Vayeilech: Devarim (Deuteronomy)

What's it all about?



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The parsha recounts the events of **Moses's last day of life.** He transfers leadership to Joshua, finishes writing the Torah, and delivers the scroll to the Levites for safekeeping in the Ark of the Covenant.

The mitzvah of *hak'hel*, or gathering, is given, commanding the entire people of Israel **to come to the Temple in Jerusalem every seven years**, during the festival of Sukkot, and listen to the king reading from the Torah. The parsha concludes with the prediction that the Israelites will turn away from their covenant with God, who will, in turn, hide His face from them, but also with the promise that future generations will not forget the Torah.

> "So Moses wrote down this poem on that day and taught it to the Israelites."

Take a deeper dive

This week's parsha is as dramatic as it is short. Moses is 120 years old. He knows it is his last day on earth. And he wants to make sure he's leaving the Israelites with one last exhortation, one last nugget of wisdom. And so, he prophesies that they will soon abandon God's commandments, and will be punished for it, but also that they'll eventually be forgiven and return to their covenant.

The midrash illustrated this point with a lovely story. One day, the rabbis told us, the prophet Elijah was walking down the road when he met a man who was taunting him. Elijah asked the man what, when he finally meets God, he would answer when asked why he hadn't studied Torah. Simple, said the man: I'll say that I just wasn't born with enough brains to engage in such lofty pursuits as Torah study.

Elijah asked the man what he did for a living, and the man replied that he was a trapper of bird and fish. "And who," Elijah asked, "gave you knowledge and heart to take flax and spin it and weave it to make traps, and to catch fish and birds with them and to sell them?" The man was silent; he was born with these abilities, he said. They were given to him by God.

"My son," Elijah comforted him, "let it not be bad to you, as all those that come to the world are rebuked once they come and are pulled away from Torah." Everyone fumbles. The important thing, Elijah concluded, was **not to lose sight of what really matters.** "The last word," he told the poor man, "is the fear of the Lord; and those that do it with faithfulness—his craft will be counted and his is fitting for life in the world to come."

In other words, it doesn't necessarily matter who we are or what we do; as long as we love and fear God, and remember our covenant with Him, our actions here on earth, as lowly as they may be, will be counted as if we engaged in the most sacred pursuits. **Because it is our *kavannah*, or intentionality, that matters most.**

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