

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



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

Parashat Vayelech
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פרשת וילך
ו' בתשרי תשע"ז

Torah Reading: *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) Chapter 31

In this *parasha*, Moshe concludes his speech to the 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*.

Parashat Vayelech is the second-to-last portion of the Torah that we read on Shabbat. Next week's *parasha*, *Ha'azinu*, consists almost entirely of a poem of adjuration to the Bnei Yisrael. *Parashat V'zot Habracha*, which comes after *Ha'azinu* and is the actual last portion in the Torah, containing Moshe's blessings to the tribes and his death, is read on *Simchat Torah* but not on Shabbat.

This week's *parasha* begins (31:1-2):

וַיֵּלֶךְ, מֹשֶׁה; וַיְדַבֵּר אֶת-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אֶל-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל. וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֵהֶם, בֶּן-מֵאָה
וָעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה אֲנֹכִי הַיּוֹם--לֹא-אוּכָל עוֹד, לָצֵאת וּלְבוֹא; וְהִי אָמַר אֵלַי, לֹא תַעֲבֹר
אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה.

Moshe went [*vayelech*] and spoke these words to all Israel. And he said to them: 'I am a hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no more go out and come in; and Hashem has said to me: You shall not go over this Jordan.'

This parallels the beginning of an earlier *parasha*, when Hashem tells Avraham, (*Bereshit* 12:1-2):

לֵךְ-לָךְ מֵאֶרֶץךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ וְאָעֲשֶׂהָ, לְגוֹי
גָּדוֹל, וְאֲבָרְכָךָ, וְאֲגַדְּלָהּ שְׁמֶךָ; וְהָיָה, בְּרַכָּה.

Go (*lech*) for yourself out of your country, and from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a

great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you will be a blessing.

These two sections essentially bracket the beginning and end of the “Jewish National Story” in the Torah. The text employs the literary device of using similar language (“going”) and ideas (connection to the Land of Israel) to call attention to this bracketing. The first two portions in the Torah, *Bereshit* and *Noach*, deal with the origins of the world and with universal matters of good and evil. Only in *Lech Lecha*, with its narratives about the first “proto-Jew,” Avraham, does the Torah turn to the story of the development of the clans, the tribes, and eventually the nation of the Jews.

The story of the Jews begins with Avraham, his wife Sarah and nephew Lot entering the Land which Hashem showed them. That story, at least the part of it covered in the Torah, ends approximately 500 years later, with a nation of about 1.2 million people that had endured slavery, experienced redemption, and matured in the wilderness over the course of forty years up to the point that the nation was ready to... enter the Land which Hashem showed them.

The juxtaposition of these stories also invites us to contrast the lives of Avraham and Moshe. Avraham was a nomad who was born in Ur of the Chaldees, moved his family to Cana’an, and had to leave the Land twice because of famine. He experienced family difficulties, eventually exiling his son Yishmael together with Yishmael’s mother Hagar. But Avraham lived out the remainder of his life in relative peace in the Holy Land and died and was buried there.

Moshe, by contrast, grew up in Paro’s palace amid wealth and power. He gave it all up in order to help the Bnei Yisrael, even distancing himself from his wife Tzipporah and his children. After forty years of suffering through Bnei Yisrael’s growing pains, he could not enter the Holy Land, but died and was buried in Moav.

Our first Jewish protagonist and our last protagonist in the Torah lived diametrical lives. But they both were involved in *lech*: going, leading, helping our people move ahead to form the nation we are today, to develop the heritage we live, to give a special place to the Land of Israel in Jewish life.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Think of some similarities between the lives of Avraham and Moshe. Think of some differences.
- Why is the Land of Israel so important in the Torah and to Jews around the world throughout history and today?