

BS"D Parashat Ki Tavo 5782

Moshe's Final Days

It was common knowledge that these were the final days on earth of the greatest Rav who would ever live, of the only human being to achieve such an intense degree of closeness to the ultimate first cause of all that exists. The feelings of love and longing for the beloved Moshe swelled in the hearts of all the nation.

Over the course of forty years, Moshe had taken the people of Israel from a deprived existence and from the depraved society in Egypt and had turned them into God's chosen people. A sense of anticipation and pride could be felt, for soon Moshe would be delivering his synopsis of the past and his words of encouragement to the nation to be stout of heart in the future when they would enter Eretz Yisrael.

Moshe ascends the specially constructed platform from which he could see the entire people and be seen and heard by them:

These are the words which Moshe said to all Israel in Trans-Jordan, in the desert, in the wilderness across from Suf, between Paran and Tefel, and Lavan and Chatzeirot, and Di Zahav

Rashi explains that the names of all the places mentioned in this verse allude to the worst sins perpetrated by the nation

during their forty years in the desert.

Moshe alludes to the sin of the golden calf, and a sense of uneasiness passes over the people as they question why Moshe is bringing up this old, forgotten matter. They want him to let bygones be bygones, especially since they had had nothing to do with it.

When Moshe refers to the incessant complaints and threats to return to Egypt during their forty-year journey, the feeling of uneasiness turns to consternation. This is not the way a leader bids farewell to his nation.

When Moshe recounts the sins perpetrated at Baal Pe'or and with the Midianite women, the consternation turns to outright anger.

As Moshe goes on with his “sin count,” the anger turns to feelings of great shame; because it becomes clear to all that Moshe simply does not like the nation he was commanded to lead. Indeed, it seems that Moshe’s soliloquy is an expression of his great disappointment with the people, even bordering on feelings of disdain.

To be hated by Moshe, the agent of HaShem in this world, must be a reflection of HaShem's feelings toward Am Yisrael. This repudiation that we, as a nation, failed in HaShem's expectations will be indelibly engraved on the Jewish consciousness for all time.

Suddenly Moshe stops, looks out at the nation and announces:

The Lord, God of your fathers, may He increase you a thousand-fold and bless you as He has said to you.

A sense of bewilderment grips the assembled: "If Moshe dislikes us so much, why is he blessing us?"

Answer:

The Midrash informs us that Moshe beseeched HaShem 515 times to rescind His decree banning him from entering the western side of Eretz Yisrael, beyond the Jordan River. In parashat Pinchas, a change overtakes Moshe. He is reconciled to the inevitable and prays to HaShem to appoint a suitable leader who will guide the nation in the liberation of the Holy Land. What transpired in parashat Pinchas that moved Moshe from hoping that HaShem might yet rescind the decree to accepting the bitter reality that he would not enter Eretz Yisrael?

Parashat Balak closes with the unfortunate episode of Zimri ben Salu, leader of the tribe of Shimon, who publicly violated the Torah's prohibition regarding conjugal relations with non-Jews. In the wake of his misconduct and that of others in the Israelite camp, a plague broke out which threatened to decimate the entire nation.

Pinchas runs to Moshe, begging him to act. However, Moshe stands by helplessly while simultaneously encouraging Pinchas to take the initiative to erase the sin of Zimri. Pinchas enters Zimri's tent and thrusts a spear into him and his partner, thereby stopping the plague which had fallen upon the people.

What went through Moshe's mind at that moment?

Moshe suddenly recalls that forty years earlier, when he had witnessed an Egyptian task master beating a single Jew, he hadn't hesitated to come to the defense of the Jew and to kill the Egyptian. However, now when the entire Jewish nation is being threatened by Zimri's act, the natural reaction of forty years ago is no longer there.

At that moment, Moshe realizes that the task of killing Zimri

was his alone and that the whole incident had happened to prove to himself that he had changed in the forty years of leading the nation. The spontaneity necessary for the leader to make difficult and often painful decisions, in the fulfillment of HaShem's desire to grant Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish nation, is no longer there in the man Moshe.

At that moment, Moshe prays to HaShem to appoint a successor who will lead the people in difficult moments, just as Moshe could have done forty years earlier had the Jews entered the land immediately after leaving Egypt.

As he looks out over the nation, Moshe enumerates the sins which caused their sojourn in the desert to be prolonged from eleven days to forty years. It was this prolongation that stripped Moshe of his former spontaneity, necessitating the appointment of a new leader who would have to face the task of destroying hundreds of thousands (millions?) of Canaanites unwilling to give up their hold on the Holy Land.

However, as Moshe relates the historical incidents and their effect upon his personal being, he looks out over what he has actually accomplished. Standing in front of him is a nation of millions of God-fearing men, women and children who would lay the groundwork for Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael for all time – rabbis, judges, tribal leaders, fathers and mothers who would guide the nation in their future as God's chosen people.

At that moment, Moshe is consumed with love for each and every Jew, and he calls out:

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The Lord, God of your fathers, may He increase you a thousand-fold and bless you as He has said to you.

At that moment, it is clear to everyone that this is Moshe's greatest legacy – a song of love never before heard between a leader and his people.

In effect, Moshe is saying that they will forever be the chosen people of HaShem, Whose love for every Jew is eternal because of the special segula (charm) inherent in the Jewish soul. This special segula guarantees that no matter how far we might stray from HaShem's Torah because of circumstances, we will always return to our "Beloved" as stated in the Song of Songs.

The prophet Isaiah (60:8) describes the unique segula of the Jewish nation. In that verse, HaShem ponders the future return of His children to Eretz Yisrael and asks:

: אַתָּה תֹּאמֶר אֶל-בָּנָי יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתָּה תֹּאמֶר אֶל-בָּנָי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Who are these who (return to Eretz Yisrael), as a fleeting cloud and as doves to their coves?

What is the difference between a fleeting cloud and flying doves?

A cloud does not possess the ability of voluntary motion; it is driven in all directions by the force of the wind. In contrast, a dove flies by its own inner force. It navigates according to its intuitive feeling, always returning to the place of its origin.

This is what Moshe was telling the Jewish nation. There will be Jews who will come home and return to HaShem because of external forces (anti-Semitism). However, HaShem – the Creator of all human souls – knows the inherent connection between the Jewish soul and Himself. No matter what the conditions are and how far we might stray, the authentic Jewish nation will always return to its source like a dove to its cove.

The Jewish nation in Eretz Yisrael is at this very moment engaged in a war for survival. In a wider sense, it is for the survival of the human spirit. Islam, which is the most debased and corrupt of all beliefs, seeks to spin its cutthroat web around all mankind; but it is prevented, to a great degree, by the seven million Jews in Eretz Yisrael.

This year, thousands of new olim will arrive from North America, France and many other places of our exile. They come as doves returning to their coves – not like clouds driven here by anti-Semitism but as free people who have chosen to return to their source.

Of the millions of Jews who have already returned, a great many have the option to leave this land for more tranquil surroundings. Yet they stay, which in a sense is equal to having a new mitzva of aliya every day.

Moshe's love for Am Yisrael reflects the love of HaShem for the children of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. But even among children, there are those who are more devoted to their parents than others. There are children who are like clouds, driven to help their parents because of external forces. There are those who, like doves, are devoted because of their love for their parents. And then there are children who are neither like clouds nor doves, but like stones embedded in their surroundings who cannot be moved by the wind nor by their inner selves.

At the onset of this new year, let us all pray for the peace of Yerushalayim, of Eretz Yisrael, for the dedicated Jews in the Holy Land, for Am Yisrael wherever they may be, and for the welfare of every beloved soldier of Tzahal who is the vessel through which HaShem will punish the wicked and usher in the Mashiach.

Ketiva va chatima tova. May we all be inscribed in HaShem's Book of Life for good health, and for the desire and ability

to observe His Torah.

Shabbat Shalom

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