

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	RENEWED
Vayeilech	15 Sept 2018	6 Tishrei 5779	Deut. 311-:30	Hos 14:1-9; Mic 7:18-20 Joel 2:157-27	Matt. 21:9-17

Last week, we celebrated the coming of New Year 5779 since the Creation. We know it as Rosh Hashanah, translated as “head of the year.” On this day, the books of Judgment are opened by Hashem as He shows of our past deeds for 5778. He then passes on the judgment for the coming year.¹ We drank wine in joy and shared laughs, good food and warm thoughts of coming year with glad tidings. Hidden beneath the Rosh Hashanah was a death of righteous man, Gedaliah. His name means “Yah has become great.”

Gedaliah was the son of Achikam (2Kings 25:22) who saved the life of prophet Jeremiah and the grandson of Shaphan, a scribe to King Josiah. He was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon as governor of Eretz Yisrael following the destruction of the First Temple. When the people heard Gedaliah was the governor, they returned to rebuild their lives again. Along came Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama of the royal family (King David’s heritage). Jeremiah described him as one of the chief officers of King Jehoiakim (Jer. 41:1).

Gedaliah invited Ishmael and his cohorts invited to his home on Rosh Hashanah despite bad reports he received by the people. Ishmael and his cohorts killed Gedaliah and the Chaldeans in his house. When the people heard of his assassination, they fled to Egypt and the Temple was completely destroyed at that time. The sages teach that while Gedaliah was alive, the people flourished and peaceful. The Talmud² said his assassination led to complete expulsion from the land, and any hope of reestablishing the commonwealth until Ezra returned 70 years later. The First Temple was destroyed because of forbidden relations, bloodshed, and idolatry. The Second Temple was destroyed because of hate for no reason. Since Rosh Hashanah is a festival, the commemoration of his death was postponed until the third of Tishrei.

Why are we fasting for the tragic death of Gedaliah? After all, there are many other sages who were murdered. The Talmud explains that Gedaliah’s death was a result of jealousy. Ishmael did not like Gedaliah as a ruler. But then, there are many coup in other countries even today. The answer is that the fast of Gedaliah’s murder is not just a human being, but it is a spiritual destruction (*nefesh neshema*). It is an idea that was introduced that if someone doesn’t like a person, he is going to kill the other individual. This is not the Torah. This is not the teaching of Hashem nor Yeshua. It is a destruction within ourselves that could lead to future generations. Today, we don’t use sword to murder. Instead, we use our mouth, our tongue, and with our action to murder. Such action is very destructive to our foundation. It is a destruction within the community. Therefore, we are to remember this day (3rd day of Tishrei) the result of jealousy could lead to destruction, not just an individual, but to the community as well. Hashem forbid, may this day never come.

In this week’s *parasha vayeilech*, Moshe continues to address the people on the last day of his life. He establishes Yahushua (Joshua) as a new leader. He finishes committing the Torah to writing, and commanded the people to gather every seventh year to renew their covenant with Hashem in preparation to receive “the poem of witness” in *parashat ha’azinu*.

Moshe said, “I am 120 years old this day.” (Deut. 31:2) The sages teach that Moshe lived his life to the fullest, wasting no time and not leaving any undone part of the task with which he was charged with. The

¹ See previous Torah portions for detail

² BT, Ros Hashanah 18b

Zohar teaches that the most holy and righteous people are sensitive to spirituality, and could tell when the soul begins to ebb away from the body. (Or HaChaim) Moshe is teaching us that we are to live to the fullest to our lives so that our physical life could mirror our spiritual life. The sages continue that Abraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov also died on the day they were born to indicate their righteousness. An argument can be made that most people, even the very righteous do not die on their birthdays. It can mean that the person finished his tasks early or that he was given extra time after having finished his tasks to complete additional purpose.

“Go out and come in” – Moses does not mean to say that old age impedes him, for the Torah testifies that he is still vibrant (34:7). Rather he means that he can no longer lead them to battle. He goes on to say, Elohim has forbidden him to accompany the nation across the Jordan (Rashi).

“He will not fail you, nor forsake you.” (v. 6) Meaning that the people will claim that evil fell upon them because Hashem abandoned them. So, Moshe is warning them prophetically that in the future, the people will blame on Hashem for their trials and temptations. The greatest punishment is the feeling of concealment by Hashem.

Moshe then commands that the king reads to the entire nation from Deuteronomy. Once every seven years – on the first day of Chol HaMoed (Intermediate Days) of Sukkot that followed the Sabbatical Year – the entire nation was commanded to come together at the Temple to listen to the king read to them from Deuteronomy. He read from the beginning of the Book to the end of the first paragraph of the Shema (Gen. 6:9), the second paragraph of the Shema (Deut. 11:13-21), and Deuteronomy 14:22-29:1. These passages discuss allegiance to Elohim, the covenant, and reward and punishment. The reason for this commandment is that the primary foundation of Israelite's life is the Torah, and through it each of us is distinguished from all other people to enjoy the highest possible spiritual pleasure.

However, the question remains: Why will HaShem continue to conceal Himself after Israel has repented? Ramban explains that Israel's declaration of verse 17 falls short of genuine repentance (repeated same sin), because even though they acknowledge their guilt, they are not yet ready to *baal teshuvah* (confess and repent wholeheartedly). Nevertheless, HaShem will respond favorably, because verse 18 does not speak of new suffering; however, He will conceal Himself in the sense that He will not reveal the impending redemption. Because we will revert back to sin if we had foreknowledge of redemption. Therefore, Israel will have to have strong faith that HaShem will never reject them entirely (Lev. 26:44). The complete redemption must await confession and complete repentance (30:2).

Sforno comments that in verse 17 Israel despairs, feeling that it has failed HaShem so grievously that even prayer and repentance are useless. But HaShem says no. He will never let Israel fall. He will always protect His people, but His Presence will be concealed; i.e., there will be time when Israel feel that HaShem has disappeared, but He is always present, only concealed.

The Aramaic word *ahpekh apai* means, “I will turn away from them” or “I will not look after them to help them.” The term “hide” is a mistranslation. The Aramaic word for hide is *tashi*. Hashem is spirit and spirit is everywhere. There is no place in the universe where Hashem is not present or can be hidden. When people turn away from Hashem, they cut themselves off from the great power that sustains them and helps them in time of distress.

Verse 19-30: The Torah as testimony. HaShem commanded Moses and Joshua to write the Torah and to teach it to the people, and to place the scroll at the side of the Ark or inside the Ark. There is a dispute among the commentators for the placement of the Scroll. However, the key theme to these verses are

connections. There will be times when the people would forsake His words and turn to the world, but we will have constant connection with Hashem and we can never break that connection. So, the question we need to ask ourselves, “How far or close are you to Hashem?”

Writing a Torah Scroll. The Sages derive from this verse that every Israel is commanded to write a Torah Scroll, a commandment that can be fulfilled by writing a single letter of a complete scroll. Because the lack of even one letter renders a scroll invalid, the writing or correcting of a single letter is tantamount to completing the entire scroll (Rambam, Hil. Sefer Torah 7:1). According to some, the purchase of books expounding on the Torah constitutes fulfillment of this commandment (Chinuch 613; Rosh).

When the Ten Commandments were given, it was written with 620 letters in Hebrew. There are 613 commandments and 7 rabbinical laws to complete 620 letters. I have listed major laws in a short form as detail of these laws require additional teachings. What are they?

1. Saying Hallel: Psalms 113-118
2. Blessings: before eating, drinking or smelling fragrances, and many others.
3. Washing hands before eating.
4. Eruv on Shabbat: Eruv is a mechanism that makes restrictions more permissive, ie. Carrying candle lights from one place to another.
5. Shabbat candles: Must light a candle.
6. Purim (Megillah): To read the book of Esther (355 BCE).
7. Chanukah: Victory of the Maccabees (139 BCE).

Many biblical (Christian) commentators, who maintain that the sacred literature was only handed down orally and was not written until many centuries after the death of Moses. They have failed to recognize that writing was common in the time of Moses. Moshe was commanded to write the song that he could teach it to the Israelites. Had Moshe failed to record it, he would not have remembered all of it.

Also, when a song or an ordinance is written, it can be committed to memory. One may have to read it many times so that it can be recited orally. For this reason, the sages teach that we are to read from the book rather than reciting from memory. It was vital that all laws, ordinances, and important revelations were written right after they were revealed.

Moses was commanded to write the commandments and the covenant (Exod. 34:27). In Exodus 31:18, we read that the commandments were written by “the finger of Elohim,” meaning they were without fault or flaws. They were written by Moses on the same day in which they were revealed. Other prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk were told to write their visions and record [by writing] immediately.

Verse 21: “For it shall not be forgotten from the mouth of their offspring.” Despite the starkness of the prophecy that Israel will slide into sin and provocation of Elohim, there is this comforting promise that the Torah will never be completely forgotten (Rashi). History shows over and over again that there was a resurgence of Torah study after times when it seemed as if its decline was irreversible.

Verse 24-26: Moshe was commanded to write the Torah, but he was not told where to place the Scroll. Then HaShem transmitted to him the last three chapters of the Torah, beginning with the song of Haazinu, so that when he wrote the words of the entire Torah until their conclusion (v. 24), he wrote and taught them, as well. Then he was told to give the Torah to the Levites for placement next to or in the Ark (see Rashi to v. 26), to assure that no one would ever be able to add to, or subtract from the Divine text (Ramban). Thus,

after commanding that every Israel participate in the writing of a Torah Scroll, HaShem made sure that the text of the Torah would remain sacrosanct; even if people were to disobey the Torah, no one would be able to falsify what it says.

That Moshe is the author of the book is clearly seen from local color, customs, and the way of life in the desert. No one living in Babylon or Canaan at a later date could have given us such a vivid description of the events and small incidents that took place in the arid desert. Only an eyewitness could have written the book of Deuteronomy.

Those who challenge Moshe's authorship forget that the book of Deuteronomy is a review of the former writing of Moses. This is the reason he does not describe things at length. As the problems grew more complex, more laws and ordinances were added.

Verse 27: "While I am still alive with you today." The words "with you" and "today" seem to be unnecessary. Or HaChaim explains that Moses says "today" simply to reiterate that he is speaking on the last day of his life. As for "with you," he alludes to the concept that the righteous are considered to be alive in the spiritual sense even after their death (Berachos 18a), so that he qualifies his words by saying that though he would live eternally through his teachings, he is not speaking only of his physical presence "with you."

Verse 29: "After my death that you will certainly act corruptly." Although Moshe predicts that the national corruption would begin as soon as he died, Scripture testifies that Israel remained righteous for as long as Joshua lived (Judges 2:7). This shows that a teacher loves his student like himself, so that Moses feels that he is still alive as long as Joshua lived (Rashi). Rather, he is warning the Israelites against what would happen to them so they won't commit sin.