

## **Parashat Wayyelekh**

## **פָּרָשַׁת וַיְלֹךְ**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

*Parashat Wayyelekh* (Deut. 31:1-30) contains the following *sidrot*:

*Hundred-and-Sixty-Fourth Sidra'* (continued from the previous *parasha*), Joshua inaugurated as the new leader, and the reading of the entire Torah on the Year of Release;

*Hundred-and-Sixty-Fifth Sidra'*, the final touches.

### **ANALYSIS:**

*Hundred-and-Sixty-Fourth Sidra'* (Deut. 31:1-13 continued from the previous *parasha*): Joshua inaugurated as the new leader, and the reading of the entire Torah on the Year of Release.

Moses is now a hundred and twenty years old, and announces to all Israel that he will no longer be able to lead them since YHWH will not permit him to cross over the Jordan. However, Joshua will lead them, and YHWH will cross over before them in order to destroy the nations of the Land so that they, the Israelites, may dispossess them as YHWH had promised. YHWH will destroy the nations of the Land as He destroyed Sihon and 'Og, the kings of the Amorites. However, they must, "*Be strong and courageous, do not fear and do not be terrified before them; for YHWH your God He is the One who goes with you, He will not fail you and He will not abandon you.*" (Deut. 31:6) Moses then summons Joshua and commands him before the eyes of all Israel to be strong and courageous since it is he, who will lead the people into the Land, and once the Land has been conquered, it is he who will be responsible for allotting to the people their landed inheritance.

*"And Moses wrote this Torah, and gave it to the kohanim the sons of Levi, those carrying, the Ark of the Covenant of YHWH; and to all the elders of Israel."* (Deut. 31:9) During the Year of Release (the Sabbatical Year) - the seventh year of the agricultural cycle - at the time of the Pilgrimage Festival of *Sukkoth* [Booths], when all Israel has come to be seen before YHWH at the place that He shall choose, the Torah is to be read before all Israel; in their ears. The entire nation, men and women, including the young ones and the Sojourner must assemble to hear the reading of the Torah so that they will learn, observe, and keep all the words of the Torah and revere YHWH our God. *"And their children that do not know they shall hear and learn, to revere YHWH your God; all the days that you live on the soil, that you are passing over the Jordan to possess."* (Deut. 31: 13)

*Hundred-and-Sixty-Fifth Sidra'* (Deut. 31:14-30): The final touches.

YHWH tells Moses that the day of his death is soon approaching. Moses is to call Joshua and both of them are to present themselves at the Tent of Appointed Times. Moses and Joshua do as YHWH commanded, stationing themselves at the Tent of Appointed Times, where YHWH is seen at its entrance in a column of cloud. There YHWH informs Moses that he is about to lie with his fathers and in time to come the people will whore after the gods of the foreigner of the Land; they will abandon Him and violate the Covenant between Him and them. On the day that we - Israel - violate the Covenant, YHWH's anger will flare up against us; He will abandon us just as we abandoned Him, hiding His face, and withdrawing His protection, thus enabling many ills

and troubles to befall us. When these ills and troubles come upon us, we will realize that they befall us because God is no longer in our midst. However, on the day of our troubles He will continue to hide His face from us because of all the evil that we have done by turning to other gods. *"And now write for yourselves this song, teach it to the Children of Israel put it in their mouths; in order that this song shall be for Me as a witness against the Children of Israel."* (Deut. 31:19) YHWH tells Moses that in years to come when the needs of the people have been satisfied by the bounty of the land, they will grow complacent, turn to other gods, and serve them, thus despising YHWH and breaking His Covenant. *"And it shall be when many ills and troubles befall them, then this song shall answer before them as a witness, for it shall not be forgotten from the mouths of their seed; for I know their intentions that they are formulating today, even as I bring them, into the land about which I swore."* (Deut. 31:21) On that same day, Moses wrote down the song and taught it to the Children of Israel. YHWH then commands Joshua son of Nun to be strong and courageous since he is about to lead the Children of Israel into the land that He swore to them; and YHWH will be with him! *"And it was when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this Torah in a book; till their completion."* (Deut. 31:24) Moses then commands the Levites - those in charge of carrying the Ark of the Covenant of YHWH - to take the Book of the Torah that Moses had just completed writing and place it beside the Ark of the Covenant, as a witness against them. Moses comments that all the time that he has known them they have been a rebellious and stiff-necked people, if they behave this way while he is alive, then he can only imagine how they will behave after his death! Moses assembles the tribal elders and officials, and tells them the words of the song, calling the heavens and the earth to act as witnesses against them, for Moses knows how they will be after his death, turning to idol-worship and going astray from the Way, angering YHWH and thus causing evil to befall them in the end days! *"And Moses spoke in the ears of all the assembly of Israel, the words of this song; until their completion."* (Deut. 31:30)

### **TEACHINGS OF HAKHAM REKHAVI:**

*Wash make clean, put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes; cease to do evil. Learn to do well seek justice relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now please and let us reason together says YHWH; even if your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow, even if they be red like crimson they shall be as wool. If you be willing and obedient.* (Isa. 1:16-19)

There is holiness of place - the *Mishkan*, holiness of time - i.e. the Shabbath, and there is holiness of people. Holiness of time is intrinsic, holiness of place is intrinsic while the place is in physical existence, but holiness of person is dependant upon the spiritual state and the actions of the individual that affect that state of holiness. Israel is to be a holy people dedicated to the Ways of YHWH, *"Holy you shall be; because holy, am I YHWH your God."* (Lev. 19:2) We are a nation set apart for holiness and we achieve holiness by fulfilling both the ethical/moral and cultic/ritual *mitzwoth* [divine commandments] of the Torah in equilibrium. The ethical/moral *mitzwoth* are not superior to the cultic/ritual *mitzwoth*, neither is the inverse true, for YHWH commanded both they are two halves of the same whole. To observe His Ways is analogous to breathing, we cannot remain alive without breathing, and we cannot breathe without both inhaling and exhaling. To survive we need His Torah, and just as with breathing we do not have the luxury to choose between only inhaling or only exhaling, so with His Torah we do not

have the privilege to choose between keeping the ethical/moral *mishwoth* only or the cultic/ritual *mishwoth*!

Holiness is essentially good. To be holy one has to be righteous. Righteousness is not a concept that is unattainable, but is something quite achievable and is in reach of every human being. Righteousness includes not only the areas that we may consider as being part of justice but other areas of morality as well. The Hebrew *Sedek* [righteousness] conveys a principle, which includes the notions of right and just actions, truth, and to do and say what is correct, it is the root of the Hebrew word for charity and it therefore means to show generosity and to be kind and caring. To be a *Saddik* [righteous person], is to be someone who has mastered these principles.

King Solomon wisely said, "*If they sin against You for there is no human who does not sin*" (1Kings 8:46) – no human being is without sin! Therefore, we all sin and to sin does not necessarily mean to be in outright defiance of the Torah. Sometimes we sin inadvertently and without even realizing, sin can also be a weakness in the moment or simple forgetfulness. Thus, we do not sin because we are sinners, but rather we are sinners because we sin!

The Torah identifies three levels of sin, "*all the iniquities* [*עֵינָיוֹת*] *of the Children of Israel, and all their transgressions* [*עַבְרָוֹת*] *for all their sins* [*אַפְלָגָה*]" (Lev. 16:21) and "*bearing iniquity* [*עֵינָיוֹת*] *and transgression* [*עַבְרָוֹת*] *and sin* [*אַפְלָגָה*]" (Ex. 34:7).

### ***Het'* - [*אֶתֶּן* - sin]**

The least deviant form of sin is known as *het'*. The word *het'* simply means sin, and is derived from the root *אֶתֶּן* which meaning to miss, and is used for an arrow that misses its target. It is therefore failure to follow the correct path, to stumble along the way, to be diverted from YHWH or even to be separated from Him. *Het'* is therefore applicable to the unavoidable in addition to the unintentional. An example of unavoidable sin is impurity caused by childbirth, where the woman is required to present a sin-offering at the Temple once she becomes pure (see Leviticus 12:6-8). Unintentional sin is when you wake up on a Shabbath morning, a bit disorientated, go into your kitchen and turn your kettle on - as you would do during the week - suddenly you realize that it's the Shabbath! Your sin was unintentional and without malice.

### ***Awon* - [*עֲוֹנוֹת* - iniquity]**

*Awon* is derived from the root *עָוָה* meaning bend, twist. It is a sin brought about by uncontrollable emotions and desires. It refers to someone whose course in life is bent and twisted, turning away from the pursuit of good; their temperament impels them to do wrong. An *awon* is committed knowingly, but not in direct defiance of YHWH. Sexual sins, such as adultery and incest, are classified by the Torah as forms of *awon*, as is idolatry, which is portrayed as being comparable to adultery. In the Book of Hoshea we find the concept of YHWH being the loving husband of Israel, a concept which emphasises the fact that idolatry is a form of disloyalty to YHWH, and is therefore tantamount to adultery.

### ***Pesha'* - [*עַבְרָה* - transgression]**

The wickedest form of sin is *Pesha'* which means rebellion. It is therefore an intentional sin committed in open defiance of YHWH. It refers to an attitude of mind through which an individual sets himself up as the sole judge of his own actions. Right

becomes what pleases this type of individual and wrong is anything that stands in their way. An example of *pesha'* is stealing an item that has been left in your custody and denying that you stole it.

## **Repentance**

We learn from Isaiah 1:16-19 that the righteous person is not someone who refrains from doing wrong and evil towards their fellow man, but someone who actively seeks the good and welfare of others. Being a righteous person is thus not a passive undertaking but an active endeavour. True repentance is therefore a matter of trying to restore the balance. Our experiences are the raw building blocks of our lives; they are to be internalized and learnt from - for they make us who we are. A fool is therefore someone who does not learn from their experiences. As previously noted, King Solomon insinuated that we all sin, i.e. miss the mark, if we are all guilty of sin then surely there must be a way to make amends for our mistakes. When we do wrong according to the Torah, and therefore in the eyes of YHWH, the only true option left open to us is repentance.

The ability to repent and redress the wrongs we have done is a great gift bestowed upon us by YHWH:

*"If My people that upon them My name is called shall humble themselves and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from the heavens, and I will forgive their sin." (2 Chron. 7:14)*

*"And in turning back the wicked man from his wickedness that he has done, and does judgment and righteousness [good works]; he shall save his soul/life force alive. Because he sees and turns back, from all his transgressions that he had done; his life he shall live he shall not die." (Ezek. 18:27-28)*

If we follow these seven steps to repentance with an earnest and true heart then YHWH will grant us reprieve.

- 1.** Acknowledge the wrong done.
- 2.** The feeling of guilt and remorse for what has been done.
- 3.** The resolution never to do it again.
- 4.** The hatred of the deed in one's self and in others.
- 5.** Ask for forgiveness from the person that has been wronged.
- 6.** Correct the wrong committed according to the instructions of the Torah, if the wrong cannot be corrected then some form of penance.

(At this stage, when the Temple was still standing, the penitent would bring the relative sacrifice to the altar. However, since the Temple is no longer standing it is now impossible for us to bring sacrifices, therefore how can we ever make full atonement for our sins if we can no longer offer our sin-offerings and guilt-offerings? The answer to this question can be found in the pages of the Mikra',

*"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, God, You will not despise!"* (Psalm 51:19) and, *"For I desire loving-kindness and not sacrifice; and knowledge of God rather than ascent-offerings."* (Hosea 6:6)

## **7. Ask YHWH for forgiveness.**

The last point can only be truly undertaken once all the other points have been accomplished, because without them has true repentance to YHWH been really made?

The Book of Koheleth [Ecclesiastes] states, *"But remember your Creator, in days of your youth; while that the evil days come not, nor the years arrive, that you shall say, I have no pleasure in them."* (Koheleth 12:1) Koheleth is here saying that repentance should not be postponed but made immediately. For repentance made in one's youth whilst we still have the ability to sin, is more righteous than repentance made in old age, when we no longer have the capability of repeating our sins and when our desires have abated and the allure of sin no longer entice us.