

(Dvar Torah continued from the front page...)

dichotomy. He knows that at this point God is betting we will choose Door #2. We will get distracted by a shiny new toy, a more lucrative opportunity, or be blinded by our own passions that we will completely lose sight of ourselves.

To me, this feels like Moses is playing "good cop" to God's "bad cop," a role often adopted by parents hoping their children will make the decisions they want them to make. In my experience though, as a 20-something-non-parent, no matter how many times you tell your children something, they are not going to listen. The trick seems to be having faith that they are learning the lesson even when they are seemingly ignoring the messenger. Okay, I am clearly speaking from my own experience of giving my parents trouble, but this really seems to be the case here with Moses's latest attempt to set the Children of Israel on the right course.

As we reach the final chapters of Deuteronomy, our time with Moses is running short. He knows that he has taught us complicated lessons, sometimes several times. He spent decades enduring straying, screw ups, disobedience, and nagging questions. However, each of these episodes was met first with rebuke, then lessons learned, and finally, repentance.

"Choose life so you and your children may live." (Deuteronomy 30:19) This is Door #1, which could not be clearer or more timely. As we move into the season of repentance (for Ashkanazim) we will begin reciting Selichot or Jewish penitential poems and prayers this Saturday night, leading up to the High Holidays. We are forced to simultaneously look back at our life and the year we lived, while looking forward to what we want our life to be in the year to come.

It is, in fact, this turning point in the cycle that leads me to the greatest lesson I can gather from this portion. See mom & dad - I was paying attention! In all seriousness, is it as though during the season of repentance, we have an opportunity to choose between two doors. Choosing Door #2 ends with curses and disaster while Door #1 ends with blessings and joy. Even if we continuously choose Door #2, Door #1 is always there. To me, that is the significance of the high holidays and this Torah portion specifically. No matter what, we can always choose Door #1, but if we happen to choose Door #2 for whatever reason, it is not the end of the world. Because of the covenant, we know there can be repentance and better choices made in the future. May you remember to choose Door #1 and ask forgiveness when you choose Door #2 instead.



Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center
Conservative Yeshiva

TORAH SPARKS

Nitzavim-Vayelech

September 12, 2020 | Elul 23 5780

Annual I (Deuteronomy 29:9-31:30) **Etz Hayyim, p. 1165**
Triennial I (Deuteronomy 29:9-30:14) **Etz Hayyim, p. 1165**
Haftarah I (Isaiah 61:10-63:9) **Etz Hayyim, p. 1180**

Eric M. Leiderman, CY alumni '10 & '18, [MASORTI On Campus](#) Co-Founder & President

-

This week's double header, Nitzavim-Vayelech, opens with a dramatic calling. Addressing the entire nation, Moses calls on every last one of us, regardless of our status or station, to remember all the instructions we have received in the desert and the consequences that come from our choices. Each successive generation is bound by this covenant, beginning an eternal dilemma choice between Door #1 and Door #2.

Choosing Door #1 means upholding the covenant and honoring the Torah leading to a reward of life and prosperity. Whereas Door #2 leads us away from God, away from success and blessing.

Looking back at the 40 years from Mt. Sinai to where we are now, on the cusp of entering the Land of Israel, it is no wonder why Moses is reminding us of this

Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center

Agron Street 8 • P. O. Box 7456 • Jerusalem, Israel 94265
Tel: 972-2-625-6386 • israel@uscj.org • uscj.org • conservativeyeshiva.org

(Dvar Torah continued on the back page...)

D'var Haftarah: God's Role in Israel's Tribulations

Rabbi Mordecai Silverstein (from the archives)

In this last haftarah of the Sheva d'Nechamta (the Seven Shabbatot of Consolation), the final verse (63:9) should serve as a summation of the idea of consolation. Instead it presents us with an interpretative dilemma. There are two different traditions of how this verse should be read, each of which carries a different message with regard to God's relationship to His people. The focus of this problem is on how we are to read a single word. The "written" tradition (the ktiv) records this word "lo" with the Hebrew letters 'lamed' and 'alef' meaning "not". The verse, according to this tradition should be understood to mean: "God will not (lo) multiply their [the people of Israel's] troubles. Rather, He will save them from it." (see Targum Yonaton and Radak) The "read" tradition (the kri) understood the word "lo" to be spelled with the letters 'lamed' and 'vav' meaning "to him". The resulting translation would be "In all of their troubles God is also troubled".

Rabbi Isaac Abrabanel, the 14th-15th Spanish statesman and Bible commentator, used the example of the experience of the children of Israel during their trek through the desert to explain the first interpretation (ktiv). He explains that during the desert trek, God was never the source of their troubles. Instead, He was there to save them in their every trial and tribulation. God was not to be seen as an enemy. Whenever they were in trouble, God was a source of salvation for them. Similarly, God is always present to help us in our time of need.

Abrabanel explains the second interpretation of this verse with a teaching of the famous sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: 'Beloved are the people of Israel before the Holy One blessed be He. Every place where people of Israel were exiled, the Shechina (the Divine Presence) was with them. When they went into exile in Egypt, the Shechina was with them... When they were exiled to Edom, the Shechina was with them.... When they were exiled to Babylonia, the Shechina was with them... So too, when they returned from exile, God was with them. God's interest was not in their suffering. Their pain and anguish were His pain and anguish.' Here we note that God empathizes with our suffering and He is with us in both our suffering and in our triumphs.

Both of these approaches bring us consolation during these trying days. In particular, as we approach Rosh Hashanah, the strength of God's saving power and His constant presence and empathy will give us the strength to repair ourselves and draw closer to His Presence.

At the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem, we offer students of all backgrounds an opportunity to engage with Jewish texts in a dynamic, inclusive, and collaborative environment. We welcome your support at www.fuchsbergcenter.org.

The Pain of Parting

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb (CY Faculty)

Text: Devarim 31:1-3

(1) So Moshe went and spoke these words to all Israel. **(2)** And he said to them, "I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I am no longer able to go and come, and the LORD has said to me, 'You shall not cross this Jordan.' **(3)** The LORD your God He will cross ahead of you; He will destroy these nations before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua he will cross ahead of you, just as the LORD has spoken..."

- The Torah tells us that Moshe 'spoke to ...ALL Israel'. Why was it important to address everyone?
- What does Moshe's age of 120 have to do with his inability to come and go or with God having told him that he will not cross the Jordan?
- For an extra challenge consider Bereshit 3:22 and 6:3. How are the foundational events at the beginning of Torah connected to Moshe's words here regarding his age?
- What are Joshua's credentials, according to Moshe's words here? What might you have expected him to add?

Commentary: Rashi Devarim 31:2

I AM NO LONGER ABLE TO GO AND COME – *Is it possible that this was because his physical strength failed him?! [However,] Scripture states (Deuteronomy 34:7) "His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated!" What then is the meaning of 'no longer able to'? It means: "I am not permitted" because the power (leadership) is being taken from me and given to Joshua. — Another explanation of 'to go and to come' is: I can no more take the lead in the matter of the Law; this teaches us that the traditions and the well-springs of wisdom were stopped up for him (cf. Sotah 13b). This is what "I am no longer able to go and come" means – because "the LORD said to me".*

- Rashi clarifies that Moshe's inability to go and come is not a matter of frailty due to his age. What is preventing him from carry on his leadership role?
- The relationship of Moshe and Joshua, the master and the disciple, has evolved over 40 years. What do you think that it looks like now, based on Rashi's reading 'I am not permitted... the power is being taken from me and given to Joshua'?

- Can you think of parallel situations in our times? How would you recommend handling them? Why?

We welcome your comments: torahsparks@uscj.org