Summary of Parashat Debarim

Moshe addresses the people of Israel –the new generation of Israelites who are about to enter the Land of Israel– in a long and powerful speech. His words begin by recalling the events that took place from the time of the Exodus from Egypt, forty years earlier, until the present moment.

Moshe also recounts the appointment of leaders and judges to assist him in guiding the people. This initiative would later serve as a foundational model for the judicial system of the nation of Israel, establishing the principle of shared responsibility and justice.

He then retells the story of the spies, and how –with the exception of Yehoshua and Caleb– they discouraged the nation, spreading fear and doubt, which led to a national crisis. As a consequence of this episode, that entire generation was denied entry into the Promised Land. This turning point caused the people of Israel to wander in the desert for forty years, awaiting the rise of a new generation.

God tells Moshe that the people had remained long enough in the mountainous region and that the time had come to move forward toward the Promised Land. He instructs them not to provoke or engage in conflict with the descendants of Esav, who lived in the land of Se'ir. Instead, they are commanded to purchase food and water from them –not to take anything by force– because God had not granted Israel any portion of the land of Se'ir.

Similarly, God commands Moshe not to harass the Moabites or the Ammonites, since their lands were given by God as an inheritance to the descendants of Lot. These nations were not to be disturbed, respecting the divine allotment of territories.

The Israelites then spent thirty-eight years journeying from Kadesh-Barnea to the crossing of the Zered River. During that time, the entire earlier generation —those who had rebelled— perished in the wilderness, just as God had decreed.

Moshe reminds the people that he had sent envoys to Sihon, the king of the Amorites, with a peaceful offer, requesting safe passage through his territory. However, Sihon refused and instead prepared for battle. The Israelites were then forced to engage in war with Sihon, king of Cheshbon, and they ultimately conquered his land.

The Torah then describes in detail the subsequent conquest of the territories of both Sihon and Og, king of Bashan, on the eastern side of the Jordan River. These newly acquired lands were allocated to the tribes of Reuven, Gad, and the half-tribe of Menasheh, establishing their inheritance on the eastern bank of the Jordan, even before crossing into the main body of the Promised Land.