

Much of this week's reading, *D'varim*, is given to Moses' review of the nation's 40 years of wanderings in the desert. There is something curious that appears several times in his address to the nation. See if you find strange the use of the word "you" in the following verses as Moses recalls the ill-fated mission of the scouts/spies:¹

1:22: Then all of **you** came to me and said, "Let us send men ahead to reconnoiter the land...."

1:25-26: ... they gave us this report: "It is a good land that the Lord our God is giving to us." Yet **you** refused to go up

1:29, 32: I said to **you**, "Have no dread or fear" Yet for all that, **you** have no faith in the Lord your God.

1:34: When the Lord heard **your** loud complaint, He was angry

1:37: Because of **you** the Lord was incensed with me too....

Etc. What have you noticed odd about these uses of the word "you"?

Recall the generation of the spies was sentenced to die out in the desert. Of Moses' audience in this address, most were children or not yet born during the expedition of the spies; it was their parents' and grandparents' generations that bore the guilt of this disaster. So why does Moses seem to be blaming an innocent generation?

Unlike some of our neighbors, we do not believe in inherited guilt. Although the Torah describes God as

Extending kindness to the thousandth generation ... but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon the 3rd and 4th generations.²

We should perhaps understand this verse as telling us what a good deal God gives us when we compare His goodness and punishment. Note also the Hasidic commentary at the bottom of p. 541 of the *Etz Hayim*, that God holds parents responsible for the religious and moral instruction of children, who often learn to do evil from their parents. The prophet Ezekiel teaches:

The soul that sins, **it** shall die; the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father.... the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon **him**, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon **him**.³

So, what is Moses doing in speaking to the generation about to enter the Promised Land as if it bears the guilt of its parents' generation? You have probably all heard or read the maxim, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."⁴ I believe Moses is telling the younger generation to learn the lessons of its people's history. In the commentary of Professor Ilana Kurshan of the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem,

When Moshe "expounds" on Torah in the book of Deuteronomy, he is not merely reviewing the past; he is also showing us how the past continues to shape us. As we learn from Moshe's final address, the way we remember our history and the way we retell our stories determines the people we are today, and the people we will become.⁵

¹ *Etz Hayim*, pp. 986 - 988

² Ex. 34:7 – *Etz Hayim*, p. 541

³ Ezekiel 18:20

⁴ George Santayana, *The Life of Reason*, 1905

⁵ Ilana Kurshan, "Not Just a Second Torah," *Torah Sparks* for July 17, 2021; downloaded from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SnpmWy56R-CSBJexeqvP9d4rCXcDFy70/view> on July 15, 2021