

## Parsha Vayelekh

Deuteronomy 31.1-31:30

D'var Torah, September 15, 2018, by Harry Hirsch

For most of the year we have been reading about the relationships between G-d and Moses, and between G-d and the Israelites. I'm going to talk about a specific relationship but first, let's learn about the high drama in our parsha.

We find Moses informing the Israelites that he has reached 120 years of age and can no longer be active; and that G-d told him he cannot cross into Israel.

But for the last few weeks we have been reading the speeches ably delivered by Moses to the Israelites in which he taught them Torah. He's been a very active person. So is Moses really no longer able to be an active person?

According to Rashi, Moses was really saying that he was no longer *allowed* to be active. His authority had been taken from him and given to Joshua. In other words, it was time for new leadership.

Perhaps to ease the concerns of the Israelites, Moses also told them that G-d would go into Israel before the Israelites and wipe out the nations that stood in the way. Then Joshua would lead the Israelites across the Jordan into Israel.

G-d tells Moses that time is drawing near for him to die. He meets with Moses and Joshua in the Tent of Meeting to give them direction. G-d appears to them in a pillar of cloud at the entrance. G-d tells Moses that because he is about to die, when the Israelites go into Israel He expects them to break the covenant by worshipping idols, etc., and therefore they would experience great hardships. G-d instructs Moses to write down a poem that G-d will give him and teach it to the people of Israel," in order that this poem may be My witness against the people

of Israel." We are told that Moses wrote it down that day and taught it to the Israelites.

Then we are told that Moses wrote down the Teaching, i.e., the Torah, the law that he had been teaching the Israelites for several weeks. Moses told the Levites to place the book of teaching in the Ark of the Covenant. Then Moses assembled the elders and officials of the tribes to teach them the Torah and the poem.

The parsha, the shortest one in the Torah, ends as Moses recites the poem to the whole congregation of Israel. We will read it in next week's parsha.

Of course this Shabbat is known as "Shabbat Shuvah." It occurs when we are engaged in reflection about our actions and inactions during the year just ended. It is a time for repentance, prayer and charity. It is also a time for each of us to think about our relationship with G-d, specifically our ability to communicate with Him through prayer.

We have read many times how Moses has had a long relationship with G-d with lots of ups and downs. We have also observed that the relationship between G-d and the Israelites has been, shall we say, under construction.

For me, prayer has been an ongoing project for a long time. Growing up in a small town with few Jews meant that my family had to be purposeful about seeking out synagogue activity and participation due to the required travel. I had a bar mitzvah and was confirmed. But I was not really comfortable about being in a synagogue service until I came back to Richmond after military service and raised a family in this synagogue. But being comfortable during a service in shul does not mean that I was experiencing truly meaningful prayer.

That did not occur for me until years later when I was faced with a life-changing personal challenge that caused me to turn to G-d for comfort, help and guidance. I began to pray often by myself and I began to slowly develop a relationship with

G-d that I had never had. Having developed that relationship, I was able to experience truly meaningful prayer. It did not happen every time I prayed and the same is true today. But I learned to know what it means to be in meaningful prayer. As a result, I have this feeling that when I want to talk to G-d I know that I can do it because of our relationship. In hindsight, the lesson I learned is a simple one, familiar to all of us. I was finally able to reach meaningful prayer because I decided to work on creating a relationship with G-d. I had the ability to do that all along. It was totally up to me. I just did not know it until faced with that challenge.

Have you ever given thought about the context in which you pray to G-d? Do you have an ongoing relationship with G-d? Does your prayer today seem like an uncomfortable action, one that does not feel natural to you? Or is your prayer part of a relationship between you and the Almighty that often gives you a sense of warmth and comfort? Perhaps it's something for you to think about during this time of reflection.

May each of us and our family members be written in the Book of Life for another year with a renewed sense of spirituality, good health and happiness.

Shabbat Shalom

L'Shana Tovah