

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT VAYEILECH

DVAR TORAH: SHABBAT & TESHUVAH

There is a key difference between the kedushah (holiness) of Shabbat and the kedushah of Yom Tov, writes Harav Chaim Tchernovitz, זצ"ל (1760-1817) in the first essay of his סידורו של שבת, the classic 19-part work devoted to the thought world of Shabbat. Whereas Hashem put the keys to the kedushah of Yom Tov in the hands of the People of Israel, every seven days since the beginning of Creation Hashem initiates an entire day of kedushah. No matter what, Shabbat comes down from above. If that is the case, asks Reb Chaim, why do we see radical differences between different people's Shabbat experiences? One person's face shines with Shabbat yet another person seems unaffected. If the kedushah of Shabbat is an independent Divinely directed initiative, why don't all experience it the same?

The obvious answer, says Reb Chaim, is the difference between different מקבליים – those on the receiving end of that kedushah. Hashem's kedushat Shabbat is a constant, but our ability to experience that kedushah depends on how we prepare for Shabbat. For Shabbat to really affect us, we need to precede it with teshuvah. He brings the point home through the following image.

Imagine a king of a medieval city-state preparing to visit the villa of a devoted subject. His future host would prepare every room for the royal entourage, making sure every aspect of the house is fit for a king. He'd make sure it is spotless and polished, everything functioning flawlessly. He'd create a royal environment that matches the king's needs and desires. The king's servants and staff would check out the accommodations beforehand and note how wonderfully everything has been prepared. Even though the host doesn't specifically ask for it, the king's advisors would arrange for some special time between the host and the king, and make sure he is aptly rewarded for his efforts and devotion.

But imagine another subject in the same situation who focuses instead on the great personal benefits he might get through hosting the king. He realizes that there will be many visitors in the area and sets up profitable concession stands. He promises wealthy friends he'll use his protektzia to arrange for them to meet with the king – and he dreams of the future profits these favours will bring him. But this host does not focus on preparing his home for the king. It is clean, but not spotless; it is nice, but not royal. The advisors check out the place and fear it is not fitting for a royal visit.

We must, says Reb Chaim, prepare our internal selves for Shabbat through teshuvah. Then the Divine revelations of Shabbat – present every seven days since creation – will rest within us. If our hearts and minds are fitting for royalty, if we clean our internal homes and ready them for the King, we will remove any barriers to a Divine visit. (Some go a step further and immerse twice in a mikveh every Erev Shabbat, once to remove any barriers to kedushah and a second time to elevate towards the approaching kedushah.)

This Shabbat is referred to as Shabbat Teshuvah (Maharil Minhagim Aseret Yemei Teshuvah 4), but says Reb Chaim, every Shabbat requires pre-Shabbat teshuvah. Not only will we enjoy Shabbat, we'll also host the Divine Presence in our homes and inside ourselves.

SOURCE GUIDE: MOSHE WENT

Our parshah begins with two words, וילך משה – “Moshe went” – that leave us with a question: Where did Moshe go? The verse doesn’t seem to give an answer; it goes on to discuss Moshe’s speech that follows. This source guide explores how this question was addressed by commentators throughout the generations.

<p>1. Devarim 31:1 Moshe went and he said all of these words to all of Israel.</p>	<p>דברים לא:א וילך משה וידבר את הדברים האלה אל כל ישראל.</p>
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The Targum (not Unkelos, but the additional one that appears in most Mikraot Gedolot) adds a few words:

<p>2. Targum on Devarim 31:1 Moshe went to the Tabernacle, the house of learning, and said all of these words with all of Israel.</p>	<p>תרגום על דברים לא:א ואזל משה למשכן בית אולפנא ומליל ית פתגמיא האלין עם כל ישראל.</p>
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This answers the question in the most straightforward way possible: Where did Moshe go? He went to the most natural place to teach Torah, the Ohel Moed, and from there taught the People of Israel. But later commentators explain the verse differently. Why? Perhaps the Targum’s explanation did not satisfy them because it seems to merely supply an obvious detail. Why was there a need to mention that he went?

ראב"ע – Ibn Ezra’s answer is probably motivated by the context of our parshah – Moshe’s imminent death:

<p>3. Ibn Ezra on Devarim 31:1 He went – He went to each and every tribe to tell them that he was going to die, so they should not fear. And he strengthened their hearts concerning Yehoshua. Therefore it is later written, “And you will give it over to them as an inheritance” (verse 7). In my opinion, he then blessed the tribes, even though their blessing appears in the text only later.</p>	<p>ראב"ע על דברים לא:א וילך - הלך אל כל שבט ושבט להודיע שהוא מת שלא יפחדו, וחזק לבם בדברי יהושע, על כן כתוב אחריו "ואתה תנחילנה אותם" (ז). ולפי דעתי, כי אז ברך השבטים, ואם ברכותיהם מאוחרות במכתב.</p>
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Moshe is preparing the people for his own death, conscious of what can happen to a panicking nation in his absence. The Golden Calf downfall began with the nation saying, “Moshe the man we do not know what has become of him” (Shemot 32:1). Now, forty years later, Moshe knows he will once again ascend to Heaven. He has arranged for Yehoshua to succeed him in his absence, but he must now prepare them emotionally for succession. Fear of what will happen without Moshe could compromise a smooth transition.

The Chizkuni goes in a similar direction but adds two points:

<p>4. Chizkuni on Devarim 31:1 Moshe went from the Tent of Meeting where he lived – as it says, “Camping before the Tabernacle of Hashem were Moshe and Aharon and his sons” (Bamidbar 3:38). He went to each and every tribe to tell them that he was going to die and they should not fear, but, rather, be strengthened through the words of Yehoshua. Why did he need to go to the trouble of going after them? Should he not have gathered them using the chatzoterot (rough translation: trumpets) that Moshe made? However, Rabbi Yehoshua of Sichnin, quoting Rabbi Levi, said: The trumpets Moshe made in the desert: when Moshe’s death was imminent, the Holy One, blessed be He, hid them so Moshe would not blow them, causing them (the nation) to come to him. This fulfills the verse, “There is no dominion on the day of death” (Kohelet 8:8).</p>	<p>חזקוני על דברים לא:א וילך משה מאהל מועד שהיה דר שם שנאמר "והחוננים לפני משכן ה' משה ואהרן ובניו" (במדבר ג:לח). והלך לו אצל כל שבט ושבט להודיעם כי הוא מת ולא יפחדו אך יחזקו לבם בדברי יהושע. ולמה הוצרך לטרוח וללכת אחריהם? היה לו לכנסם בחצוצרות שעשה משה. אלא אמר ר' יהושע דסכנין משום ר' לוי: חצוצרות שעשה משה במדבר – כיון שנטה משה למות גנזן הקב"ה שלא יהא משה תוקע בהן והם באין אצלו, לקיים מה שנאמר "ואין שלטון ביום המות" (קהלת ח:ח).</p>
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- a. Note that this is the opposite of the Targum – Moshe **came from** the Ohel Moed as opposed to **going to** it.
 b. Moshe's need to go to the people communicates to them that the day of his death has come. Otherwise why is he going to them as opposed to gathering them all through the trumpets?

Rabbeinu Bechayei takes this approach one step further:

<p>5. Rabbeinu Bechayei on Devarim 31:1 We similarly find that Moshe went to Israel from the Camp of the Levites to the Camp of Israel to console them over his death, as well as [through mentioning] the greatness of Yehoshua who will succeed and replace him. He did not want to speak to them while they were all gathered and standing before him. Rather, he waited until every man returned to his tent so he could go to them.</p>	<p>רבינו בחיי על דברים לא:א וכן מציינו במשה שהלך לישראל ממחנה לוייה אל מחנה ישראל לנחם אותן במיתתו, ובגדולתו של יהושע שיהיה תחתיו וימלא מקומו, ולא רצה לדבר להם כשהיו כולם מקובצים ונצבים לפניו אבל המתין עד שהלכו איש לאהלו כדי שילך הוא אצלם.</p>
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Moshe went to the People of Israel to do a pre-death ניחום אבלים – consoling the mourners. He consoled his people over his own future death.

Ramban: Up until now, the People of Israel were gathered together, נצבים, standing together before G-d. Says the Ramban:

<p>6. Ramban on Devarim 31:1 Moshe went – After he completed all of his words, all of those who were standing before him went, along with the children and women, each man to his tent. There was no need to mention this, for it already said, “You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d ... to enter the covenant with Hashem your G-d. The verse now says that Moshe went from the Camp of the Levites to the Camp of Israel to honor them, like one who wants to take leave of his friend and asks permission of him.</p>	<p>רמב"ן על דברים לא:א וילך משה - כאשר השלים כל דבריו אז הלכו כל הנצבים לפניו והטף והנשים איש לאהלו, ולא הוצרך הכתוב להזכיר זה, כי כבר אמר (לעיל כט ט יא) אתם נצבים היום כלכם לפני ה' אלהיכם וגו' לעברך בברית ה' אלהיך, ואחר עברם בברית ילכו מפניו. ויאמר הכתוב עתה, כי משה הלך ממחנה לוייה אל מחנה ישראל לכבדם, כמי שירצה להפטר מחבירו ובא ליטול רשות ממנו.</p>
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Moshe escorted the entire People of Israel as they left him, taking leave of them before he passes away.

Tosefet Brachah: Harav Baruch Halevi Epstein, זצ"ל (1860-1941) makes a novel suggestion:

<p>7. Tosefet Berachah on Devarim 31:1 It is possible to say that the expression “he went” here does not connote walking with his legs. Rather, [הלך] here means mustering one's spiritual might, using inner strength and courage to actualize a difficult thing or a weighty action that is not done easily.</p>	<p>תוספת ברכה על דברים לא:א ואפשר לומר, כי הלשון "וילך" כאן אינו ממוכן פסיעה ברגלים, כי אם מלשון התאזרות בגבורת הרוח ובעוז אומץ הנפש להוציא אל הפועל דבר קשה או פעולה כבדה, שלא בנקל תוכל להעשות.</p>
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Moshe must gather all of his inner strength; he must undergo internal movement, to share these last words with the People of Israel about his own death outside the Land of Israel. He must strengthen them and Yehoshua to trust that Hashem will be with them as they conquer the mighty nations of the land.

The Tosefet Berachah quotes a number of verses where הלך, the verb for going, indicates internal movement, taking initiative to do something especially difficult. Here are the verses he explains in this light: Bereishit 35:22, Bereishit 37:27, Shemot 2:1, Shemot 3:10, Shemot 5:11, and Tehillim 34:12. He also suggests that the verb בוא is sometimes used in a similar fashion.

Where did Moshe go? A. to the Beit Midrash (Targum); B. to the people (Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni, Rabbeinu Bechayei, and Ramban); C. he moved internally, preparing himself & gathering his strength for the coming challenge (Tosefet Berachah).

GOD'S POEM BY RABBI GIDON SHOSHAN

At the end of this week's parshah, the Torah records the last of the 613 mitzvot, the obligation of every individual to commission the writing of a new Sefer Torah, a new Torah scroll.

As the death of Moshe neared, G-d communicated with Moshe and his successor Yehoshua and foretold the unseemly future in which the Jewish People would worship the idols of their new homeland. They would thereby precipitate a spiritual exile, one in which G-d would conceal himself and orchestrate Jewish history with a hidden hand.

To document the covenant and the prediction G-d said, "And now write for yourselves this שירה," this poem, "and teach it to the Children of Israel" (Devarim 31:19). The Oral Tradition teaches that this statement of G-d commands that Jewish men in every generation preserve the traditions of Torah study and the transmission of our covenant by writing new Torah scrolls.

The usage of the word "שירה", poem, is amazing. While Rashi and many others understand it to mean the poem that is to follow at the beginning of next week's parshah, the Netziv of Volozhin explained it to mean the entire Torah. The text of Torah, he teaches, is not prose, but poetry. While prosaic writing is deliberate, detailed, and thorough, poetry is concise, choice, and laden with allusion. A poet does not write all that he wishes to communicate but, rather, uses the power of language and brevity to encapsulate, in limited words, virtually unlimited ideas.

In its deeply meaningful lines to the informed reader, poetry is ultimately much more passionate and powerful than prose. Proper interpretation does not embellish the writer's ideas; it captures his original creative intent.

So it is with Torah. The Torah, written by G-d as his poem, has wording that is concise, but content that is limitless. Understanding that there is far more to it than what meets the eye is not imagination or embellishment, but a path towards deciphering the true thrust of the Divine communication.

Just as the best poetry is interesting to the novice but infinitely fascinating to the trained scholar, so too, Torah is even more fascinating to the learned eye. As we enter the New Year, the time is right to make a new commitment to studying G-d's poem. The more you do it, the better it is.

Dedicated in memory of
Nechama bat Shimon, ז"ל

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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