

August 31, 2013

NITSAVIM/VAYELECH

Although there is a double portion this week, I am focusing on VaYelech. In this *parashah*, Moses announces his impending retirement and the transfer of leadership to Joshua. HaShem, Who knows the future, tells Moses that the Israelites are bound to disobey the teaching found in the Torah, so He instructs Moses to write a poem warning them of the punishment they will earn for their disobedience.

But Judaism is more than just a religious path and being obedient. Being Jewish is a destiny, a people, and a shared past. In all of the years since Moses urged the Israelites to enter into a covenant with the Lord, there have been many bumps in the road. Being Jewish has never been easy and it often requires a great deal of effort. But human effort is often sporadic and half-hearted. However, the effort that HaShem put into Jewish survival is another matter. It includes taking us out of the land of Egypt, bringing us through the desert to the land of Israel, establishing our homeland with Jerusalem as our capital, enabling our people to survive and even flourish in the many diasporas through which we have wandered, surviving the deadly holocaust, renewing of the state of Israel after a two-thousand year absence, and the reuniting of Jerusalem.

As Jewish and Gentile believers, we train ourselves to see the hand of God in the commonplace. In the case of the survival of the Jewish people it is virtually impossible to not acknowledge the intervention of HaShem. So if HaShem has taken so much trouble in preserving the Jews as a people over the centuries, surely He still has a purpose for our existence. We still need to embody a vision of sanctity, justice, and compassion. As His people, we need to act as His hands and feet in doing acts of love and kindness. We testify to the greatness of HaShem and the truth and wisdom of the Torah, not only by our words, but more effectively by our deeds. If HaShem has taken such effort on our behalf, we need to reciprocate. When we entered into a covenant with the Lord, He promised that He would never leave us nor forsake us. Well, as always, He has kept His part of the bargain.

Focus: Commitment

Hebrew reading - Deuteronomy 31:8

English - Deuteronomy 31:7-8

Haftarah - Isaiah 63:7-9

B'rit Chadashah - Romans 10:1-4