



The Collective Conversation

*Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community*



Sefer Devarim

Parshat Vaetchanan

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Hearing the Unseen: Unlocking Success through Visualization in Parsha Vaetchanan

By Jeremy Elice

Picture Mount Sinai aflame. Smoke blocks the sun, and thunder booms so powerfully that the Israelites can see it. Envision our ancestors in the wilderness, bathed in the divine light of *Hashem's* revelation as *Moshe* strides fearlessly into the fiery summit. He'll return bearing the divine gift of the Torah of Truth.

Can you see it?

If not, don't worry. You're not alone.

For the first time since the Exodus and receiving the Decalogue, *B'nei Yisrael* are dealing with the question of faith outside of revelation.

Parshat Vaetchanan picks up from where *Devarim* concluded. Having led the Israelites to victory, *Moshe* revisits his denied entry into *Canaan*. He pleads with God. According to *Midrash*, he offers 518 prayers, yet his entreaties fall on deaf Divine ears.

If the great *Moshe* himself cannot sway God, what hope do we have? Why have faith that *Hashem* hears our prayers or will deliver us to The Promised Land?

Those are fair questions that the second-generation Israelites, on the banks of the Jordan River, ready to cross into Canaan, must have pondered, particularly after learning that *Moshe* wouldn't accompany them into the Promised Land.

For forty years, the Israelites, under *Moshe's* guidance, have wandered through the wilderness, losing faith, making mistakes, and earning Divine forgiveness. Now, about to enter *Canaan*, they stand at the precipice of the world's harsh realities. They must evolve and strengthen their faith even as *Hashem's* presence seemingly diminishes.

The generation of the Exodus witnessed the revelation at Sinai firsthand. Trembling in awe, they could not see *Hashem*, only hear His voice. Even that proved too much. They sought *Moshe* as their conduit. News of *Moshe's* impending absence leaves the next generation grappling with their faith.

How can they survive without *Moshe's* leadership and *Hashem's* protection? How can they believe when they weren't eyewitnesses to the divine revelation?

The answer is auditory visualization.

Visualization is more than a trendy hashtag. Athletes like Kobe Bryant, entertainers like Oprah and Tom Cruise, and even computer scientists turned podcasters like Lex Fridman have attributed their success to it.

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In *Parshat Vaetchanan*, *Moshe*, denied entry into *Canaan*, narrates his divine encounter to the new generation. They learn to visualize their journey from slavery to the cusp of the Promised Land through *Moshe's* words. In essence, they learn to visualize success by hearing the stories of their past and envisioning a brighter future.

The question arises: Why doesn't *Hashem* provide firsthand revelation to this generation? Because faith nurtured through sight is fleeting. Despite witnessing the Divine revelation, the first generation faltered with the Golden Calf and the sin of the spies. *Hashem* understands that hearing something deeply engrains it into our consciousness, fortifying our faith.

Parshat Vaetchanan brings us the *Shema*. "Hear, O Israel. The Lord is God, the Lord is One." With this central prayer, declaring our allegiance and belief in the one true God, we learn that our faith rests not merely in seeing but in hearing, teaching, and learning. *Vaetchanan* teaches us to cultivate our faith by hearing, actively engaging with the world, and refining our perception, for faith is ultimately seen through the ears, not the eyes.

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As the *Rebbe* comments on this parsha... "...despite the advantages of sight over hearing, there is also an advantage of hearing over sight. True, when we see something, our sense of the reality is what we see is much stronger than when we only hear about it. However, this understanding of certainty is solely due to the force of the experience rather than to any work we have done in refining our perception. Therefore its affect on us is ephemeral. Once we are no longer looking at what we saw, our experience of it begins to fade, eventually becoming weak enough to be challenged.

In contrast, the conviction of truth we arrive at indirectly engages us to a much greater degree. In the course of reaching this conviction we have to struggle with the argument posed by the world which challenges and conflict with this truth. By answering overcoming these tests, we are changed in the process."

This serves as a reminder that sight might lend a transient certainty, but true faith demands struggle, resilience, and confrontation with challenges. The real triumph is in overcoming these tests, emerging strengthened.

We do so through auditory visualization — saying the *Shema* twice daily, praying with a minyan, reading Torah in *shul*, and recounting our history for our children during the high holidays and on *Shabbat*. Auditory visualization strengthens our faith and becomes our link between the generations. Here again, what seems so new — the trend of preaching about visualizing success — the Torah was teaching three thousand years ago.

Jeremy, his wife Nicole, and their three kids, Vivienne, Madelyn, and Ethan, moved to Scarsdale last summer after 24 years in Los Angeles. They are grateful to be close to family and friends and to have found such a wonderful home at Young Israel.

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