

Vayelech - Rabbi Lerner - September 18, 2011

The Final Day of Moshe's Life

31:2: *He said to them, "I am 120 years old today, I can no longer go out and come in, for Hashem said to me that You shall not cross the Yardein."*

Rashi: On this day his days were complete - he was born on this day and he will die on this day. It was the 7th day of Adar.

Rashi: What does it mean that Moshe could not go out and come in? One might think that he was infirm, that his strength had left him; but at the very end of the Torah it says that his physical condition was unchanged - his eyesight and vigor were not diminished in any way; he had the full strength at 120 as he had at 80 at the beginning of his mission, the strength of a young man. But he no longer had permission to do things; spiritually he was forbidden from continuing as their leader; that role was given over to Yehoshuah; it was a decree from above.

This final day of Moshe's life was extraordinarily busy. When we go back to the beginning of Netzavim, it says in 29:9: *You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem...*

Rashi: Moshe brought them into a covenant on this day, the day of his death; he is inducting them into a Bris on the final day of his life. The Bris of Ki Savo, with all of the blessings and curses, was expressed by Moshe to the nation on that last day of his life as well.

31:1: What does it mean *Vayelech Moshe*, that Moshe went? In Nitzavim he began his speech to the people about the Bris, and he already was addressing the people on this final day of life; in 30:15 he is still talking to them on this final day. So where did he go? What does it mean *Vayelech Moshe*? **Ramban:** There is something unsaid here in the Torah: After Moshe finished the formal Bris, all of those who stood before him returned home to their tents; it wasn't necessary for the Torah to tell us this. Once the ceremony was complete, the program was finished and people thought it was time for them to go home. So now that they are not around anymore later in the same day, since they had first all gathered together to hear him, Moshe now felt a need to return the favor and go to the people to speak to them. He felt it was necessary for their honor, before he took leave of them forever, to "ask permission" from them to go. That is why it says *Vayelech*.

Abarbanel: he actually goes to each and every tribe and makes it known to each of them that he was about to die; it was a tremendous expression of his great love and respect for them; he was the shepherd saying a final good-bye to all of his sheep.

Rabbeinu Bachya: Moshe had tremendous humility. In Mishlei it says: *Go (Lechu) drink my wine and eat my bread*. Shlomo used this verse as a metaphor to describe Torah - bread and wine are the greatest of solid and liquid foods - they are the most important foods for the body, and Torah is the greatest "food" for the soul - it quenches like no other. It says *Lechu* - you have to go and search it out. That is why it says here *Vayelech*: Moshe is the greatest teacher - first the people came to him for the Bris convocation in the camp of the Leviyim. Now Moshe is going into their camp to do advanced menachem aveilus, comfort to the mourners who will soon lose Moshe - he is comforting them about his impending death. He also now has to build up Yehoshuah in their eyes since he will be replacing Moshe as the new leader. He didn't want to do this when they were all gathered before him being invoked into a formal Bris. When it had to do with the Bris, with God's business, they came to him. But in his great humility, he went to all of them to say good-bye since this was his personal business. He had no arrogance, he was not

caught up in the trappings of power; he went to all of them to comfort them, telling them that they will be in good hands with Yehoshuah as a leader.

31:2: **Ibn Ezra**: Moshe was saying that he can no longer lead them in battle; even if he did not die now, he would be of no further value to them in the upcoming battles; he no longer had the strength for battle. He was saying that they don't really need him anymore because they have Yehoshuah, and Hashem will be behind him for all the upcoming battles. Hashem will go before them to destroy the enemy, and they have a very capable leader in Yehoshuah; they will do to the nations of Canaan as God did against Sichon and Og. They should not be afraid of them; Hashem will not abandon His people.

If Moshe is saying that he no longer has the strength to lead, how does the Ibn Ezra then understand the pasuk at the end of the Torah that says Moshe's strength was undiminished?

Abarbanel: Moshe told the people he was 120 years old; they were wonderful years; his eyesight and vigor were still intact; but he cannot delude himself and think that he will remain this way for always; he is already 120 and while he is currently healthy, it is of no doubt to him that something has to change in the future, and it can happen quickly. And then at that time, he might not be able to organize a smooth transition. Even though he can lead now, he won't be able to do this in the future. So these two pasukim don't contradict each other. He currently is strong and healthy, but it will change at some point in the future.

Rav Hirsch: it is not just Moshe's insecurity about the future. His health was a special gift from God lasting for the tenure of his leadership. Now he can only expect the natural process to take over since he will no longer be leading the people. He could not complain that he did not have the strength. God fulfilled the promise of keeping Moshe healthy while in he was in power; he was blessed with miraculous strength that did not diminish while in his job; but from here on, nature would take over and he would not be able to continue as the leader.

Netziv: Why does Moshe have to "go" - Vayelech? Until this point, when Moshe wanted to address the people, Moshe could stand in one place and his voice could be heard throughout the entire camp of Israel - his booming voice was strengthened by the shechina which was talking through his throat and could be heard by everyone throughout the camp. The oral Torah could be heard by everyone clearly. The pasuk that says Moshe would speak and Hashem would answer with a voice (*Moshe Yedabeir VeHashem Ya'anenu Bakol*) really means that Hashem made Moshe's voice raised to an amplified level so that all could hear whenever Moshe was transmitting any part of the Torah, oral or written, to the people. But now when he is near the end of his life, there was a slow dimming of the power of his voice; his words were no longer heard by all from one place. So, for the first time, he had to go from tribe to tribe to address them so that they all could hear. Even though it was still very important information, he had to go out to each of them in order to be heard.

Another reason (? **Oznayim LaTorah**): he was no longer explaining the mitzvos. Now it was all personal things that Moshe was saying, so there was no reason for Hashem to amplify his voice - Hashem would only do that when it was Divrei Torah; at those times there was a miraculous amplification of his voice. But now it was Moshe speaking in a natural voice and he does it from tent to tent because of his love of the people.

Kli Yakar: Moshe needed to make the point clear why he was no longer allowed to go out - Moshe was afraid that the people might not believe it was from Hashem - so to prove it to the people, Moshe went out to all of the people, the entire length and breadth of the nation, on the last day of his life, running a marathon; it was the busiest day of his life and he demonstrated

tremendous vigor; and when he says he cannot continue, it was not because of a lack of physical ability; it was only because God commanded him.

Kli Yakar: another reason he went out to the people was that as he was about to die he wanted to urge the people to do Teshuva one final time; it is his last opportunity to have them repent and adhere to God's will. He went out from tent to tent, speaking from the heart to each and every person, pleading with them to avoid sin, to do Teshuva, to listen to Hashem.

Kli Yakar: Finally, he was going from tent to tent to bring them all together; the purpose was to get rid of dissension and bring Achdus. It was a journey of shalom. This is the only mitzvah that we are ordered to chase after - the pursuit of peace, *rodeif shalom*. He pleaded with all of them to be responsible for each other, to bring peace between brother and brother, which would in turn bring peace between man and Hashem. Hashem would not make peace with the people unless they made peace with each other. He begged them to stop the squabbling and back-stabbing.

31:9: Moshe wrote the Torah and handed it over to the Kohanim. What does this mean?

Ramban: he wrote the entire Torah, from Berieshis to the end of Zos Habrachah, to the last words "*Le'inei Bnei Yisrael*" - there is a machlokes about who wrote the last 8 pasukim of the Torah. The Ramban says that Moshe wrote every single letter of the Torah, that it had to be completely written by Moshe, all on the last day of his life.

Abarbanel: the Ramban is incorrect. Moshe here did not write the first four books now, nor did he write the very end of the Torah - that was written by Yehoshuah. He now wrote *just* Sefer Devarim, which were his own words, spoken by himself on his own initiative, but was to be incorporated into the Torah as per Hashem. The first four seforim were written beforehand.