



# REFLECTIONS ON BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

The period of Sukkot, and specifically Shemini Atzeret, weave together endings and beginnings beautifully. Beginning with Rosh Chodesh Elul, as indicated by the recitation of Tehillim perek 27, the Yamim Noraim period culminates with Sukkot; it also represents the finale of the agricultural cycle that began the previous spring around Pesach. However, Tishrei is also regarded as the month commemorating the creation of the world (as well as the beginning of the academic year); this was the time of year picked by Shlomo Hamelech for the dedication and inauguration of the first Beit Hamikdash. The month of Tishrei is referred to in Sefer Melachim as *yerach ha'etanim*, the month of strength, which *Metzudat David* (Melachim I 8:2) describes as a month jam-packed

with holidays that endow us with strength and set the spiritual tone for the entire year ahead.

The haftarah of Shemini Atzeret, read on Simchat Torah outside Israel, marks the end of Moshe's tenure and the transition to a new beginning under the tutelage of his protege, Yehoshua. Let us examine the message of this reading found in Sefer Yehoshua perek 1 and its relationship to this auspicious time.

*Megilla* 31a lists the various haftarot read throughout the year. Yehoshua perek 1 is absent from this list.

וז"ט האחרון קורין כל הבכור מצות וחווקים  
ובבכור ומפטירין (מלכים א ט, א) ויהי ככלות  
שלמה למחך קורין וחאת הברכה ומפטירין  
מלךים א ח, כב (ויעמד שלמה).

*On the last Festival day of Sukkot,  
i.e., the Eighth Day of Assembly, they*

*read the portion of "All the firstborns," starting with the portion of "You shall tithe," since it includes many mitzvot and statutes relating to gifts for the poor, and it concludes with the halakhot governing firstborns (Deuteronomy 14:22–16:17). And they read as the haftarah the portion of "And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying" (I Kings 8:54–9:1), which occurred on that day. On the next day, the second day of the Eighth Day of Assembly in the Diaspora, they read the portion of "And this is the blessing" (Deuteronomy, chapters 33–34) until the end of the Torah, and they read as the haftarah "And Solomon stood" (I Kings 8:22–53).*

Tosafot on *Megillah* 31a, note this divergence of common custom from that mentioned in the Gemara, and argues that Rav Hai Gaon changed

the haftarah choice from the one that was listed in the Gemara to the first perek of Sefer Yehoshua. They note, however, that no rationale was given for this exceptional change.

The Ran, in his commentary on the Rif, explains why this change was made. The haftarah is a direct continuation from the storyline and conclusion of the Torah in *Vezot HaBracha*. This reason is somewhat surprising, since most haftarot connect thematically to the Torah reading of the day and not chronologically.

Let us attempt to explore why Yehoshua perek 1 was deemed an appropriate choice for this haftarah.

The first perek of Yehoshua revolves around the establishment of Yehoshua as leader and his acceptance among the nation. The phrase “*chazak v’ematz*” (be strong and courageous) is strategically repeated and emphasized in the perek’s beginning, middle and end. There is a great deal of emphasis on Yehoshua being *mesharet Moshe* (Moshe’s apprentice), and the fact that Moshe died is repeated several times in the perek. Why is there a need to repeatedly state the obvious?

This perek also contains the famous directive given to Yehoshua to remain constantly and whole-heartedly connected to the pursuit of Torah study and its laws, as seen in Yehoshua 1:8:

**לֹא יִמּוֹשֵׁךְ סָפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּה מִפְּיךָ וְגַם־בָּו  
יוּמָם וְלֹילָה לְמַעַן תִּשְׁמֹר לְעַשׂוֹת כָּל הַכְּתוּב  
בָּו פִּי אֲזַלְלֵיכְךָ אֶת דָּרְכֶךָ וְאֶת תְּשִׁפְּלֵיכָ**

*Let not this Book of the Teaching cease from your lips, but recite it day and night, so that you may observe faithfully all that is written in it. Only then will you prosper in your undertakings and only then will you be successful.*

Why wasn’t this important directive stated by Moshe in Sefer Devarim in his parting words to the nation and to Yehoshua personally? Why is it uttered instead in this first perek of Sefer Yehoshua?

To better understand this perek, let us explore the nature of Yehoshua’s leadership, abilities and strengths. Moshe’s transfer of leadership to Yehoshua was not surprising and in many ways was the natural order of progression given that Moshe mentored him for so many years. However, their leadership roles and charges were significantly different. We begin to see the differences in Sefer Bamidbar when the nation rejected the heavenly blessings they were granted in the desert. Their travels into Israel, ostensibly under Moshe’s direction, were designed to be miraculous — for example, the eleven-day journey from Midbar Sinai to Kadesh Barnea was completed in just three days. Yet the nation requested spies and sought to temper the supernatural efforts with a human, more natural element. Hashem (reluctantly) agreed to this suggestion and Yehoshua himself was commissioned to join the mission of the spies, paving the way for his emergence as a leader under this type of existence.

Similarly, in the war with Amalek in Shemot 17, each leader played a role in the victorious battle against our sworn enemy. Moshe combatted Amalek with his *mateh Elokim*, “the staff of G-d” — used to bring about miracles — while Yehoshua utilized the sword.

**וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֹּחר לְנוּ אֲנָשִׁים וְצִא  
הַלְּחִם בְּעַמְלֵק מִחרָא נָכַב עַל רַאשׁ הַגְּבֻעָה  
וּמִפְּנֵי הַאֱלָקִים בָּרוּךְ**  
*Moses said to Joshua, “Pick some men*

*for us, and go out and do battle with Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill, with the rod of God in my hand.”*

### Shemot 17:9

**וַיַּחֲלַשׁ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת עַמְלֵק וְאֶת עַמוֹּ לִפְיֵי חֶרֶב.  
And Joshua overwhelmed the people of Amalek with the sword.**

### Shemot 17:13

The Malbim (Shemot 17:9) notes the different contributions of both Moshe and Yehoshua in this war against Amalek. This war was fought primarily *b’derech hateva* and under the leadership of Yehoshua since the nation did not deserve an exclusively supernatural victory, but rather a victory won through obscured miracles, *nissim nistarim*. Yehoshua was the logical choice for this type of battle, since he would continue to lead the people in similar battles upon entering Israel:

**וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ הַנָּה בְּמַלחְמָת סִיחָן  
וּוּגַן נְלַחֵם מֹשֶׁה בְּעַצְמוֹ כִּי הִתְהַגֵּד  
עַי ה' בְּנָסִים גָּלוּם, כִּמְשׁ (דָּבָרִים ג':ב') אֶל  
תִּירָא כִּי בִּינְךָ נָתַתִּי אֶתְּנָא כִּי אָז הִיוּ רָאוּם  
אֶל הַנֶּס, لֹא כִּן עַתָּה שָׁה' הַסְּתִיר פְּנֵיו מֵהֶם  
וְהִיוּ צָרִיכִים לְמַלחְמָה טָبְּעִית, שָׂוָה לֵא הִיא,  
בְּכָחוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה, שֶׁכֹּל עַמּוֹ הִיא מַעֲשָׂה נָסִים,  
וְלֹכֶן הַוּצֶרֶךְ שְׁתִיהֵה הַמַּלחְמָה עַי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ,  
שֶׁהָוָא הִיא מוֹכוֹן לְרַשְׁתָּת אֶת הָאָרֶץ עַי מַלחְמָה  
טָבְּעִית בְּעֹזֶר אַלְקִי בְּנָסִים נְסָתְרִים כִּי הַזָּכוֹת  
וְהַהְנָה לְכָן כַּזָּה אֶל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ, וּמֹשֶׁה שֶׁלֹּא הִיא  
כָּל לְהַושְׁיעָם אֶז בְּכָה שְׁבִידּוֹ לְהַפְלִיא פְּלוֹאָת  
בְּנָסִים גָּלוּם כִּי ה' הַסְּתִיר פְּנֵיו מֵהֶם, בְּכָ"ז יִצְאָ  
לְעוֹרָם בְּתַפְלָתוֹ וְלַהֲפִיקָּרְצָוּן שֶׁלֹּא הִיא הַחֲטָאת  
מְכַשְּׁילָם לְפָנֵי צָורִיהם.**

*Moshe said to Yehoshua — Moshe’s special abilities lay in the realm of the supernatural. For this reason, he conducted the wars against Sichon and Og personally, since those wars were openly miraculous. On this occasion, by contrast, Hashem hid His face so that they were required to do battle in a natural manner. Therefore, Moshe*

*delegated command to Yehoshua, who had been chosen by Hashem to lead the conquest of Canaan, which was to be accomplished through natural wars accompanied by hidden miracles. Nevertheless, Moshe helped in the battle against Amalek through prayer and urgings to repentance in order that they would enjoy Divine favor.*

We see other examples of this leadership style. Bamidbar 11 contains the account of the appointment of seventy elders to share in Moshe's leadership. Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp instead of gathering by the *ohel moed* as instructed by Moshe. Yehoshua reacted strongly to this incident and demanded that Moshe shut them down. However, Moshe appeared nonplussed by this seeming act of disobedience and was pleased that there were more people receiving prophecy from Hashem. Since Yehoshua worked within the framework of *derekh hateva*, the natural order, he was concerned about process and was alarmed when the *nevuah* for Eldad and Medad did not come about through the prescribed framework. For Moshe, employing a supernatural lens, he was not focused on the natural order but on the importance of the end result of more prophets.

Yehoshua's role in the story of the *meraglim* shows this aspect of his character as well. Moshe formally changed his name from Hoshea to Yehoshua before sending him on this mission. (The Netziv believes that Moshe temporarily changed his name previously before the war with Amalek, yet the name change became permanent now). The Netziv (Bamidbar 13:16) explains why Moshe sought to make the official

name change at this juncture and why Moshe even agreed to send Yehoshua as one of the *meraglim* once he realized the mission would be a failure. Once Hashem allowed the sending of the spies, Moshe became aware of a paradigm shift in how the land would be conquered, one that would include a conquest within *derekh hateva*. Based on this, he understood what type of leadership role Yehoshua was cut out for and began to cultivate him for this type of leadership.

יָקָרָא מֹשֶׁה לְיוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן נוּן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ... וְהִוא פָּלָא  
אֵם יָדַע מֹשֶׁה שָׁמְרָגְלִים יְקַלְּלוּ כִּי לֹא הִיא  
לֹו לְשָׁלָחָם. אֶלָּא כִּי הַדָּבָר... עַד אַוְתָה שְׁעָה  
שְׁנִתְבָּרֵר שִׁיחָוּשׁ מְכֻנִּים יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאָרֶץ אָם  
עַיִל נְבוֹאת אֱלֹד וּמִידָה אֵם מֹזָה שְׁהִבָּן מֹשֶׁה  
שְׁלָא תְּהִי בֵּיתְאֵת לְאָרֶץ לְדָרְךָ נָס גְּנַלָּה כִּי  
שְׁהָרִי הַסְּכִים הַקְּבָ"ה לְמַרְגָּלִים. וְאַכְ"ב יְהִי עַיִל

יְהוֹשֻׁעַ עַכְ"ב בָּרְכוּ לְחַלְוִיטִין בָּזָה הַשָּׁם.

*And Moshe called Hoshea ben Nun  
Yehoshua — This is perplexing  
considering Moshe knew that the spies  
would sin, it seems like he should not  
have sent him (Yehoshua). But the  
matter is such ... it was not until this  
moment that it became clear that  
Yehoshua would be the one to enter the  
Jewish nation into Israel, whether due  
to the prophecy of Eldad and Medad,  
or rather that Moshe understood at this  
time that the nation's entrance into Israel  
would not be based on open, revealed  
miracles, once Hashem allowed the  
sending of spies. And if so, then Yehoshua  
would be the one to accomplish this and  
therefore he (Moshe) blessed him with  
this name going forward.*

This explanation fits nicely with Rav Kook's understanding of the failed mission of *chet hameraglim*. He writes that the majority of the *meraglim* were accustomed to a miraculous existence in the desert. They could not comprehend an existence where the nation was expected to work the land

and obtain their sustenance naturally, while also spending time engaged in significant Torah study. This is why they attempted to sabotage the entry into Eretz Yisrael. They could not foresee a way to integrate the natural and supernatural. As a consequence, the generation they represented did not enter the land. Yehoshua, who recognized and embraced a life integrating hidden miracles and *derekh hateva* in Israel, would lead and inspire the next generation. The challenges and experiences in the desert and Eretz Yisrael were different, the worries and uncertainties were unique in each locale and required different approaches and guidance. On one level, we can consider a life *b'derekh hateva* as inferior to one dictated by *nissim gluyim*, outright miracles. Yet we can't underestimate the power and spirituality that emerges from overcoming challenges and achievements fueled through our own efforts, within *derekh hateva*. When the *aspaklaria meira* of Moshe's prophecy diminished, it was up to the *zekenim* and others to propel Hashem's word and the Torah further through human effort and transmission. The challenge of not receiving divine directive in an unequivocal fashion necessitates considerable human effort to seek it out. As *mesharet Moshe*, Yehoshua absorbed the Torah from his master, which he was tasked with ushering into a new reality.

The Gemara in *Bava Batra* 75a tells us:

זְקִנִּים שָׁבָאוֹתָו הַדָּר אָמְרוּ פָנִי מֹשֶׁה כִּפְנִי

חַמְרָה פָנִי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כִּפְנִי לְבָנָה

*The elders of that generation said: The face of Moses was as bright as the face of the sun; the face of Joshua was like the face of the moon.*

The source of the moon's light is the sun, yet the moon's size does

not remain constant like the sun. It waxes and wanes over the course of a month. We can view the moon as representing *derek hateva*, which emanates from the miraculous, yet contains opportunities and challenges for humans to influence. Yehoshua stood at the foot of Har Sinai ready to be taught the Torah that was given by Hashem directly to Moshe and make it relevant to those he was to teach from that day and beyond. The sun represents a fixed corpus that can be transmitted in its entirety, whereas the moon symbolizes this task of applying the information to reality — to unprecedented situations in a life governed largely by the laws of nature. The focus of the nation's daily life in the desert was fundamentally different from their concerns upon entering the land. Finding a connection to the Torah in the desert and in Eretz Yisrael was a qualitatively different experience and one that Yehoshua was tasked with. For this reason, he was given encouragement, *chazak v'ematz*, on several occasions throughout the first perek of Sefer Yehoshua. Already from the end of Sefer Devarim, the Torah is referred to as a *sefer Torah*, something complete, which is being transmitted. The challenge after Hashem completed the transmission of the Torah to Moshe was about taking the entirety of the Torah and integrating it into daily living throughout all generations.

It is this *sefer Torah* that Yehoshua was encouraged to remain connected to and immersed in all day and night. As the nation began life in Israel, they were reminded about the integral role the Torah plays as they go about their daily lives, and tasked with the challenge of remaining connected even when life becomes busy with many other important responsibilities

and missions. For this reason, the pasuk of “*v'hagita bo yomam va'layla*” is intentionally introduced after the death of Moshe and when Yehoshua assumed his leadership. The directive is not about learning Torah as much as about being involved in integrating Torah into our day. It is the experiential life of Torah that was to be created under this new existence in Eretz Yisrael. Who better than Yehoshua to be tasked with “*lo yamush*,” since he was described with this quality of attachment to Moshe and the word of Hashem in Shemot 33:11:

וזכר ה' אל משה פניהם אל פניהם כאשר יזכיר איש אל רעהו ושב אל המכחנה וממשרתנו יהושע בן נון גער לא ימיש מתחזק האהלה

*The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another. And he would then return to the camp; but his attendant, Joshua son of Nun, a youth, would not stir out of the Tent.*

The Gemara, Menachot 99b, quotes both this pasuk and the pasuk from our haftarah. It indicates that the obligation of being engaged in Torah daily applies even to one who has amassed the entirety of the Torah, because this directive is not about learning information but rather about integrating Torah and framing each day both at its start and end. Yehoshua proved himself to be the one to represent and be the champion of this lifestyle. The Gemara continues:

אמר ר' יונתן פסוק זה אינו לא חובה ולא מצוה אלא ברכה ראה הקב"ה את יהושע שדברי תורה חביבים עליו ביותר שנאמר ממשרתנו יהושע בן נון גער לא ימיש מתחזק האהלה אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא יהושע כל כך חביבין עליך דברי תורה לא ימוש ספר התורה זהה מפיך.

*Rabbi Yonatan says: This verse is neither an obligation nor a mitzva, but a blessing. Rabbi Yonatan explains: The*

*Holy One, Blessed be He, saw Joshua and observed that the words of Torah were very precious to him, as it is stated: “And the Lord spoke to Moses face-to-face ... and his servant Joshua, son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the Tent” (Exodus 33:11). The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Joshua: Joshua, are the words of Torah so precious to you? I bless you that this Torah scroll shall not depart from your mouth.*

On Simchat Torah, we celebrate this connection that has been forged with the Torah for all times. It is a culmination of the continuous Torah reading that takes place every week and every Shabbat throughout each year. It is a celebration of an end. Yet it also marks a beginning, represented by the reading of a selection from Parshat Breishit. It is a time to reflect on the Yamim Noraim season that is coming to an end, and to take the intense connection to Hashem that has defined our existence, and integrate it into our daily lives going forward in the “*achar hachagim*” period of time. It is in many ways easier to feel connected when we clock countless hours in shul, surrounded by members of our community, performing many unique mitzvot pertaining to each chag. Yet we know the true challenge lies ahead in maintenance of this spiritual high after the intensity wears off, when we resume our routine. The holiday of Simchat Torah and the recitation of this haftarah have the ability to help us navigate lives that are constantly immersed in Torah and provide some structure for how to accomplish this goal.

*Translation of Talmud passages from The William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud*