



Why do I want to Preserve My Father's Memoir?

My Father's Memoir Transports Me Back in Time

In school, I used to hate history. It was so boring to remember past events and years. Ironically, my MA degree is in Jewish history. That's what was available for me at the time, and I was able to study the history of ideas which was different. I never took an interest in past events, despite having been taught the importance of remembering the past in the Jewish school, especially the Holocaust, for the sake of "Never Again!" Yet, my father's Memoir is everything but boring. He worked so hard to put the main events of his own life and everything he recalled about his family on paper. He also collected photographs, even four generations back. I'm grateful that my father bequeathed us, his daughters, grandchildren and great grandchildren with the rich legacy of our roots. It's hard for me to explain why this Memoir means so much to me. First of all, since I have lost my father and can no longer ask him to tell me the story of his and his family's past, all that's left is my memory of him, videos, photos and his Memoir. When I read it, I feel my father is talking to me, which he is in reality, as well as to the rest of his descendants. My father's Memoir transports me back to being a little girl, once again sitting on my father's lap and asking him questions. In his Memoir, he anticipated the questions I would want to ask, and he patiently answered them, one by one. When I face the computer screen, working on translating my father's Memoir from Danish, so that it can be preserved for posterity, it is as if I have my own personal 'rendezvous' with him. Tears often run down my cheeks as I hear my father's voice through his written words, while I try my utmost to find the closest English equivalent to his rich, articulate idioms and jargon. "O Father, thank you for caring enough about us to leave part of yourself and your legacy behind."

History is Hashem's Premeditated Heavenly Artwork

My father's Memoir imparts in me that I'm not just a random feather blowing in the wind. I'm part of an unbroken chain of hardworking Jews from time bygone. Knowing about my ancestors helps me anchor myself in the place of my yesteryear, grounding myself in the roots of my heritage.

ספר דברים פרק לב פסוק ז זָכֹר יָמוֹת עוֹלָם בֵּינוּ שָׁנוֹת דֹּר וָדֹר שֶׁאֵל אָבִיךָ יִגְדֶּךָ זְקֵנֶיךָ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָּךְ:

"Remember the days of old; reflect upon the years of [other] generations. Ask your father, and he will tell you; your elders, and they will inform you" (*Devarim* 32:7).

I'm thankful that my father told me about "the years of the past generations." Knowing about my past offers me perspective for the future, as Rashi explains: [If] you have not set your attention to the past, then "reflect upon the years of generations," i.e., to recognize the future, that He has the power to bestow good upon you and to give you as an inheritance the days of the Mashiach and the world-to-come [*Sifrei* 32:6]; (Rashi, *Devarim* 32:7). History is not just a random sum of dates and events. Past, present and future are tied together like a string of pearls. Since history is cyclical, our past teaches us about the future. Nothing happens in the world without it being divinely decreed. This imbues history with value. Historical facts thus become situations of humanity in respect to G-d, and as such they acquire a religious value that nothing had previously been able to confer on them. It may, then, be said with truth that the Hebrews were the first to discover the meaning of history as the epiphany of G-d." (Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, New York, Harper & Row, 1959, 104). Judaism is humanity's first glimpse of history as more than a mere succession of happenings – as nothing less than a drama of redemption in which the fate of a nation reflects its loyalty to a covenant with God (*The God Who Acts in History*, Lord Jonathan Sacks). Everything that was, is and will be is part of Hashem's delicately premeditated artwork, culminating in the most heavenly light.

Strengthen Emunah by Learning History the Torah Way

Studying history through the lenses of redemption can be an important aspect of studying Torah. Our Torah verse gives us a clue to the Torah way of studying history: “**Remember** the days of the world, **understand** the years of each generation, **ask** your father and he will tell you; your elders and they will say to you” (*Devarim* 32:7). The Vilna Gaon explains the three kinds of learning: Remember, understand, and ask, corresponding to: “Hashem didn’t give you a heart to know, eyes to see and ears to hear” (Ibid. 29:3). Each of these three ways of learning strengthens our emunah. Learning from our personal experience is called ‘seeing.’ We learn from our father and elders, by ‘hearing’ their experience. Finally, we make our own inferences through our ‘understanding from the heart.’ Corresponding to seeing it states, “Remember the days of the world...” ...that your eyes saw, the signs and wonders that He did in front of your eyes (*Devarim* 29:2). “Understand the years of each generation” corresponds to the understanding of your heart. “Ask your father...” Accept the well-known past that can be sensed through hearing. These three ways of understanding history correspond to the three dimensions of Divine influence: עולם/*olam*, שנה/*shana*, and נפש/*nefesh*, or the dimensions of space, time, and soul. It is the soul level that corresponds to what we receive from our father and elders, as you see in the following chart based on the Vilna Gaon, *Aderet Eliyahu*, *Devarim* 32:7.

	Mind	Heart	Mouth
	Eyes	Heart	Ears
	Chachmah	Binah	Da’at
	Space עולם	Time שנה	Soul נפש
<i>Devarim</i> 32:7	Remember	Understand	Ask
<i>Devarim</i> 32:7	the days of old	the years of [other] generations	your father, and he will tell you; your elders
	General/Masculine	Particular/Feminine	
<i>Yechezkiel</i> 40:4	“see with your eyes,”	“and pay attention with your heart”	“hear with your ears”
<i>Yesha’ayhu</i> 6:10	“...his eyes are becoming sealed”	“This people’s heart is becoming fat”	“...his ears are becoming heavy”
<i>Yesha’ayhu</i> 6:10	“lest he see with his eyes”	“understand, and he repent and be healed”	“and hear with his ears”
<i>Devarim</i> 29:2-3	“your very eyes beheld and those great signs and wonders.”	“Hashem has not given you a heart to know”	“and ears to hear.”
<i>Devarim</i> 4:9	“lest you forget the things that your eyes saw”	“and lest these things depart from your heart,”	“and you shall make them known to your children and to your children’s children”

Moshe’s Memoir

Parashat Ha’azinu is about the history of the nation of Israel. Ramban explains that this enthralling song encompass our entire history as “a true and trustworthy witness which tells clearly all that transpires with us” (Ramban, *Devarim* 32:1). It is interesting to see what has and will happen, and how all our history is affected by our willingness to listen to the words of the Torah. The Song of *Ha’azinu* alludes to how our choices affect our historical reality for bad and for good. This leads us to the gate of hope, recognizing our immense impact on history. In a way, we are in fact writing our

own history. Still, the entire Torah comes to teach us how our history and fate is influenced by Hashem's individual providence. We see the hand of Hashem through learning about the history of our people: the first human's disobedience and subsequent expulsion, the depravity of the generation of the flood and its destruction, the selection of Avraham due to his kindness and hospitality, the dynasty of the Jewish people, our suffering and ensuing Exodus culminating in the giving of the Torah by Moshe. Hashem speaks to us directly through him in the Book of *Devarim*, also called, 'The Repetition of the Torah.' In this book, Moshe recounts the events and laws that have already been given over, in his own voice, teaching us how repeating past events of our history gives birth to new sounds, new voices, new notions. Moshe is not only our Rabbi but also our father, who tells us the story of the divine Torah, in order to preserve it for posterity, for all future generations. Perhaps we can say that the entire Book of *Devarim* is Moshe Rabbeinu's lifelong Memoir?