe’s initiative and God’s part in creating the conditions for *Bnei Yisrael* to fight and win:

But Sichon, king of Cheshbon, would not let us pass by him, for the Lord your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that He might deliver him into your hand, as is apparent this day.

God hardens Sichon’s heart, and thus God’s original plan is realized, along with Moshe’s proclamation of peace.

What leads Moshe to act differently from God’s command? The *midrash* cited above speaks of “words that preceded the Torah.” This brief expression begs a much broader and more fundamental question: what is Moshe’s stance vis-à-vis God? More broadly still – what is the stance of the Sages of the Oral Law, throughout the ages? How are they to obey God’s word and how much discretion can they permit themselves? The image that arises again and again in *Tanakh* is of God “making room,” as it were, and allowing man to weigh the situation as he sees it and to assume responsibility. This situation is depicted as a proper and legitimate ideal, not as a compromise.[[14]](#footnote-14) This idea is expressed in the *midrash* by means of the concept of “words that preceded the Torah” – meaning, in a sense, the “*derekh eretz* (way of the world) that preceded the Torah.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Through this upholding of those words, the Torah is imbued with new meaning. God does not come to contradict the way of the world or that which is self-evident; rather, He comes to add new levels to it and to imbue it with meaning. It is on the basis of that assumption that a profound and complex encounter takes place between man and God.

**Conclusion**

*Sefer Devarim* begins with Moshe’s speech in the fortieth year, just before *Am Yisrael* enter the land. He starts off by reviewing the events of the past, starting from when the nation started journeying away from the mountain of God in the second year after leaving Egypt (1:6). The subject at the heart of this introduction is the journey to *Eretz Yisrael*.[[16]](#footnote-16) The first chapter describes Moshe’s delegation of leadership (v. 9), followed by the story of the spies (v. 22), the punishment – that the generation would not enter the land (v. 35) – and the attempt by the despairing people to ascend the mountain (v. 41). God does not acquiesce to this initiative, and the decree of death in the wilderness remains in force (1:45-46). This rejection creates a new reality – a prolonged stay in the wilderness, and a long journey involving encounters with many nations. It is these encounters that have been the focus of this *shiur*.

The position presented in these verses is not self-evident. There is an emphasis on fraternity in relation to some of the nations, and an in-depth examination of the nature of the right of each of them to its land.[[17]](#footnote-17) It would seem that this focus, along with the deeper insights reflected in it, are a direct expression of the long route that the nation must now take on its journey to the land. They will not approach it directly, in a way in which the focus would probably have been one conquest after the next. Instead, the movement is the opposite: an encounter whose point of departure is awareness of the environment, of the other. On the way to the land, *Am Yisrael* encounter their brethren, the children of Esav, without assaulting their status. They meet Moav and Ammon without vexing these nations, which have received their inheritance from God. In the same spirit, Moshe sends a message of peace to Sichon, and even the war against Og is the fruit of his own initiative, rather than the initiative of the nation.

The unit we have examined here serves as a sort of preface, and it offers a conceptual foundation for the encounters with the nations of the land. The “sin of the Emori” is not complete. The nations of Cana’an have become corrupt, and therefore the mission of this generation of Israelites, and the generations that will follow, is to wage war, conquer, and take possession of the land. At this point, the nation might easily be drawn to a stance of “men of war,” without looking beyond that limited goal. In this sense, our unit creates a wider horizon; it broadens the perspective and reminds the nation of its greater story. This story began with Avraham, father of the nation, who is also “father of a multitude of nations.” His essence was the recognition that the nations of the world are not enemies and that *Am Yisrael* has a role in world history and a message for all of humanity. A long time will pass before the nation will mature, build its kingdom, and come to understand how closely its own story as a nation is bound up with the story of all of humanity.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

1. Mount Se’ir is described as Esav’s dwelling already in *Sefer Bereishit* (36:8). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It would seem that verse 7, “For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your walking through this great wilderness; these forty years the Lord your God has been with you, you have lacked nothing,” is meant to answer a possible question that might arise. From where do *Bnei Yisrael* have money with which to pay the children of Esav for food and water? The answer is that God has blessed them and they lack nothing. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A comparison with the original description of the encounter with Esav, as recorded in *Sefer Bamidbar*, shows that Moshe chooses to ignore an important element of that encounter – the response of the children of Esav to the appeal by *Bnei Yisrael*: “And Edom said to him, ‘You shall not pass by me, lest I come out against you with the sword.’ And *Bnei Yisrael* said to him, ‘We will go by the highway, and if I and my cattle drink of your water, then I will pay for it I will do you no harm, only on foot will I pass through.’ And he said, ‘You shall not go through.’ And Edom came out against him with many people and with a strong hand. Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border, so that Israel turned away from him” (*Bamidbar* 20:18-21). What leads Moshe to omit this? Perhaps the reason is his desire to focus on his main message – the acknowledgment of Esav’s status as a brother and emphasis on the fact that his land is given to him by God. This is an objective, inherent state of affairs; it is not dependent on Esav’s behavior. Esav’s response to the appeal by *Bnei Yisrael* to pass through their land was indeed immature and inappropriate, but their attitude and their response should in no way affect *Bnei Yisrael*’s attitude towards them. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The basis for this attribution of the land to Moav would seem to be the account in *Sefer Bereishit* where Avraham offers Lot to share the land between them (“if you take the left, I will turn right; if [you take] the right – I will turn left”). Lot looks towards Sedom and the cities of the plain (*Bereishit* 13:5-12), thereby relinquishing his right to the eastern part of the land. His choice of inheritance is understood in *Sefer Devarim* as a gift from God – “For I have given Ar to the children of Lot as an inheritance.” (Tzo’ar is described in *Yeshayahu* 15:5 as one of the cities of the plain: “My heart cries out for Moav, his fugitives shall flee to Tzo’ar…”). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The plain sense of the past-tense formulation of the verse – “as Israel did to the land of his possession” – seems to be a description of the immediate future – what “Israel is about to do.” The past tense may be used as an indication of the certainty that this will happen. (Similarly, Avraham tells Efron the Hittite, “I have given the price of the field; take it from me” [*Bereishit* 23:13], before he actually hands over the payment.) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For instance, in the historical description in *Sefer Bereishit* we find: “And in the fourteenth year there came Kedarla’omer and the kings that were with him, and they smote the Refaim in Ashterot-Karnayim, and the Zuzim in Ham, and the Emim in Shaveh Kiryatayim, and the Chori in their Mount Se’ir, up to El-Paran, which is by the wilderness. And they returned and came to En-Mishpat, which is Kadesh, and they smote all the country of the Amaleki, and the Emori, who dwelled in Chatzatzon-Tamar” (*Bereishit* 14:5-6). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The very name “Cana’an” testifies to their status within it. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. There are many examples: “And Avram passed through the land up to the place of Shekhem, up to Elon Moreh, and the Canaanites were then dwelling in the land” (ibid. 12:6) – a record of Avraham’s nomadic existence. After Shekhem, he sojourns on the way in between Beit El and Ai, like someone who does not consider himself as belonging to either place (v. 8). Thereafter, “And Avraham journeyed, going on even further, to the Negev” (v. 9). The next move is to Egypt, from whence he returns to the Negev (13:1) and then continues his journeys: “And he went on his journeys from the Negev even to Beit El, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beit El and Ai” (13:3). Later, God tells him, “Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it, for I will give it to you” (13:17). Eventually Avraham settles near Mamre, his friend, in Hevron, and later in Beer Sheva. Nevertheless, the first indication that the Torah gives of any gesture on his part that advances or reflects his ownership of the land is the purchase of the burial plot for Sarah. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This word pair has a similar meaning in *Sefer Yehoshua*: “All the people that came out of Egypt that were males, all the **men of war**, died in the wilderness, by the way as they came out of Egypt… For *Bnei Yisrael* walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were **men of war**, who came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they did not obey the voice of the Lord, to whom the Lord swore that we would not show them the land that the Lord swore to their fathers that He would give us, a land flowing with milk and honey” (*Yehoshua* 4:4, 6). Here the “men of war” are those who died in the wilderness, and they are also described as not having obeyed God. Elsewhere, the same expression “men of war” simply denotes the fighting force (*Bamidbar* 31:28, 49; *Yehoshua* 6:3, and more). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “I humbly submit that the men of war are those of whom it was said [after the sin of the spies,] ‘they went up to the top of the mountain’ (*Bamidbar* 14:40), as it is written [in Moshe’s recounting of the incident], ‘And you girded on every man his weapons of war’ (*Devarim* 1:41)… Therefore he calls them men of war, and not just men of war in general, but *the* men of war - men who are known to us, who went against the command of the Holy One, blessed be He” (Rashbam on *Devarim* 2:14). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The noting of the fact that the Emori dwell in that mountain may be understood as framing the Israelite initiative as an invasion of their territory. This idea is reinforced by the image of the beehive, as Rabbenu Bechayei comments: “[And chased you] as bees do – they chase after whoever touches their hive, thereby endangering themselves.”

    It should be noted that the initiative of the *ma’apilim* did not arise from fringe elements. The description of the incident in *Sefer Bamidbar* indicates involvement of the nation as a whole: “And Moshe conveyed these words to all of *Bnei Yisrael*, and the people mourned greatly. And they rose up early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, ‘We are here, and will go up to the place which the Lord has promised, for we have sinned’… But they presumed to go up to the hill top; nevertheless, the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord did not depart from the camp” (*Bamidbar* 14:39-44). Moshe speaks to “all of *Bnei Yisrael*,” who nevertheless emerge the next morning and head out to battle. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In *Sefer Yehoshua*, the cities of the Pelishtim are enumerated among the cities on the border of the inheritance of the tribe of Yehuda: “Ekron with its hamlets and its villages: from Ekron to the sea, all that lay near Ashdod, with their villages. Ashdod with its hamlets and villages; Aza with its hamlets and villages, up to the Nachal of Egypt and the great sea, being its border” (*Yehoshua* 15:45-47). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Perhaps Moshe regarded this as a sort of “division of roles.” Two different values are at stake – the value of peace and the need for deterrence and a fear of *Am Yisrael*. He takes responsibility for the first, leaving the second to God. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See in this regard our *shiurim* on *Sefer Shemot* – *Parashat Beshalach* and *Parashat Ki Tisa*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The textual basis for this *midrash* is the emphasis on the place from which Moshe dispatched the messengers: “And I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemot to Sichon, king of Cheshbon, with words of peace, saying….” The *midrash* interprets “the wilderness of Kedemot” as a description of the spiritual place from which Moshe was acting, in communion with “words that preceded the Torah.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The description starts with leaving the Mountain of God; the goal was meant to be the inheritance of the land: “The Lord our God spoke to us in Chorev, saying: **You have dwelled long enough in this mountain; turn and take your journey**, and go to the mountain of the Emori, and to all the places near it, in the plain, in the hills, and in the lowland, and in the Negev, and by the seaside, to the land of the Canaanites, and the Levanon, as far as the great river, the river Perat. Behold, **I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to your fathers** – Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov – to give to them and to their seed after them” (*Devarim* 1:6-8). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. An examination of parallel units in *Sefer Bamidbar* reveals different focuses: *Bamidbar* emphasizes national strength, destiny, and identity; *Devarim* emphasizes choice and discretion and the assumption of responsibility. As an example, in the confrontation with Sichon in *Sefer* *Bamidbar* (21:21-24), the focus is on passing through his border. No mention is made of “words of peace” that are conveyed to him, nor is there any Divine command to engage him in battle. In *Sefer Devarim* there is a command to wage war against him, while Moshe in fact proclaims peace. This difference in perspective, along with other different elements, defines the respective character of *Sefer Bamidbar* and of *Sefer Devarim* along with the events described in each. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)