

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital*

Parashat VaYeLech  
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פרשת וילך  
ו' בתשרי תשע"ו

Torah Reading: *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) Chapter 31

In this *parasha*, Moshe concludes his speech to *Bnei Yisrael*, blesses Yehoshua, and instructs the community to gather every seven years to read publicly from the Torah; Hashem predicts the eventual straying of *Bnei Yisrael*.

This *parasha* contains the last two of the 613 *mitzvot* in the Torah. First comes *Hakhel* [Assembly] in verses 10-13:

י וַיִּצַו מֹשֶׁה, אוֹתָם לֵאמֹר: מִקֵּץ שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים, בְּמַעַד שְׁנֹת הַשְּׁמִטָּה--בְּחַג הַסִּכּוֹת. יא בָּבוֹא כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל, לִרְאוֹת אֶת-פָּנֵי ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ, בַּמְּקוֹם, אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר: תִּקְרָא אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת, נֹגֵד כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל--בְּאָזְנוֹהֶם. יב הַקְהֵל אֶת-הָעָם, הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנְּשִׁים וְהַטּוֹף, וְגֵרְךָ, אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ--לְמַעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ וְלְמַעַן יִלְמְדוּ, וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת-ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיכֶם, וְשָׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת, אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת. יג וּבְנִיחָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדְעוּ, יִשְׁמְעוּ וְלִמְדוּ--לִירְאָה, אֶת-ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיכֶם: כָּל-הַיָּמִים, אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם חַיִּים עַל-הָאָדָמָה, אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן שָׁמָּה, לְרִשְׁתָּהּ.

**10** And Moshe commanded them, saying: 'At the end of every seven years, in the set time of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, **11** when all Yisrael is come to appear before Hashem your God in the place which He shall choose, you shall read this law before all Yisrael in their hearing. **12** Assemble the people, the men and the women and the little ones, and the stranger that is within your gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear Hashem your God, and

observe to do all the words of this law; **13** and that their children, who have not known, may hear, and learn to fear Hashem your God, as long as you live in the land where you go over the Jordan to possess it.

The second *mitzvah* in this *parasha* and the final one in the Torah is writing a *Sefer Torah* [Torah Scroll]. Verse 19:

יט וְעַתָּה כְּתֹבוּ לָכֶם אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת וְלַמָּדָה אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁמָּה  
בְּפִיהֶם לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה־לִּי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְעֵד בְּבִנְיֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

**19** Now therefore write for yourselves this song, and teach it to the Bnei Yisrael; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a testimony for Me among the Bnei Yisrael.

The commentators universally agree that the “song” mentioned in the verse is an actual Torah scroll.

The Aruch HaShulchan [Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein – 19<sup>th</sup> Century Lithuania], in his preface to the *Choshen Hamishpat* section of his seminal work, entitled *Aruch Hashulchan*, says the following: “וכל התורה כולה נקראת שירה, ותפארת השיר, היא כשהקולות משונים זה מזה, וזהו עיקר הנעימות. – The entire Torah is one song, and it is the harmonic combination of different and distinctive voices that is the very essence of the pleasure we derive from it.”

This is one explanation of why writing a Torah scroll is the ultimate *mitzvah* in the Torah. Many Jews believe that the Torah is the revelation of God’s word; others believe that it is humans’ interpretation of God’s revelation. But along with that revelation come the unique voices we add to God’s “Song.” This is what we as Jews are bidden to do as we make our way through human history: to harmonize our own unique paths, forge a Jewish legacy, and create beautiful music.

It also may explain the penultimate *mitzvah* of assembling the nation once every seven years. Music is not music unless it is shared. Compositions that do not see the light of day or, more precisely, enter the consciousness of hearing, are not music at all. Once every seven years, the entire *Bnei Yisrael* comes together to hear the base melody, so that they can add their harmonies anew.

Were the *Beit HaMikdash*, the Temple, still standing today, we would all be gathering in Yerushalayim the week after next for the Reading of the Law. Until the Messianic age arrives, we will need to remind ourselves in our disparate locations of the beautiful music and harmonies contained in the Torah.

Shabbat Shalom and *Gmar Chatimah Tovah* – may we all be sealed in the Book of Life for a good year.

For Discussion:

- What other reasons may there be for the *mitzvah* of writing a Torah scroll?
- Why do you think that the Torah refers to itself as a “song”? What is unique about music that this word may have been chosen?
- What do you imagine it might have been like when the entire Jewish nation gathered in Yerushalayim to hear the Torah read once in seven years? Share your vision of that event.