

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Vayeilech

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GROWTH MINDSET

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"Moshe went and spoke these words to all of Israel..."
(31:1)

Normally, when Moshe wanted to speak to the nation, he would summon them by having the *chatzotzros* (trumpets) sounded. Now, however, on this last day of his life, he went around the people to speak to them and communicate to them his parting words.

Some *mefarshim*, based on the Midrash, explain based on the principle of *אין שלטון ביום המוות* - "There is no dominion on the day of death" (Koheles 8:8). Now that Moshe was leaving this world, he was relinquishing his *שלטון*, his authority and power over the people. This was expressed by his having to go over to the people to speak to them rather than call for them to come to him.

The Rachmastrivka Rebbe, in Amaros Tehoros, cites the Orach Lachayim as explaining this *pasuk* differently. He writes that there are two ways one can live - as a *הולך* or as an *עומד*. An *עומד* is someone who stands, who stays in place, who feels content and comfortable with where he is. The angels in the heavens are described as *עומדים* because they "stand" in place, they never grow. They were created perfectly designed for the mission they are meant to fulfill, without any resistance, without any flaws, without any impulse to do anything wrong. Therefore, they do not need to grow or advance. We human beings, however, are flawed and imperfect, and our obligation throughout our lives is to be *הולכים*, to constantly strive and work to improve ourselves, to move forward, to make ourselves better.

The Orach Lachayim explains that the Torah tells us *וילך* to emphasize that Moshe was a *הולך* even on this final day of his life. We might have assumed that as he was preparing to depart this world, he would now relax, take it easy, stay in place, without working to move forward. The Torah therefore tells us *וילך* - that even in the last hours of Moshe's life, he kept moving forward.

Renowned psychologist Carol Dweck wrote what has become a famous book, describing these two ways of living, calling them a "fixed mindset" and a "growth mindset." She shows the differences between people who live with a "fixed mindset," who want to comfortably remain where they are, and are not open to learning and discovering, and those with a "growth mindset," with the desire to continue learning and improving.

There are people in their 90's, and even over 100, who are still "young" in the sense that they live with a "growth mindset," continually looking to learn and improve. And unfortunately, there are people in their 20's who are already "old" because they live with a "fixed mindset," they are set in their ways, inflexible, and not interested in advancing. Moshe Rabbeinu serves for us as an example of continued growth, of seeking to learn and improve even in his final hours of life.

HOLY INFLUENCERS

Reb Menachem Mendel of Rimanov

"Moshe went and spoke these words to all of Israel..."
(31:1)

The Jewish people, leaving Egypt and traveling in the desert, had beliefs and attitudes that were faulty. Their inner thoughts were tainted to the extent that even when they were convinced in their belief in Hashem they faltered, as evidenced by the incident of the golden calf.

Therefore, Hashem planted Moshe in their midst to become "the composite intelligence of Israel." Thus, it became possible for the "generation of the Exodus" to become known as the "enlightened generation." In this way, they were able to develop the understanding to learn how to lead a proper life.

The same occurs in every generation. There arise personalities of stature with the capacity to perform the will of Hashem and the ability to "speak these words to all of Israel" to influence them.

OUR INNER MOSHE

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

"Moshe went and spoke these words to all of Israel..." (31:1)

Why aren't we told where Moshe went? Because this *pasuk* implies that Moshe "went into" or entered into the heart of every Jew. Every Jew, in every generation, bears within his or her heart a spark of our teacher, Moshe's spirit. Thus, the answer to our question may be found at the end of the *pasuk*. Moshe, we are told, went forth "to all of Israel."

This, too, is the reason why the Torah says of Moshe that "no one knows his burial place" (36:6). For Moshe is not in an ordinary tomb, rather he is enshrined within every Jew's heart.

COMFORTING OTHERS

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I can no longer go out and come in..." (31:2)

Rav Mordechai Gifter would often recall the time he was traveling on an airplane, and the pilot announced that one of the engines had exploded and that everyone should brace themselves for a crash-landing. Thankfully, the plane landed safely, but despite everyone preparing themselves for the worst, related Rav Gifter, one man sitting nearby insisted on enjoying one last drink of coke before his anticipated death.

Moshe too was forewarned about his imminent demise and prepared himself accordingly. How so? One would have thought that he would have taught more Torah to the Jewish People or sought to gain more understanding of Hashem in those final few hours. However, the Ibn Ezra (Devarim 31:1) tells us that Moshe spent his remaining time visiting each tribe to console and strengthen them due to his upcoming death.

This is just one example of Moshe's selfless care for his people which forms the bedrock of his tenure as leader - always determining the true needs of the Jewish People and putting them above his own.

In fact, the Medrash (Mishlei 14:34) writes that Moshe's superior attribute of kindness toward the Jewish People is the defining reason that he will merit to return to lead the Jewish People after the final redemption.

Such is the value that Hashem places on one who cares for His children. Indeed, the Mesillas Yesharim (Chap. 19) writes that Hashem's love for someone is directly proportionate to how much this person loves his fellow Jew!

We see from here how important it is to improve our level of care and concern for others, and how cherished it is by Hashem. Therefore, let us all take a look around and see what we can do to comfort and encourage those who need.

AUSPICIOUS TIMES

Chasam Sofer

"I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I can no longer go out and come in..." (31:2)

Rashi comments that Moshe was saying. "Today my days and years have been filled. On this day I was born, on this day I shall die." Our Sages said that Haman chose the month of Adar to do harm to the Jews because that was the month that Moshe died. He did not realize that he had also been born in that month.

If centuries later Haman felt that Moshe's death was a bad sign for the Jews, then at the time of Moshe's death the Jews must have felt that waging war with the enemy would also be a bad idea. Therefore, Moshe told the Jews that he was also born in that month. He said to them, "Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid."

HUMBLE STRENGTH

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I can no longer go out and come in..." (31:2)

Rashi notes: "'I cannot any longer go forth and return' - in words of Torah. This teaches us that the transmitted wellsprings of knowledge became sealed off (to Moshe)." This is hard to fathom since Moshe had yet to give *Klal Yisrael* the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel*, after which he composed the *shirah* of *Ha'azinu*, and then blessed the nation before his death. This seems to clearly indicate that no sources of wisdom had been closed; on the contrary, all such sources retained their full strength for him!

Chacham Dovid Pinto shlit'a suggests that Moshe was the most humble of men as well as a great leader, to the extent that on his day of death, instead of occupying himself with his personal affairs and spiritual state - "*Vayeilech Moshe*" - he went from one place to another, from one person to another, to take care of the needs of the community - material and spiritual alike. He wanted to speak with each person to encourage him to follow the right path and he did not consider it an affront to his honor to do so. Consequently, even though the sources of wisdom may have been closed for Moshe, his humility pushed him to go from person to person in order to bring them closer to Torah. He taught them to love others, as well as the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel*, which follows the *shemittah* year (which is also connected to humility) all right before his death, to impart this important lesson for generations to come.

From Moshe Rabbeinu, the Jewish People learn just how the *middah* of humility can affect a person. Although Moshe had lost his strength and wisdom, his humility had given him back these qualities, to the point that he wrote the entire Torah, composed a poem for *Bnei Yisrael*, and he blessed them before his death. No decree can stand against humility and self-effacement. As with all great character traits, humility is applicable to all men in every generation.

THE POWER OF DESIRE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I can no longer go out and come in for Hashem has said to me, 'You shall not cross this Jordan.'" (31:2)

The Gemara (Sotah 14a) relates that Moshe was desperate to be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael in order to perform the *mitzvos* there. So much so, writes the Daas Zekeinim, that he was willing to relinquish his role as leader to Yehoshua and faithfully serve him as a student just as Yehoshua had done for Moshe until now.

Amazingly, Hashem allowed this to take place, and Moshe spared no time running to Yehoshua's tent to fulfill his duties.

After attending to Yehoshua, they both went to the *Ohel Moed* so that Yehoshua could speak to Hashem, after which Moshe then turned to Yehoshua to ask what Hashem had said. Yehoshua replied that Moshe was no longer in a position to hear everything that Hashem had told him.

Upon realizing that he had lost the close relationship with Hashem and was now not privy to understanding His Will in a direct way, Moshe could not bear the pain and declared that it would indeed be better that he moved on to the Next World instead of succumbing to such agonizing jealousy (31:1).

This eye-opening narrative teaches us so many lessons. One of them is Moshe's intense desire for a closeness with Hashem. Perhaps this is what made him such a great leader in the first place, as Rav Chaim Shmuelevits once related when asked what makes a true Torah leader.

Answering the question, Rav Chaim recalled when he was a young boy visiting his uncle, the *Rosh Yeshivah* of Navordok, he asked his uncle who the best boys in the yeshivah were. The *Rosh Yeshivah* pointed to one boy and said, "He is the most diligent."

He then pointed to two others, "This one is the most knowledgeable; and this one has the greatest fear of Heaven... But who is the very best?" asked Rav Chaim.

"The very best is in a different league; it is that boy over there. He is not the most diligent, nor the most knowledgeable, nor possesses the greatest fear of Heaven, but he has the biggest desire to get close to Hashem and understand His Torah, and that makes him guaranteed to succeed."

Who was this young man? The Steipler, who did indeed grow up to be one of the generation's greatest Torah leaders.

We see from here that it is not our natural talent that will bring us success in Torah, rather it is our ambition and drive to succeed. If our desire to learn Hashem's Torah and understand His ways fills our mind, then surely, we too will be destined for greatness.

IN THE STUDENTS MERIT

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I can no longer go out and come in..." (31:2)

Moshe Rabbeinu told the people that he was now 120 years old, and לא אוכל עוד לצאת ולבוא - "I can no longer go or come" (31:2). At first glance, this appears to refer to physical decline, that Moshe, in his advanced age, was frail and unable to move about. However, Rashi notes, the Torah says later (34:7) that לא כהתה עינו ולא נס ליחה - Moshe remained physically strong and healthy until his death. Rashi therefore explains, based on the Gemara, that לא אוכל עוד לצאת ולבוא means something else, that נסתתמו ממנו מסורות ומעיינות החכמה - his wisdom and intellectual capacities were taken from him. On this final day of Moshe's life, he lost access to מעיינות החכמה - "the fountains of wisdom."

Rav Yosef Sorotzkin, in Meged Yosef, explains why this happened, positing a theory which I can personally attest to. He writes that a teacher attains knowledge and wisdom through his own hard work and effort, but is also granted special דשמיא - סייעתא דשמיא - divine assistance - in the merit of his students, of the *tzibur* whom he teaches and guides. Now that Moshe passed the baton to his disciple and successor, Yehoshua, he no longer received that סייעתא דשמיא. He lost access to the merit of his students, of those whom he taught, because he had now passed on the mantle of leadership.

So much of what a rabbi or teacher accomplishes is to the credit of his eager students. It is their thirst for knowledge, their fierce desire to learn and grow, that helps the teacher learn and communicate the information and provide the inspiration which they seek.

PRAY RIGHT AWAY

Rav Eliyahu Lopian

"I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I can no longer go out and come in..." (31:2)

Chazal tell us that if Moshe had prayed immediately, Hashem would have allowed him to enter Eretz Yisrael. We learn from this that we should not put off praying when a need arises. Rather, we should pray immediately.

FOR THE RIGHT REASONS

Tiferes Shlomo

"And Hashem gave them before you; and you shall do to them according to the entire commandment that I have commanded you." (31:5)

When you execute vengeance on the seven nations of Canaan, you shall do it not for the sake of selfish gain and thirst for revenge but solely for Heaven's sake, because I, G-d, have commanded you to do it.

THE SOURCE OF STRENGTH

Chacham Dovid Pardo

"Be strong and courageous, do not fear and do not be broken before them; for Hashem, your G-d -it is He Who goes before you. He will not release you, nor will He forsake you." (31:6)

Can we possibly fathom that Hashem will make us weak or abandon us? However, if a person truly recognizes that Hashem goes with him at all times and will never forsake him, then this will infuse him with strength - not just mentally and emotionally, but even physically.

Moshe Rabbeinu had this spirit and was strong and healthy till his very end. Dovid HaMelech was the same. Why? Because Hashem is the source of all strength.

UNBREAKABLE BOND

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Be strong and courageous, do not fear and do not be broken before them; for Hashem, your G-d -it is He Who goes before you. He will not release you, nor will He forsake you." (31:6)

Moshe informed us with these words that even if it would occur to us that life would be easier if we were free from both G-d's mission and His assistance, such a life is not possible. G-d will never forsake us. We can never completely silence the inner voice that urges us to discard our infatuation with superficial pursuits and assume the mantle of responsible Jewishness.

For this same reason, we should never feel incapable of fulfilling our Divine mission. The same G-d who refuses to leave us alone, always prodding us to join Him in perfecting the world, stands at our side to assist us in our efforts to transform the world into His home. (Sichot Kodesh 5732, vol. 1, p. 9) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

TO EACH THEIR OWN

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"And Moshe summoned Yehoshua and said to him before the eyes of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous!'" (31:7)

Moshe tells the nation that G-d will deliver the land to them and charges the nation to be strong and courageous because G-d "Goes with you. He will neither fail you nor forsake you" (31:6). Moshe later instructs Yehoshua to "be strong and courageous" (31:7), but without the assurances that followed the charge for the nation. Why would the nation's charge to be strong and courageous be different from that of their leader?

Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that leaders and teachers and followers and students require different types of strengths. Teachers can't despair even when they think their words have no effect. Likewise, students need to trust in their leaders and not be discouraged when they don't completely understand their reasoning.

Following requires both adherence to the rules and faith in the end result, but ultimate success is guaranteed to all who have proper trust in leadership and faith in G-d's vision.

DEDICATION IN EDUCATION

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

"And Moshe summoned Yehoshua and said to him before the eyes of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous!'" (31:7)

Moshe gave this exhortation to be strong and courageous to the people as a whole, and then repeated it to Yehoshua, adding the promise that Hashem would not release or forsake him. From this we see that both teachers and students need strength and courage.

A teacher must never despair: Even when he thinks his words are having no effect at all and the students seem to be paying no attention, he must still persist and trust that eventually what he says will be heard. But students also need strength at times: Even though they find it hard to understand what they are being taught, they must persevere and strive to their utmost ability to learn without despair. If they apply themselves to the fullest, they may be confident that in the end they will come to understand and ultimately achieve great success.

TIME TO STEP UP

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"And Moshe summoned Yehoshua and said to him before the eyes of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous!'" (31:7)

The usual way of understanding this *pasuk* is that Moshe Rabbeinu called Yehoshua, and in front of all the *B'nei Yisrael* instructed him to be strong and courageous.

The Meshech Chochmah draws our attention to the *trop* - the cantillation marks, underneath the words *לעיני כל ישראל חזק ואמץ*. They are *מנח זרקא מנח סגול*, which connect the first group of words (*לעיני כל ישראל*) to the next group (*חזק ואמץ*).

In essence, this means that the words should be read in the following way: Moshe Rabbeinu called Yehoshua and told him that "in front of the *B'nei Yisrael*, be strong and courageous."

Yehoshua was an exceptionally humble man. He had been granted the leadership on account of the fact that he prepared and tidied up the *sefarim*, tables, and chairs for the *shiurim* delivered by Moshe Rabbeinu. He never moved from the tent and was private and modest.

Moshe Rabbeinu instructs Yehoshua to leave his humility at home in order to be a leader. When standing in front of the Jewish People, Yehoshua had to be strong and courageous - *לעיני כל ישראל חזק ואמץ*.

There are occasions when the situation demands that we take a leadership role, and at that moment, we are not permitted to shirk our responsibilities and opt for the

quieter, more humble position of staying in the shadows. *"In a place where there are no leaders, strive to be a leader. (Avos 2:6)*

Moshe Rabbeinu informed Yehoshua that his time was now, and therefore, לעיני כל ישראל חזק ואמץ - he needed to be strong and courageous in front of the Jewish People.

A person once approached the Alexander Rebbe and asked him a surprising question. We are taught that everything in this world can be used as part of our *avodas Hashem* - to further our relationship with The Creator. But how can atheism be used as part of one's *avodas Hashem*? The Alexander Rebbe answered that when others approach people for help - be it for *tzedakah* or to become involved in some worthwhile communal activity - the reply is often *"Hashem ya'azor."* I don't need to help or become involved because I can leave it up to Hashem, Who will take care of you.

At that moment, says the Alexander Rebbe, you have to become an atheist. At that moment, there is no Hashem, and the only person who can help is you! (Laylah shel Achdus, Haggadah shel Pesach, p. 43)

When the need arises, we cannot hide in the shadows and let other people take care of what needs to be done, letting others help with their advice or their charity. We cannot even hide in the shadows and allow Hashem to take care of it. We need to leave our humility and shyness at home and fulfill Moshe Rabbeinu's charge to Yehoshua לעיני כל ישראל חזק ואמץ

APPROPRIATE TIMES

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And Moshe summoned Yehoshua and said to him before the eyes of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous for you shall come with this people to the Land that Hashem swore to their forefathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it.'" (31:7)

G-d's Torah and His commandments are eternal and unchanging, but the way they must be made relevant and applied in each generation changes as time progresses.

In order to ensure that we live life in accordance with G-d's wishes, G-d Himself has authorized the rabbinic leaders of each generation to apply the Torah's teachings to the unique circumstances of their generation.

Therefore, when today's rabbinic authorities apply the Torah's teachings in innovative ways, we cannot try to live in the past, complaining that the leadership of previous generations did not see the need for such innovations.

On the contrary; only by reading the Torah through the eyes of our "Yehoshua" - today's Moshe - can we be certain that the Torah will provide us with the inspiration to fulfill our Divine mission and live our lives to the fullest. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 19, p. 314) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And Moshe summoned Yehoshua and said to him before the eyes of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous for you shall come with this people to the Land that Hashem swore to their forefathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it.'" (31:7)

This verse describes the moment when Moshe was about to appoint Yehoshua as his successor. The Gemara (Bava Basra 75a) tells us that when Moshe and Yehoshua were together, the Elders of the generation would say, "The face of Moshe is like the face of the sun, whereas the face of Yehoshua is like the face of the moon. Oh, the embarrassment. Oh, the shame!"

Many commentators explain that with these words the Elders were describing Yehoshua's embarrassment that the holy radiance of his face did not reach the level of Moshe. However, Rav Itzele Volozhin explains the Gemara completely differently:

The phrase "Oh, the embarrassment. Oh, the shame" that we previously attributed to the embarrassment of Yehoshua, was in fact said by the Elders in reference to their own embarrassment at not attaining the level of holiness that Yehoshua reached.

Reb Itzele illustrates this with the following analogy:

One day a rich merchant passed through a poor city. In need of workers, he offered the people of the city the opportunity to work for him and he would support anyone who joined him. No one agreed to join the merchant except for one poor man.

After some time, the merchant and his worker returned to the city, and by now they were both very rich. When the worker's friends saw that their "poor friend" was now very wealthy, they hid their faces in shame.

"Why are you embarrassed in front of me?" he asked. "If it is because of my wealth, my boss is still many times richer than me!"

Shamefaced, his friends replied, "Your boss comes from a family whom Hashem has always blessed with plenty. Why would we paupers, who have lived in poverty all of our lives, be embarrassed because of him? But you, you were once one of us, you were as poor as us, and we had the same chance to become rich that you did. But you took that chance, and we squandered it! That is why we are embarrassed in front of you."

So too, the Elders were saying to Yehoshua, "It is not for us to be embarrassed in front of Moshe, for his greatness comes from Hashem and cannot be reached by us. But you, Yehoshua, attained greatness because of your dedication to Moshe at every moment. For this we are embarrassed because we too had the opportunity to achieve greatness like yours, but we squandered our chance."

STRONG AND HUMBLE

Meshech Chochmah

"And Moshe summoned Yehoshua and said to him before the eyes of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous...' (31:7)

The melody to which this *parshah* is usually chanted links the phrase "in the sight of all of Israel" with "be strong and courageous." This teaches us how a king or leader in Israel must conduct himself in public. Two basic qualities are required of a king in Israel: He must be humble in his heart; he "must not lift up his heart above his brother."

To the outside, on the other hand, he must project a stern front. He must guard his royal prerogatives and not decline any of the honors due him, as it is written: "You shall set a king over you so that his fear shall be upon you."

As we know, Yehoshua was exceedingly humble. He regarded himself as no more than a servant, making it a practice to sweep the floor of the house of study and arrange the seats there in proper order (see Targum Yonason to Bamidbar 13:16, "And Moshe called Hoshea the son of Nun, Yehoshua" - "on account of Yehoshua's humility").

Now that Yehoshua was about to become a leader and ruler in Israel, Moshe said to him: Be humble in your own heart, but "in the sight of all of Israel, be strong and courageous." In front of the Jews, don't reveal your humility; show only your strength and determination.

BASED ON THEIR NEEDS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"And Moshe summoned Yehoshua and said to him before the eyes of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous for you shall come with this people to the Land that Hashem swore to their forefathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it.'" (31:7)

Moshe summons Yehoshua as he takes over the leadership of the nation and tells him to "be strong and courageous" when he brings the people to the land that G-d has promised to their forefathers (31:7). The Hebrew words used in this *pasuk* literally mean "You will come with this nation." Why is this wording not consistent with the intention for Yehoshua to lead the nation into the land?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks posits that leadership comes in different forms. Moshe's task, as leader, was to take the Jews out of Egypt, so he needed to be firm, decisive, and action oriented. Moshe wasn't anyone's friend; he did what needed to be done. Yehoshua, on the other hand, had to be much more democratic. His assignment was to lead a new nation into a new land with unfamiliar challenges, requiring cooperation and coordination from many people. He was participatory and engaging and had to get buy-in from leadership and citizens alike.

The roles we play in life are not only dictated by our talents and skills but by the needs of those we encounter and interact with. Recognizing their collective strengths, weaknesses, and needs can ensure that we positively impact those around us.

SOURCE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And Moshe summoned Yehoshua and said to him before the eyes of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous for you shall come with this people to the Land that Hashem swore to their forefathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it.'" (31:7)

Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman asks a very interesting question based on this verse:

Hashem has already promised that He will bring the Jewish People into Eretz Yisrael, so if Yehoshua was still frightened, how would Moshe's words help to encourage him when Hashem's own promise was not enough to calm his fears?

Rav Shteinman answers simply that we see from here that every word of encouragement does help. Whatever the circumstances, support and encouragement from someone else can turn everything around.

UNITED DIVERSITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Moshe wrote down this Torah and gave it to the Kohanim, the sons of Levi, who carried the Ark of the Covenant of Hashem, and to all the elders of Israel." (31:9)

There is only one Torah; its lessons apply equally to all of us and we are all equally obligated in its laws. Nevertheless, Moshe wrote a copy of the Torah for each tribe, recognizing that each tribe, both due to its hereditary qualities and due to the unique environment in which it would settle, would develop its own sub-culture within the general culture of the Jewish people.

This flowering of the Jewish people into unique sub-cultures is reflected in today's various Jewish communities - Ashkenazic, Sephardic, Yemenite, and so on. This celebration of diversity is a beautiful phenomenon, reflecting how G-d's oneness expresses itself in infinite ways.

The underlying unity behind this diversity was reflected in the Torah scroll that Moshe wrote for the Levites. This scroll was kept in the Temple, and all subsequently written scrolls had to conform to that authoritative copy.

We can learn from this to cherish both sides of the dichotomy: to celebrate our own culture while always remaining true to the underlying unity that is sourced in G-d's Torah. (Hitva'aduyot 5742, vol. 1, pp. 9-10, 20-21) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

ASSEMBLIES OF FAITH

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When all Israel comes to appear before Hashem, your G-d, in the place that He will choose, you shall read this Torah before all Israel, in their ears.” (31:11)

The objective of this assembly was to strengthen the foundations of Jewish education and observance.

We can thus fulfill this commandment nowadays firstly by “assembling” all the various facets of our personalities in order to imbue them with the knowledge and reverence of G-d. Next, we should assemble our families periodically and strengthen each other in a spirit of family love and camaraderie. Finally, we should assemble whatever groups of people we can - whether at work, at school, in our synagogues, our extended families, our wider circle of friends, etc. - in order to influence as many people as possible to enhance their commitment to the Torah’s values and lifestyle, as based on the love and awe of G-d.

Fulfilling this commandment to the greatest extent possible will elicit G-d’s reciprocal response, and He will enable us to finally fulfill it in its optimal fashion, in the rebuilt holy Temple, as we listen to the Torah read to us by the ultimate Jewish king, Mashiach. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 34, pp. 211-216) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

We are all required to appoint a metaphorical “king” over ourselves, i.e., a spiritual counselor responsible for ensuring that we stay firmly on the path of spiritual growth. This king’s primary responsibility is to “read to us” - i.e., inculcate us with - the same passages from the Torah that the real king reads to the people at the septennial assembly.

The first passage that the king reads (Devarim 6:4-9) focuses on accepting “the yoke of the kingdom of heaven,” i.e., submitting to G-d’s authority. The second passage (Devarim 11:13-21) teaches us that material success is dependent upon heeding G-d’s commands. Keeping these two lessons in the forefront of our consciousness is the key to continued spiritual growth. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 24, p. 106) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

TEACHING UNITY

Imrei Emes

“You shall read this Torah before all Israel, in their ears. Gather together the people...” (31:11-12)

Shouldn’t the command to “assemble the people” have gone before the command to “read this Torah”?

The commands were deliberately put in what seems to be reverse order, since the meaning of this *pasuk* is as follows: “You shall read this Torah”; you shall read to them the law that teaches us to “assemble the people.” When Jews dwell together in unity, that in itself is a manifestation of Torah.

BESTOWING REWARDS

Kotzker Rebbe

“Assemble the people – the men and the women and the children and the strangers in your communities - that they may hear and so learn to revere Hashem, your G-d, and be careful to perform all the words of this Torah.” (31:12)

Why was it necessary to state that the children were to go with the parents? Shouldn’t it be obvious that the parents were not going to leave the children by themselves?

The Talmud explains that the parents were specifically told to bring the children, so that the parents would be given a reward for their adherence.

ACCORDING TO THE EFFORT

Sefas Emes

“Assemble the people – the men and the women and the children and the strangers in your communities - that they may hear and so learn to revere Hashem, your G-d, and be careful to perform all the words of this Torah.” (31:12)

When parents exert themselves to bring their children to the Holy Temple, they show their willingness to maintain their Jewishness and listen to the words of Torah.

This action is justification for Hashem to give the reward that their children should be influenced by Torah and grow as productive Jews. Hashem gives the same proportion of aid in the education of their children as the effort given by the parents.

POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“Assemble the people – the men and the women and the children and the strangers in your communities - that they may hear and so learn to revere Hashem, your G-d, and be careful to perform all the words of this Torah.” (31:12)

Moshe introduces the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel* (assembly), where every seven years, all men, women, and children assemble, and the king reads the Torah (31:12). While of course it makes sense for men and women to be there, why would children be required to attend? If anything, their presence would likely distract from the experience as parents struggle to control their young children.

Surprisingly, the *Lekach Tov* suggests that the children’s attendance is not only not distracting but, in fact, essential for creating a positive experience for the entire family unit, especially the younger members. As the *pasuk* continues, “So that they hear and learn and fear G-d” (31:12).

The first step of an experience is simply being there, even before we learn anything. Once we are old enough to comprehend, learning and revering follows. Creating positive experiences for our children to enjoy will lead to increased engagement and enhanced commitment down the road.

MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Assemble the people – the men and the women and the children and the strangers in your communities - that they may hear and so learn to revere Hashem, your G-d, and be careful to perform all the words of this Torah.” (31:12)

The Mishnah (Sukkah 28a) relates a story that when Shammai's daughter-in-law gave birth to a baby boy, Shammai removed a portion of the roof under which the newborn slept and placed *s'chach* on the opening so that the infant would be inside a sukkah. Many commentators wonder about this (Otzar Mefarshai HaTalmud brings a list of authorities who grapple with it) and question what the great Shammai sought to accomplish by doing this. What could the newborn child derive from the fact that he technically was “sleeping in a sukkah”? As we know, a minor is not obligated in *mitzvos*. Rather, his or her parents are obligated to train their child to lead a life of Torah and *mitzvos* after his bar *mitzvah*. Accordingly, we must determine what precisely Shammai was seeking to impart to his infant grandson.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt'l (Reshimot Shivrim) cites the ceremony of *Hakhel* as a precedent for Shammai. The Torah issues a command to the entire congregation of *Klal Yisrael* to gather in the *Beis HaMikdash* during the festival of Sukkos of the post-*shemittah* year for the *Hakhel* ceremony. Explicitly, the *pasuk* mentions that every man, woman and child is to attend this magnificent event. The Ramban understands the teachings of Chazal (Chagigah 3a) that even infants should be brought to *Hakhel* in order to gain merit for those [parents] who bring them. In the same vein, R' Soloveitchik suggests that the newborn baby sleeping in his crib with *s'chach* over his head did not actually benefit from being in a sukkah. Shammai, however, did benefit by gaining merit for constructing a sukkah for his infant grandchild.

This insight teaches us a vital lesson in the Torah outlook towards *chinuch*. *Chinuch* has the potential to benefit not only the child, but also the educator (i.e. the parents). In fact, Chazal express this point by recording the observation of the great Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, who said (Makkos 10a): “I have learned much from my teachers, and even more from my colleagues; but I learned [gained] the most from my students.”

DISSEMINATING HOLINESS

Rebbe Nachman

“Behold, your days are drawing near to die; summon Yehoshua, and both of you shall stand in the Tent of Meeting, and I will instruct him.” (31:14)

The Hebrew letter *aleph* (א) consists of an upper point, a lower point, and a center line. Moshe represents the upper point of the *aleph*; his disciple, Yehoshua, represents the lower point; and the Tent of Meeting corresponds to the center line, which joins the two points together.

At the time of a *tzaddik's* passing, he loses the authority to illuminate others with his *daat* (knowledge of G-d). But G-d sees to it that his disciples continue to illuminate the *tzaddik's* teachings in this world. Thus, “G-d said to Moshe” - in order for your illuminating light (the upper point) to continue shining - “summon Yehoshua” - your light must be directed into the lower point. “Stand with him in the Tent of Meeting” - a channel must be created to filter the light downwards. This is accomplished by “I will instruct him” - by returning authority to G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 6:8)

NO ROOM FOR JEALOUSY

The Rabbi of Ostrowicz

“Behold, your days are drawing near to die; summon Yehoshua, and both of you shall stand in the Tent of Meeting, and I will instruct him.” (31:14)

When the pillar of cloud vanished, Moshe went to Yehoshua and asked: “What did the oracle say to you?” And Yehoshua said to Moshe: “When the oracle was revealed to you, I used to know (without asking) what it had told you.” At that moment Moshe cried out: “Better one hundred deaths than one (moment of) jealousy!” (Midrash Rabbah)

How could Moshe possibly have felt jealous of Yehoshua, particularly since one is usually not jealous of one's disciples, as the Sages say: “One can be jealous of anyone except one's son and one's disciple.”

In order to mitigate Moshe's grief at his impending death, G-d deliberately planted a little jealousy in his heart. When Moshe realized this, he cried out in dismay: All my life I labored to cultivate virtues. Now I find that I am afflicted with the vice of jealousy. I would rather die than go on living with this fault! “Better a hundred deaths than one (moment of) jealousy.”

ALWAYS WITH US

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

“And I shall conceal My face from them, and they will be for consuming... and they will say on that day, ‘Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?’ But I will surely have concealed My face on that day...” (31:17-18)

This is perplexing. In the first *pasuk*, it's clear to the person speaking that his suffering was caused by the lack of Hashem's presence in his life. Why then would Hashem punish him further by continuing to hide His face?

Reb Simcha Bunim of Peshischa explained that this is a fundamental mistake. Hashem never left him. Hashem is always watching over him. Thinking that Hashem was not with him - that was his sin.

One must recognize that even when he sins and is “walking in the valley of the shadow of death,” Hashem is always with him.

STRENGTHENED BOND

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And I shall conceal My face from them, and they will be for consuming... and they will say on that day, 'Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?'" (31:17-18)

The purpose of life is to be connected to Hashem. Every *aliyah* (ascent) and *yeridah* (descent) of a person's life is connected to the attribute of *deveikus* (attachment).

No matter what a Jew does, he is either attaching himself to Hashem or detaching himself from Him. The most important thought that a Jew must have before he does any act is to determine if it will bring him closer to or further from Hashem.

Similarly, says the Nesivos Shalom, Rav Shalom Noach Berezovsky zt'l, all the tests and tribulations in life are not necessarily a punishment for impure desires or thoughts of heresy, but rather the *yetzer hara* puts in front of a person trials of both body and mind, until it appears as if he is being pushed away from Hashem and his prayers are not being heard because he has become unwanted in His eyes. It is as if an iron wall has gone up between him and his Father in Heaven. This is the most difficult tribulation of all, and a Jew must employ every tactic of *kedushah* to strengthen his belief in Hashem even more.

"As I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I do not fear evil for You are with me" (Tehillim 23:4). The understanding of any *nisayon* is to determine the strength of one's connection to the *Ribono shel Olam*. If his *deveikus* to Hashem is permanent, then this temporary trial will not break his bond.

CONCEALMENT WITHIN A CONCEALMENT

Rebbe Nachman

"But I will surely have concealed My face on that day ..." (31:18)

Hasteir Asteir (I will surely hide) literally means "Hide, I will hide." This alludes to two levels of Divine concealment.

On the first level, G-d is hidden in a single concealment. Though it is difficult to find Him, a person is still aware that G-d is hidden from him. Even if he desires to commit a sin, he knows that what appears permissible is really forbidden. On the second level, G-d is hidden in a concealment within a concealment. Then the person is oblivious to the fact that G-d is hidden. He may sin repeatedly, being totally unaware that for him, the forbidden has become permissible.

Only the *tzaddik*, who has a mastery of the deepest Torah mysteries and an awareness of G-dliness that is beyond the grasp of even the very righteous, can reach into the most hidden places - into the concealment within a concealment - and raise the awareness of those who are most distant from G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 56:3)

HIDDEN YET NEAR

Baal Shem Tov

"But I will surely have concealed My face on that day ..." (31:18)

The term "hiding" generally implies that one does not know where the other person is. However, if one knows that the person is on the other side of the obstacle, and he merely cannot see him, he is not truly hidden. Thus, when Hashem tells us, "I will surely hide My face on that day," He is encouraging us for He is saying: "Even though I am not visible, I am standing close by."

The emphasis implied by the repetition of "hide" indicates that the concealment of G-d's presence in this world is itself concealed. In other words, when the spiritual darkness grows too powerful, you stop realizing that it is darkness, and you can, G-d forbid, mistake it for goodness and light.

Imagine yourself at the base of a spiral staircase. Look up, see the image at its very top. Start ascending, keeping an eye on that final destination. As you proceed, a supporting pillar blocks your view. In truth, you have moved closer than before, but because your destination has suddenly disappeared from your sight, you might think you are at a greater distance from your destination.

Do not be fooled. Between one achievement and the next, you must move around a pole that produces momentary obstructions of vision, but as long as you are climbing, you are moving closer, not further.

TORAH-FILLED HOME

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Now, write this song for yourselves and teach it to the people. Place it in their mouth, so this song may be a witness for Me against the Children of Israel..." (31:19)

This verse alludes to the commandment to write a Torah scroll and study from it (Mishneh Torah, Tefillin u'Mezuzah v'Sefer Torah 7:1; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Dei'ah 270:1). The Torah has already enjoined us to study and memorize its words (Devarim 6:6); the additional commandment to write a Torah scroll (or have one written, or purchase one) is intended to ensure that we have the means by which to study the Torah easily, fully, and accurately.

Before the Oral Torah was written down - i.e., when it was studied from memory - this commandment applied only to the Torah scroll; nowadays, it applies to the texts of the entire Written Torah (the Tanach) and Oral Torah (the Talmud and the Codes of Jewish Law). When we fill our homes with holy books, making G-d's instructions for us readily available to study and fulfill, G-d considers it as if we ourselves stood at Mount Sinai and received the Torah directly from Him. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 23, pp. 17-26) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

NEVER ALONE

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“Now, write this song for yourselves and teach it to the people. Place it in their mouth, so this song may be a witness for Me against the Children of Israel...” (31:19)

The Torah commands us to write a *Sefer Torah*; this is the last *mitzvah* recorded in the Torah. The Chofetz Chaim points out that this commandment comes immediately after the previous *pasuk* that shares that at times Hashem conceals Himself from us. We are all aware that although Hashem continues to work behind the scenes, there are times when He hides Himself from our view.

The Chofetz Chaim explains that the Torah is teaching us through the sequence of these two *pesukim* - the first regarding Hashem’s concealment, and the second stating the obligation to write a *Sefer Torah* - that although there may be situations in life where we are struggling and may have trouble seeing the Yad Hashem, we always have the Torah and Hashem to protect us. Hashem, in His infinite kindness, does not leave us to figure things out for ourselves. Rather, He provides us with an instruction manual to help us navigate the challenging and difficult situations that we confront in our lives.

This insight of the Chofetz Chaim is powerful. We must remind ourselves that the Torah and Hashem’s guiding hand are always present, and they will no doubt provide the ever-needed *chizuk* and strength that we all so desperately desire and rely on.

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

Rabbi Aryeh Dachs

“Now, write this song for yourselves and teach it to the people. Place it in their mouth, so this song may be a witness for Me against the Children of Israel...” (31:19)

The final *mitzvah* in the Torah is the unique *mitzvah* for every Jewish male to write a *Sefer Torah*. (Interestingly, Rabbeinu Asher ben Yechiel, the Rosh understands that nowadays this *mitzvah* is fulfilled by purchasing Torah books for study.) This *mitzvah* has an interesting provision. Even if one inherits a Torah from his father, and therefore already owns a Torah, he is still required to write a new Torah for himself.

Rabbi Yaakov Neiman in his work *Darchei Mussar* offers an interesting take. There is a lesson here for our Torah observance as well. It is not enough to “inherit” our Torah observance from our father. Meaning, if our observance of Torah is merely passed down to us and only practiced out of habit, then our observance is lacking. Rather, it is imperative that we write our own Torah. We are obligated to create our own observance, one that is unique to us. The writing of the Torah by each generation symbolizes the need to make the Torah, or our fulfillment of the Torah, our own. We live in a new and unique generation and we do ourselves a disservice when we exclusively rely on the Torah from our fathers. It is our duty to make the Torah ours.

JUMP INTO ACTION

Rabbi Avi Wiesenfeld

“Now, write this song for yourselves and teach it to the people. Place it in their mouth, so this song may be a witness for Me against the Children of Israel...” (31:19)

It was Russia in the 1920’s. A Jew by the name of Reb Yitzchok Fagen gathered a group of *talmidim* and risked his life to teach them Torah in an attempt to spread Torah in Russia during the time when teaching Torah was a serious crime. He would teach them *mussar* and *hashkafah* on a weekly basis, ensuring that *yiddishkeit* would remain strong.

On one particular evening, he was delivering a very powerful and riveting class in *hashkafah*, and the *talmidim* became very emotional to the point that they even started to cry.

All of a sudden, they were startled by a noise from outside. During that time, a sudden noise outside may have meant that the Russian secret police, the KGB, had come to arrest them for their terrible crime of learning Torah.

All of the men in the room jumped up and found a different place to hide silently as they waited in terror and fear for the KGB to enter. After a few long minutes, the noise repeated itself but no one seemed to be entering. Finally, someone bravely decided to unlock the door and peek outside to see what the noise was about.

They all breathed a sigh of relief and whispered a prayer of gratitude to Hashem when the source of the noise was found to be a stray cat scratching itself near the house where they learned. They returned to their seats around the table to resume the *shiur*.

Reb Yitzchok turned to his *talmidim* and asked them, “I don’t understand what just transpired. Why did you all jump up when you heard a potential threat to your lives? What is more dangerous - a physical threat or a spiritual threat?”

The *talmidim* responded honestly, saying that although they understood the severe ramifications of a spiritual danger to their *neshamos*, surely the rebbi understands that physical danger is felt much more strongly, and for that reason they needed to actually get up and do something, and not just pray for Hashem’s help.

Reb Yitzchok explained to them: “That is just the point I want to make. When it comes to matters of *yiddishkeit* and *ruchniyus*, we think that it suffices to get emotional and cry. But in truth, we have to get up and do something in order to have any effect and make any real change.”

Rosh Hashanah has just passed, two days full of *davening* and *teshuvah* during which we very likely became emotional. However, now, during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, we need to spring into action - in the same way we would if faced with a physical threat - and do something practical to change and become the people we want to become.

This week's *Parshah* teaches the last *mitzvah* of the 613 (*Taryag*) *mitzvos*: ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת - "And now, write for yourselves this song" - the *mitzvah* to write for oneself a *Sefer Torah*. The Kesav Sofer explains that this means that each and every one of us needs to reconnect to and embrace our own personal Torahs. It is not enough to receive the Torah as an inheritance from our fathers and grandfathers. It is incumbent upon each and every one of us to make the Torah our very own.

Although we certainly may have been neglectful in our fulfillment of Torah and *mitzvos* during the past year, we now have an opportunity as we stand at the threshold of Yom Kippur to show Hashem that we will take the emotions and tears we shed on Rosh Hashanah and put them into action and enhance our *mitzvah* observance, each person in his own way, to reconnect to the Torah and make it our very own.

LIVING IN HARMONY

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Now, write this song for yourselves and teach it to the people. Place it in their mouth, so this song may be a witness for Me against the Children of Israel..." (31:19)

G-d tells Moshe to enter the *Mishkan* with Yehoshua and tells them both that the Jews will abandon G-d, that He will hide His face from the people, and that they will be subjected to many troubles. G-d then tells Moshe and Yehoshua, "Write for yourselves this song and teach it to the people. Place it in their mouths so that the song will be a witness for the people" (31:19). We discover that the song referenced in this *parashah* is composed only in the next *parashah*. While describing the many difficulties that will befall the Jews, why does G-d mention the concept now when the song itself won't be introduced until later? Also, how can a song help people through their hardships?

Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr explains that a song includes the concept of harmony, where multiple sounds come together in unison and in a pleasing way. The metaphor is meant to comfort people as they struggle through difficult times with the understanding that, like sounds in a song, all events in our lives are intended to guide us toward the best possible outcome.

As we face challenges in life, it helps to know that we are not alone, that we have each other, and ultimately G-d to help us. Just as Moshe and Yehoshua seamlessly worked together to transition authority and leadership, we can use each other to navigate life with friendship, cooperation, and harmony.

COMING TO OUR DEFENSE

Malbim

"Now, write this song for yourselves and teach it to the people. Place it in their mouth, so this song may be a witness for Me against the Children of Israel..." (31:19)

Why does G-d require a witness for Himself? Actually, this song is intended to serve as a witness for the Jewish people. G-d did not require the song as a "witness" to testify "against the Children of Israel" but only as a "witness" in their defense.

What is actually meant may be explained by the following parable:

A certain king freed his servant from prison and appointed him guard of his treasures. Knowing that the servant had once been imprisoned for theft, the king worried that the man may be tempted to commit theft again. A second offense of this sort carried the death penalty. The king, therefore, entered into his record book that the servant had once been guilty of theft.

The members of the royal household thought that the king had made the entry to remind the servant that if he were to commit another theft his punishment would be twice as severe as the one he had been given for his first offense.

The fact, however, was that the king had made this entry not as a warning to his servant but as a personal reminder for himself not to deal too harshly with the servant in case he should repeat the offense. For, after all, the king had given the man this position of trust even though he knew that the servant was a habitual thief.

Similarly, G-d took this song as "a witness for Me." It was to remind Him not to judge the people of Israel too harshly when they sinned. For, after all, G-d, had chosen Israel to be His People even though He had known their nature ("for I knew their imagination"; 31:21) and their propensity to sin.

SETTING AN EXAMPLE

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

"For I shall bring them to the Land that I swore to their forefathers, flowing with milk and honey, and he shall eat, be sated, and grow fat, and shall turn to other gods, and they shall serve them and provoke Me, and annul My covenant." (31:20)

It is noteworthy that the middle of this verse is phrased in the singular, "he shall eat, be sated, and grow fat, and shall turn to other gods," but it concludes in the plural, "they shall serve them and provoke Me, and annul My covenant." From this shift we may derive the following lesson: A person may think that when his excesses cause him to stray after false gods, he does so only as a private individual, but this is not so. Never does a sinner remain alone for long, for his sins always make an impression on others and draw them to follow him. Even if he speaks to no one and makes no conscious effort to influence others, there will always be some who learn from the example he sets with his debased actions and try to imitate them.

Thus, even though at first only one person turns to other gods, the result is that many others come to serve them, thereby provoking Hashem into annulling His covenant.

Conversely, the good deeds one does have an even stronger power to teach and influence others. In the blessing we say before *Shema*, the Sages instituted a prayer that Hashem “instill understanding in our hearts... to learn, to teach.” Even ordinary people, who are not teachers in the normal sense of the word, must be aware that their actions have the power to set an example that teaches others for the good or (Heaven forbid) for the bad.

NEAR AND DEAR

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When they encounter many evils and troubles, this song shall speak up before it as a witness, for it shall not be forgotten from the mouth of its offspring, for I know its inclination, what it does today, before I bring them into the land that I have sworn.” (31:21)

The phrase “for it will not be forgotten from the mouths of their offspring” is G-d’s assurance that we will never forget the poem that constitutes the greater part of the following *parashah* (*Ha’azinu*), and indeed, that we will never forget the Torah in general.

Furthermore, inasmuch as the Torah is our guide for maintaining and enhancing our relationship with G-d, this phrase is also a promise that we will never “forget” our relationship with G-d, i.e., this relationship will always remain available to us.

The way that we realize this promise is alluded to in the first word of the poem, *Ha’azinu*, which means “listen from nearby.” When we keep the Torah’s message near to our hearts, making it easy and natural for us to fulfill its directives, G-d assures us that the Torah will always remain relevant to us, that we will always feel close to Him. We will know our purpose in life and fulfill it successfully, and G-d’s material and spiritual blessings will accompany us in all that we do. (Sichot Kodesh 5735, vol. 2, pp. 496-497) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

FOR ALL ETERNITY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“When they encounter many evils and troubles, this song shall speak up before it as a witness, for it shall not be forgotten from the mouth of its offspring, for I know its inclination, what it does today, before I bring them into the land that I have sworn.” (31:21)

The transmission of Torah from generation to generation is not merely a Jewish legacy handed down from father to son. Not every father knows how to hand it down and not every son knows how to accept and incorporate the concepts contained within. Rather, it is the promise of “כי לא תשכח מפי זרעו” - “For it will never be forgotten from the lips of their progeny,” that serves to sustain *Klal Yisrael* all throughout the long exile, with the rich heritage of Torah and *mitzvos*.

Today we see the realization of this promise clearly, says R’ Yaakov Horowitz shlit’a, by looking at the aftermath of the Holocaust. Broken and bereft survivors attempted to rebuild their shattered lives. With great sacrifice, they sent their children to learn in cheder. Because of the circumstances, the schools were often sub-par, staffed with teachers who were incapable of relating to their students. Amazingly enough, for the most part, they succeeded! The second generation of Jews after the war became learned individuals who created the religious atmosphere and lifestyle we enjoy today. This could only be due to the promise of *lo sishkach*.

ALWAYS THERE FOR US

Reb Noson of Breslov

“This song shall serve as testimony before them as witness - for it shall never be forgotten from the lips of their progeny.” (31:21)

Even when the Jews sin and forget the Torah, the Torah does not forget them. It will always be there for the Jews and will eventually bring them back to G-d. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 185b)

Why do we celebrate on the *yahrtzeit* of a *tzaddik*, rather than cry over our loss? Our joy expresses the truism that the Torah and teachings of the *tzaddik* remain with us. Using his strength, we can overcome all adversity. Thus, on the seventh of Adar (the *yahrtzeit* of Moshe) and on Lag Ba’Omer (the *yahrtzeit* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai), there is great rejoicing. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 274)

REFUSED TO BE FORGOTTEN

Rebbe Nachman

“This song shall serve as testimony before them as witness - for it shall never be forgotten from the lips of their progeny...” (31:21)

Pondering the intensification of the Roman oppression and the impending stages of exile, the Sages declared:

“The Torah will one day be forgotten by the Jews.” But Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai declared that the Torah would never be forgotten, citing this verse as a proof-text. (Shabbat 138b)

Rabbi Shimon’s citation of the present verse was not incidental. The final letters of the words *ki lo tishakhach m’pi zaro* (כי לא תשכח מפי זרעו), since it will not be forgotten from the lips of their progeny) spell *Yochai* (יוחאי), indicating that through Yochai - i.e., Rabbi Shimon - the Torah will not be forgotten.

In making this promise, Rabbi Shimon stood alone against the leading sages of his time. But he was correct. And, furthermore, in the merit of the Zohar, which Rabbi Shimon revealed, the Jews will eventually leave the exile (Zohar III, 124b). (See Likutey Moharan I, Preface)

SONG OF TORAH

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Moshe wrote this song on that day, and he taught it to the Children of Israel..." (31:22)

Parashas Vayeilech recounts the last days of Moshe's life. After G-d tells Moshe to designate Yehoshua as his successor, He tells Moshe to write a "song" and teach it to the Jewish people so that the song will be a witness for them (31:19). Moshe writes the song with Yehoshua's help (according to Rav Hirsch).

Why is Moshe instructed to teach in song form, and why do we need to know that Moshe taught the song to the people (31:22)?

Rav Hirsch clarifies that both the song and the teaching aspects of these instructions were given specifically for the benefit of Yehoshua, the future leader of the Jewish people. The way information is conveyed affects how it is absorbed, and songs and poems make it easier to see the beauty within the words. Once the proper medium of education was established, Yehoshua had to learn how to teach.

For knowledge to last, it is not enough to absorb information but to understand the spirit behind the letter of the Torah law and discover its beauty and brilliance. By studying and examining the Torah, we can learn not only its laws, but we can also extract the beauty behind them - such that they sound like music to us and to those we teach.

EARNING OUR REWARD

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"He commanded Yehoshua the son of Nun, and said, 'Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the Children of Israel to the land that I have sworn to them, and I shall be with you.'" (31:23)

We are taught that had Moshe led the Jewish people into the Land of Israel, its conquest would have been virtually effortless. The intensity of Moshe's holiness would have neutralized any opposition. The same would have been true of our "conquest" of the world's materiality: Moshe's entry into the Land of Israel would have made our task of elevating and refining the world virtually effortless.

This is the inner reason why G-d did not allow Moshe into the Promised Land. G-d wants to shower us with infinite goodness. But were He to do so freely, without requiring us to "earn" it, we would feel ashamed. Thus, His desire to be good to us would backfire. Therefore, G-d made the bestowal of His infinite goodness dependent upon our efforts.

When we summon our hidden potential in order to overcome obstacles to the Divine mission of perfecting the world, we earn G-d's infinite goodness. (Hitva'aduyot 5711, vol. 1, pp. 20-22) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

BEARING WITNESS

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"Gather to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, and I shall speak these words into their ears, and call heaven and earth to bear witness against them." (31:28)

After Moshe completed the writing of the *Sefer Torah*, he requested that the Leviim gather the elders to remind them to be loyal to Hashem. He states that heaven and earth will bear witness to that which he will proclaim.

The Chiddushei HaRim offers an alternative explanation that is very powerful. He explains that Moshe was asking *Bnei Yisrael* to serve as witnesses for He Who created heaven and earth. In other words, Moshe was challenging *Klal Yisrael* to assume the responsibility of publicizing to the world that Hashem is the Creator of, and in control of, our world. Moshe was communicating that *Klal Yisrael* is to serve as a light unto the nations in order to bring honor to Hashem.

The Chiddushei HaRim is reminding us that being a Jew is a tremendous privilege that comes with great responsibility. We are expected to serve as the ambassadors of Hashem and ensure, through our behaviors and actions, that we can accurately bear witness to Hashem's existence in our world. As the *Yomim Noraim* rapidly approach, let's guarantee that we act in a way that brings nachas and honor to Hashem.

HAFTORAH

OUR FORGIVING KING

Kochav M'Yaakov

"Return, O Israel, to Hashem, your G-d..." (Hoshea 14:2)

If one says that one will carry one's case as far as the king's own throne chamber, it means that one has no chance of acquittal at the lower courts. Since one is guilty according to the law of the land, the only hope lies in obtaining a hearing from the king himself who has the right to pardon even those whose guilt has been established beyond a reasonable doubt.

The prophet Hoshea says: "Return, O Israel, to Hashem, your G-d": You can come only to Hashem, your G-d, with your repentance; He alone has the power to accept your repentance and to pardon you now, "for you have stumbled in your iniquity." Your sins were too great for you to have a chance for acquittal in the courts of earthly princes. Only G-d in His mercy can forgive your sins now and, being merciful, He will pardon them even though they were numerous and grave.

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