

פרשיות נצבים – וילך

OVERVIEW

Moshe was determined to use the approach of collective responsibility as an incentive to strengthen the national conscience. This would in no way diminish the responsibility of the individual to do his share in upholding the supreme rule of G-d's Torah. By the same token the benefit of divine mercy and protective intervention is enjoyed by the community and individual alike.

COMMENTARY

אתם נצבים: you who are present - the nation which will never, perish! Generation follows upon generation, leaders succeed one another, but the nation remains – (**מצבה**, the pillar that stands upright).

And yet - Moshe's uneasiness persists, he fears for a recurrence of the tragic events in the desert. Who will be the Moshe of the future? Will the people commit the blunders of their ancestors and invoke G-d's anger (29:26-27) that will make exile inevitable? (The large **ל** in the word **וישלכם** gives us a clue as to the interpretation of the word meaning "He casts them (into another land)": your exodus into exile is not tantamount to a break of your bond with G-d, it is not the end. It will serve as a lesson to you taught by the school of the Galut.

"The hidden Matters"

The future is cloaked in darkness and uncertainty. Moshe assures his people: "The hidden matters belong to G-d; but that which has been revealed is ours and our children's forever: to carry out all the words of His teaching" (29:28).

No one has a right to despair regardless of circumstances or events that seem incomprehensible. G-d alone knows the future. Where would be the incentive for action, the initiative to create and to build, if man knew what awaits him, turning him into a prisoner of the future? For us, one truth and

one truth only, is clear and accessible: The Word revealed by G-d and our loyalty towards G-d and His Torah law. Everything else is pure speculation.

The three words **לנו ולבנינו עד** feature eleven dots above their letters which, according to Rashi, point to the first eleven years following the entry in the land during which the concept of collective responsibility stressed by Moshe did not yet take hold among the people. The full involvement of the people actually began with the ceremony and proclamation at Ebal and Gerizim.

Heaven and Earth, Life and Death

During the final days of his life Moshe never ceased to draw the nation's attention to the decisive importance of obedience to G-d and His law. Is it really so difficult to remain loyal to G-d, so difficult to submit to the divine rule? "For this commandment that I command you today is not beyond your understanding, not is it far away" (30:11). The knowledge transmitted by the Torah law is not in the realm of the supernatural ("for it is not in heaven"). The purity and perfection the Torah desires to instill in us are not conditioned by time, climate or geographical location ("neither is it beyond the sea so that you could say, who will bring it to us" (30:13)... "For the Word is incredibly close to you" (30:14)).

G-d creator of your whole being, knows the needs of your moral and physical organism. "See, I have set before you life and good and also death and evil" (30:15). Your national and individual existence, your happiness, the highest potential of your inner self will always depend on the choice which you make. Freedom of will, the essence of Jewish philosophy, is postulated in these mighty verses. The choice is before you, nothing infringes on this divinely bestowed privilege. Everything is within your reach, your greatness and your decline, your light and your darkness.

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We live and yet we are told to "choose" life. For there is nothing in common between the life of loyalty to G-d and His Torah and the life of pure materialism and earthly pleasure. Life lived in the light of Torah encompasses every aspect of the human existence. The free choice of such life is a lasting act of love, "to love G-d, your G-d" (30:20). In the free decision to recognize G-d as the supreme Ruler, the mercy of heaven and the human spirit meet the boundless majesty of divine power and the humble and therefore magnificent effort of man.

Moshe and Joshua

"I am one hundred and twenty years old today; I will no longer be able to guide you..." (31:2). Thus spoke the most humble of men. It would be an offense to Moshe's modesty and simplicity to attribute the term "incomparable" to his leadership, and yet we are told "none like Moshe ever rose up in Israel".

One cannot read the final chapters of the last Book of the Pentateuch without deep emotion. The man Moshe stands before us, intensely alive, the echo of his words resounding through the millennia. He transfers his authority to his faithful disciple Joshua who proves his superb qualification in numerous difficult situations.

Public-Reading-of the Torah

A final commandment. It concerns a special event that is to recur at seven-year intervals: the public reading of the Torah which Moshe entrusted to his people, a reading performed by the king every seventh Succot upon the conclusion of the Sabbath-year. Its purpose is to proclaim anew the nation's awareness that its continued existence is secured solely by its faithful adherence to the Word of G-d.

In contrast to the other festivals when only the men were obligated to make the pilgrimage, the national assembly of the

seventh year united members and segments of the people everywhere in the land. Here, through the mouth of its chief representative, the nation would renew its vow "to hear and to learn and to fear G-d, your G-d".

Farewell

The transfer of leadership is effected ceremoniously. G-d's Presence in the form of a pillar of cloud bestows a unique quality on this timeless moment. It is G-d Himself Who inaugurates Moshe's successor whose personality appears to pale beside his master's overpowering and seemingly irreplaceable greatness. Joshua's authority is at stake. G-d himself has to act in order to convince the people that G-d's Torah law is eternal – "eternally valid from generation to generation".

Moshe's parting song will be the final demonstration of his intimate attachment to his people. He dying gaze probes deeply into the future. Every word of this immortal song will reverberate through the millennia of the Jewish existence. It is Moshe's true testament which is to be recorded by the people, "and so, write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the sons of Israel...." (31:19).

Every member of the nation is urged to write his own copy of the entire torah, as it was done by the Jewish king. "Take the Book of the Teaching and place it by the side of the covenant of G-d, your G-d...." (31:36). Moshe invokes heaven and earth to act as witnesses of Israel's loyalty and as guarantors of G-d's covenant.

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