

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vayelech/Yom Kippur

5 Tishrei, 5782/September 11, 2021

Vol. 13 Num. 3 (#504)

Best wishes to our community for a healthy and happy New Year

Sincerely, Susan & Fred Birnbaum & family

The Living Tradition

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

As the Torah comes to a close, an era ends. Moshe finishes his month-long lesson, and our parshah pivots to the practical – appointing a new leader, Yehoshua. Despite Yehoshua's greatness, the Jews are hardly comforted. As the Talmud (Bava Batra 75a) records, the sages react to Yehoshua's appointment with despair: "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. Woe for this embarrassment, woe for this disgrace." (Koren translation)

However, Yehoshua seems to share their hopelessness. After Moshe encourages the people to have courage in their upcoming battles (Devarim 31:6), he immediately provides a second inspirational speech directly to Yehoshua, using many of the same words, and then repeats it for a third time only a few verses later. (ibid. 7, 23) [In one place it seems that G-d is talking and in the other it is Moshe talking on behalf of himself.] In fact, G-d and the people each repeat similar sentiments to Yehoshua immediately upon Moshe's death. (Yehoshua 1:6-7, 9, 18)

Part of the plan to counter these feelings was the assurance that G-d would be with the Jewish people (Devarim 31:3-4) and with Yehoshua (ibid. 31:8, 23). However, as [Rabbi Eli Chadad notes](#), there seems to be a second element – the commitment that even after Moshe's death, Moshe will accompany Yehoshua and the Jewish people. He notes that throughout the short parshah of Vayelech, there are three stag-

es at which Moshe seems to highlight his continued presence with the Jews.

Moshe's Presence in Hakhel

Immediately after the instructions to appoint Yehoshua in front of the people (31:1-8), Moshe writes a Torah that will be read every seven years as part of the Hakhel process, in which the king inspires the nation with a public recitation of the Torah in the Beit HaMikdash. (31:9-13) Thus, Moshe's stamp is placed upon the Torah that the Jews will learn after his passing.

Moshe's Presence in a Song

In the next verses (31:14-16), G-d appoints Yehoshua in the presence of Moshe. This is followed by G-d's warning that once Moshe dies, the Jewish people will begin to go astray. In an attempt to forestall this, Moshe is instructed to write a song (Parshat Haazinu) that admonishes the Jews to follow the Torah and outlines what will happen if they do not. (31:16-22) This song is to be placed "in their mouths." (31:19)

Moshe's Presence in the Torah

This is followed by another statement of encouragement to Yehoshua, (31:23) which is then followed by a description of Moshe writing the Torah, this time "until the end", the placing of the Torah in the ark, and a gathering of the elders of the nation to direct his rebuke at them. (31:24-29) Both the song and the Torah are referred to as *eid*, as testimony for the Jewish people. Thus, both orally in the song, and in writing in the Torah, Moshe's message is given to the Jews to carry on.

Thus, central to Moshe's goal as he departs is to assure that he, or at least the inspiration he offers, will last forever. Simply knowing that G-d is with the people or Yehoshua is not enough. The Torah is part of a lived tradition, and internalizing that we are part of a connection, familial and relational, to human beings who were part of that tradition, is integral to feeling that we are not alone in the journey. Indeed, in the song of Haazinu, Moshe instructs the Jews to "Ask your father, he will inform you, your elders, they will tell you." (Devarim 32:7) The living chain is essential to understanding Torah.

During the Yamim Noraim, when we consistently invoke the merit of our forefathers, recall their commitment and struggles and model ourselves in their images, we take strength in linking ourselves to the chain of tradition, and ensuring that we are worthy to be the next links.

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Summary

In the previous chapter, the prophet Eliyahu told Achav, king of the northern kingdom of Yisrael, that there would be no rain until Eliyahu would decree it. Our chapter begins in the third year of that drought, as Hashem tells Eliyahu to meet Achav and inform him that rain will come. Eliyahu decides to inform Ovadiah, servant of Achav. Ovadiah is G-d-fearing; Ovadiah had hidden one hundred prophets, and brought them food and water himself, to escape a purge by Queen Izevel. (18:1-4)

When Eliyahu goes looking for Ovadiah, Achav and Ovadiah are out seeking fodder for the royal animals, in separate areas. Eliyahu tells Ovadiah to inform Achav that he has arrived, but Ovadiah responds fearfully. Achav has been searching for Eliyahu everywhere without success, and if Ovadiah will report that Eliyahu is here, and then Eliyahu will again disappear before Achav can come to him, then Achav will think that Ovadiah is mocking him and will kill him. But Eliyahu insists that he will remain and meet Achav, and so Ovadiah informs Achav, who comes to Eliyahu. (18:5-16)

Achav accuses Eliyahu of harming the Jews with the drought, but Eliyahu argues that Achav is the true villain, for leading the Jews into idolatry. He demands a showdown with the prophets of the Baal and Asheirah idolatries, which were the favourites of Achav and Izevel. Eliyahu instructs that 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asheirah should come to Mount Carmel; Achav gathers them. (18:17-20)

Atop Mount Carmel, Eliyahu sets the terms of the showdown. The prophets of idolatry should prepare a bull for a sacrifice and place it on an altar without adding fire, and Eliyahu will do likewise. Each will pray, and whichever one receives fire upon their altar will be recognized as the prophet of the true G-d. The assembled nation agrees to these terms. (18:21-24)

The prophets of the Baal go first, and they conduct their rituals unsuccessfully. With Eliyahu mocking them and their deity, the prophets work themselves into an increasing frenzy, but there is no heavenly response. Then, in the afternoon, Eliyahu restores a ruined altar of Hashem, using twelve stones to parallel the twelve tribes. After arranging wood and his offering, he floods everything with water. Then he briefly appeals to G-d to make clear that He is the true G-d. Fire descends from the heavens and consumes the offering, the wood, the stones and dirt of the altar, and the water. The assembly sees this and falls on their faces, declaring, "Hashem is Elokim, Hashem is Elokim." (18:25-39)

Eliyahu then orders the death of the prophets of Baal, who had catastrophically misled the nation and whose idolatry had prodded Izevel to murder the prophets of G-d. Eliyahu then prostrates himself and appeals to G-d for rain, which arrives. Eliyahu is inspired by Hashem to run before Achav's chariot on its return home, a trip of more than twenty kilometers. (Prof. Yehuda Kil, Daat Mikra) Rashi notes that this escort is meant to provide respect for

Achav, lest he travel alone. This provides an interesting contrast with the start of the chapter, in which Achav seems to have been searching for fodder on his own.

Insight

Eliyahu will appear to turn on the Jews further along, harshly criticizing them before G-d for abandoning their covenant. (19:10) However, in our chapter Eliyahu takes a daring step in defense of the nation. He accuses G-d, "You have turned their heart backward!" (18:37) As the Talmud observes, this was the verbal equivalent of shooting arrows at G-d. (Berachot 31b-32a)

Even more strikingly, the Talmud depicts Hashem agreeing with Eliyahu. In Michah 4:6, Hashem promises to restore "those I made *ra*." Rather than read this as "those I harmed," the Talmud reads it as "those I caused to sin." Creating us with vulnerability to temptation sets up an uneven playing field, and so Hashem accepts responsibility for our failures.

This may be a reason for ending Neilah on Yom Kippur with the declaration of "Hashem is Elokim," echoing the Jews at Mount Carmel. Clearly, the main purpose is to evoke the nation's recognition of Hashem, but we also call to mind Eliyahu's successful prayer. Just as Eliyahu was able to defend the Jews and argue that they should not be held liable for their sins, so we ask Hashem not to hold us liable, but instead to forgive.

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All times ET. Classes are free & open to all, unless otherwise noted.**

Monday-Thursday (Only Monday and Tuesday this week, due to Yom Kippur)

**10:00 AM - Noon: Adult Seder Boker with Rabbi Moshe Yeres on Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/sederboker> (men)
Mon/Wed: Talmud Succah, Orot haTeshuvah of Rav Kook, Tues/Thurs: Parshah, Tanach: Sefer Melachim**

Shabbat Sept 11

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT: Simcha Suite (men)

Sunday Sept 12

10 AM R' Aaron Greenberg, Talmud Shabbat, 533 Spring Gate or ZOOM: <http://bit.ly/jliczoom> 613613

Monday Sept 13

8:00 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Can a Nazi Ever Be Forgiven?, Shaarei Shomayim ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/jatorah>

8:30 PM R' Moshe Yeres, Talmud Shabbat (Chap. 15), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/talmud>

Tuesday Sept 14

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 5), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

Thursday September 16 YOM KIPPUR

2:30-4:30 PM R' M Torczyner, Connecting Yom Kippur and Shemitah, BAYT Parking Lot Tent

Our Bein hazemanim Break begins after Yom Kippur; we look forward to learning with you after Succot!