

September 22, 2012

VA-YELEKH (He Went)

This *Shabbat* between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* is called *Shabbat Shuvah*. It is so called because of the opening words of the *haftarah* reading - "Return O Israel."

*HaShem* dictated the Law to Moshe. Moshe wrote down the law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, and to all the elders of Israel. Then in the year of *shmee-tah*, during the Festival of Sukkot, the Law was to be read in the hearing of everyone - men, women, children, and the strangers who were within their gates. The *Torah* records that the sacred writings of Israel belong to the entire people of Israel, not to one holy caste or aristocracy.

One of the greatest challenges for those who would like to learn more about *Torah* is the sheer quantity of *Torah* and its offshoots. The amount of writing, the depth of analysis, and the profundity of ideas is so vast that it can look too daunting for anyone, even a full-time student. When a young student asked how to go about learning *Torah*, he was told, "One would have to first read the parasha of the week, then the entire book, followed by the prophets and the writings. After studying the Scripture, one learns the *Talmud* and then the *halakhot* and the *haggadot*." After hearing this, the student replied, "I can't learn all this!" and returned home discouraged.

The student's mistake was to confuse the optimal goal - that is, mastery of the entire corpus of Jewish learning - with a more reasonable and attainable first step. After all, a little learning is better than no learning. In last week's *parasha*, it said, "Surely this Instruction which I enjoin you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond your reach. It is not in the heavens. Neither is it beyond the sea. No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it." So let us take our cue from Hosea and return to *Torah*. It is available to everyone in fine book stores near you.

Focus: *Torah* for all

Hebrew reading - Deut 31:9

English reading - Deut 31:9-13

*Haftarah* reading: Hosea 14:1-9 (whole chapter)

B'rit Chadasha - Romans 10:5-13