



Parshas Vaeschanan

For the week ending 16 Av 5758
7 & 8 August 1998

Overview

Although Moshe is content that Yehoshua will lead the nation, Moshe now prays to be allowed to enter the Land of Israel in order to fulfill its special *mitzvos*. However, Hashem refuses his request. Moshe reminds *Bnei Yisrael* of the gathering at Sinai when they received the Torah — that they saw no visual representation of the Divine, but only the sound of words. Moshe impresses on *Bnei Yisrael* that the revelation of Sinai took place before an entire nation, not to a select elite, and that only the Jewish People will ever be able to claim that Hashem spoke to their entire nation. Moshe specifically enjoins *Bnei Yisrael* to “pass over” the event of the gathering at Sinai to their children throughout all generations.

Moshe accurately predicts that after *Bnei Yisrael* have dwelled in *Eretz Yisrael* they will sin, be exiled from the Land, and be scattered among all the peoples. They will stay few in number but eventually they will return to Hashem. Moshe designates three “cities of refuge” to which a person who kills inadvertently may flee. Moshe repeats the Ten Commandments and then teaches the *Shema*, the central credo of Judaism, that there is only One G-d. Then Moshe warns the people not to succumb to materialism and forget their purpose as a spiritual nation. The Parsha ends with Moshe exhorting *Bnei Yisrael* not to intermarry when they enter *Eretz Yisrael*, as they cannot be a treasured and holy nation if they intermarry, and they will become indistinguishable from the other nations.

Insights

NO SWITZERLAND

“And you who cling to Hashem, your G-d — you are alive, all of you, today.” (4:4)

There’s an old philosophical dispute among the nations about the nature of Man’s connection to the Infinite One. Some say that G-d is so above us that we need an intermediary. Others say that in this world it is impossible to be in contact with G-d; that only after death is this possible. Still others say that while it’s possible in this life to have a relationship with G-d, only unique individuals can attain to this; the vast majority of us, they say, will not succeed. And lastly, there are those who say that true contact with G-d is only possible after a life-time of work and effort.

The Torah teaches us that none of these philosophies is accurate. All Jews, on any level and at any time, are capable of a close relationship with G-d.

We can see this hinted in the above verse: “And you who cling to Hashem, your G-d — you are alive, all of you, today;” Meaning:

“And you who cling to Hashem...” Directly to Hashem — you don’t need intermediaries. You don’t need the neutral ground of an intercessor. Between the Jewish People and G-d there is no “Switzerland.”

“...you are alive...” You can have this contact in this world as well. You don’t have to pass on to the next world to be close to G-d.

“...all of you...” It is the birthright of the entire Jewish nation to have this connection with the Creator, not just unique individuals.

“...today...” Being close to G-d is not predicated on a lifetime’s work and struggle, you can have it today — if you want it.

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AN AIR OF HOLINESS

“Go up to the top of Pisgah and see with your eyes.” (3:27)

The quintessential quality of Moshe was eternity. Everything that Moshe instituted was eternal. The Torah is eternal and thus it was given through Moshe. Consequently, if Moshe had entered the Land of Israel, the land would never have been destroyed.

Moshe saw the air of *Eretz Yisrael* from afar. His gaze transformed the air of the Land and gave it an enduring holiness which no destruction could nullify.

Our sages teach us that the air of *Eretz Yisrael* makes a person wise (*Bava Basra 158*). The very gaze of Moshe hangs suspended permanently in the air imbuing it with an everlasting holiness.

FOREVER

“Ascend to the top of the cliff, and raise your eyes westward, northward...and see with your eyes, for you shall not cross this Jordan.” (3:27)

Picture the feelings of longing that Moshe must have had as he stood on top of the cliff, gazing out over the Land he so yearned to enter.

There it was, stretched out in front of him like a map. The Land of Israel. So close and yet so far. Hashem knew how much Moshe wanted to go into *Eretz Yisrael*, so why did He “tantalize” Moshe by telling him to go up and gaze at this land that he knew he was never going to enter?

Furthermore, our Sages tell us that by prophetic insight Hashem showed Moshe every single square inch of *Eretz Yisrael* — which must have only increased his longing!

What was Hashem’s purpose?

Each of the *Avos*, the Patriarchs, are associated with a specific quality: Avraham with *Chesed*, Kindness; Yitzchak with *Gevurah*, Self-control; And Yaakov with *Emes*, Truth. *The quality associated with Moshe is Netzach — Eternity.*

Everything that Moshe did was forever.

If Moshe had gone into the land of Israel with the Jewish People, then their entry would have been an “eternal

Haftorah: Isaiah 40:1-26

The Shabbos immediately following Tisha B’Av is called *Shabbos Nachamu* -- The Shabbos of Consolation. It takes its name from the first word of this week’s Haftorah -- “Comfort, comfort my people says your G-d.” The Prophet reminds the people that the time of the Exile of Jerusalem has come to an end. The Midrash tells us that Hashem asks Avraham to comfort Jerusalem, but he does not succeed. He is followed by Yitzchak and Yaakov and Moshe who are also unsuccessful. Finally Hashem Himself comes to comfort the Holy City.

entry.” After such an entry, the Jewish People could never again leave the Land. Hashem knew that the Jewish People would *have* to go into exile for they would not be able to maintain the high spiritual standards that the Land requires. If they could not leave, and they could not stay, they would be “caught” in a spiritual vise and they would be in the very real danger of annihilation (*r”l*).

Thus, Moshe *could not* enter the Land of Israel.

However, Hashem made Moshe’s non-entry into the Land serve a positive purpose: Hashem wanted to sear the memory of the Land of Israel into the collective psyche of the Jewish People. By showing Moshe every blade of grass, by taking him and showing him every corner of the Land he was never to enter, Hashem planted in Moshe’s heart a longing for the Land of Israel *which would be eternal.*

Look at our daily prayers. Look at the blessings after eating a meal. Our petitions to Hashem are saturated with the name of the Land which we long to return to as a Holy People.

Throughout the long, long night of exile, the Jewish people have never lost that longing for *Eretz Yisrael* that Moshe felt when he stood on top of the cliff and gazed into the Land which he would not enter.

A GENTLE NUDGE

“And you will love Hashem, Your G-d, with all your heart...” (6:5)

The philosophers ask: How can you command love? Love is something instinctive which a person either feels or doesn’t feel! Can a person be made to love on command?!

The answer is to be found in the question itself. From the fact that Hashem *commanded* us to love Him, it follows that it must be part of the nature of every Jew to be able to love the Creator. All that is required is to awaken this natural strength and give it a gentle nudge!

Sources:

No Switzerland - Kanfei Nesharim in *Mayana Shel Torah*

An Air Of Holiness - *Mayana Shel Torah*

Forever - *Malbim, Rabbi Yerucham Uziel Milevsky z”l*

A Gentle Nudge - *Sfas Emes*