Parashas Netsavim - Va-Yeilech

Parsha Summary

Moshe gathers the entire people - every single Jew, men, women and children, from the tribal leaders, to water carriers and wood coppers - to enter into a covenant with God. Moshe notes how they finally arrived at the border of the Land promised to their fathers, and now they have a responsibility to God and to each other to remain faithful, to stamp out any root of idolatry before it festers. Otherwise, God will send destruction as He did for Sedom. You will then remember this covenant and return to God, at which point He will gather you back, cause you to prosper in the land promised to your forefathers, and take vengeance on your enemies. “This mitzvah” is not distant from you, in the sky or across the sea, “but is very close to you, in your mouths and hearts to perform,” and if you follow in God’s voice and teachings you will be blessed and it will be good for you. Choose life by listening to God’s voice and cleaving to Him, because He is your life and longevity in that land sworn to your fathers.

Moshe reminded the nation of the miracles they saw and the miracles God will do for them and for Yehoshua who will be guided by God in conquering the land. Moshe commanded that at the Sukkos holiday after a Shemittah cycle, the nation should gather to hear the Torah read so that everyone will learn and fear God. Then God appeared in a cloud and said to Moshe that he will die, and the nation will stray, so you must write this song as a testament for when the nation will face troubles in the land. Moshe wrote and taught the song and gave the Torah to the Levites

Classic Questions

What was the meaning of this extra covenant, and why stress that every single Jew attended?

- **Rashi:** [this was an oath of eternal loyalty] because God swore to the forefathers that He would never abandon Israel for another nation, Israel must likely be eternally loyal
- **Bechor Shor**: this was the last time that the nation would ever be in one place, before dispersing amongst the tribe’s respective portions in the Land that they would enter
- **Ramban**: to accept the complete Torah with its elaboration (of Sefer Devarim)
- **Ohr haChayim**: only at this point would every Jew be responsible for one another
    - Each person can only be responsible according to his/her personal influence

How could future generations be obligated by an oath of their ancestors?

- **Chazal**: the souls of all future children of Israel and converts to Israel were present
- **Rabbeinu Bachayei**: this oath became ingrained within the people, so it would also be within their biological descendents, just as branches are nourished from roots
- **R. Yizchak Aramah**: the oath is symbolic of the fact that Israel seeks to follow God
- **Abarbanel**: just as someone who inherits property from their ancestors also inherits any liens or debts of others who have claims to the property, so too the people of Israel made themselves and their progeny indebted to God through this covenant
- **Maharal (Netzah Yisrael 11**): the covenant is made with the nation, not any individual, and the national identity of Israel remains immortal
- **Malbim**: the covenant is more privilege than obligation, and God doesn’t need consent

What is “this mitzvah” which is referred to as being “very close, in your mouths and hearts”?

- **Rashi, Chazal**: the study of Torah (particularly, studying its depth)
- **Ramban, Seforno**: the mitzvah of repentance (**Ramban**: or all the mitzvos as a whole)
    - **Rambam** holds that the verses about repentance are promises, not commands (the source for this mitzvah is instead "they admit their wrongs", (Bamidbar 5:7)
        - **Ramban** notes that this whole section discusses promises for the future that have yet to be fulfilled, but included in the promises is this command
    - **R. Ahron Kotler**: the two opinions agree; the verse refers to returning to God by studying His Torah as a way to repair the relationship with Him
- **Netziv**: this refers to repentance done in exile outside the land, which will inspire many individuals to move to the land before the final ingathering of exiles

Where did Moshe "go" and what is the significance of his 'going'?

- **Gemara** (Sotah 13b): this refers to Torah wisdom being closed to him
- **Targum Yonasan**: to the mishkan
- **Ibn Ezra, Ramban**: he walked from the Levite Camp to the Israelite Camp, to say 'goodbye', strengthen them regarding Yehoshua, and/or to bless them
- **Chizkuni**: he went from tribe to tribe, because he was no longer the leader of the whole nation who could gather them together as before
- **Seforno**: he went to strengthen himself to address the nation
- **Ohr HaChaim**: Moshe's spirit began to depart to seek out its final resting place
- **Netziv**: he had to travel closer to the people because he used to have a miraculous way of having every person hear his voice, which was now taken away
- **R. Hirsch**: this emphasizes that Moshe didn't use the trumpets out of humility
- **Kli Yakar**: he walked all around the camp to show that he still had his full strength
- **Chassidic works**: Moshe went from being a living person into the hearts of every Jew

Important "Chazal"s and "Rashi"s

- Canaanim came to join Israel, and Moshe appointed them as water-carriers and wood-choppers, to be converts who should not marry in to Israel (cf. Yevamos 79a)
- The covenant at Sinai includes all future generations and future mitzvos such as reading the Megillah (Shevuot 29a)
- The poison/imprint of [Adam's sin] introduced by the serpent was removed at Sinai, and this is true even for future converts to Judaism (Shabbat 146a)
- R. Akiva: the ten tribes have no portion in the world to come | R. Shimon: they may return if they repent | R. Eliezer: they will be returned (Sanhedrin 110b)
- Jews were not responsible for their fellow's [hidden] sins until crossing the Jordan (San. 43b)
- The Divine Presence accompanies Israel in exile and will return with them (Megillah 29a)
- We do not rely on heavenly voices for halachic decisions (Bava Metzia 59b)
- At Hakhel, men come to learn, women to listen, and children come only to reward those who bring them (Chagigah 3a)