

# PARSHA SUMMARY FOR PARSHAS NETZAVIM & VAYEILECH

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

**Note: The Shabbos Torah Reading is divided into 7 sections. Each section is called an Aliya [literally: Go up] since for each Aliya, one person "goes up" to make a bracha [blessing] on the Torah Reading.**

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It's about time we stopped making excuses and took responsibility for who and what we are. It's long overdue. Here we are at the threshold of a new-year and it's all about being honest with ourselves. The degree of our commitment to Torah and Mitzvos will be in direct proportion to how many excuses we make for ourselves in avoiding commitment. The more the excuses, the less the commitment. As Moshe continued his final discourse, he confronted the primary excuses we all use in avoiding commitment and responsibility.

**1st Aliya:** Moshe presented the entire nation with the basis for our covenant with G-d. Starting with the promise to the forefathers and stretching across 500 years of history, our relationship with G-d had been substantiated through miracle after miracle. Yet, future generations might deny their personal obligation for continuing the relationship and its attendant responsibilities. Therefore, Moshe makes it absolutely clear that each generation is obligated to educate their children and train them to accept the covenant with G-d. No subsequent generation should be able to excuse their responsibilities for Torah and Mitzvos due to ignorance.

The next excuse Moshe confronted was the modernization of Torah. In every generation there are those who see Torah as archaic and outdated. "Only by grafting new ideas and practices to the stale practices of Torah will Judaism continue to exist and flourish." This excuse for changing Torah's eternal truths will result in the destruction of Torah observances, our land, and our people.

**2nd and 3rd Aliyot:** As history tragically proved, Moshe's warnings would be ignored. Subsequent generations would wonder about the destruction and desolation and, in their search for answers, return to the uncompromised truths and practices of their forefathers. The benefits in doing Teshuva (repentance - returning) will be the fulfillment of all the blessings that G-d had promised.

As a generation of Baalei Teshuva (those who have returned) find their way back, many will be overwhelmed by the seemingly inaccessibility of Torah knowledge. Moshe reassures us that Torah is accessible to all those who truly desire it. Ignorance and a lack of opportunity for learning should never be an excuse.

**4th Aliya:** Finally, Moshe presented the bottom line. Endowed with free will we must choose properly. In the end, we are responsible for what happens.

Parshas Vayelach was said on the 7th day of Adar, 2488, the last day of Moshe's life. Exactly 120 years earlier the world was graced with the birth of a child who brought redemption to his people and the light of Torah to the world. He became a prophet of unparalleled greatness who led his nation through a miraculous 40-year journey to the edge of the promised land. Trials and tribulations, rebellions and conspiracies, disillusionment and questions were his lot in life. Yet, Moshe never gave up. He nurtured the Jews "like a mother cares for her child". He confronted man and G-d in protecting his charges, and succeeded in bringing the people, both physically and spiritually intact, to the fulfillment of a 500-year old promise. It was time to put his affairs in order, finish his work, and insure an unquestioned transition of leadership to his student Yehoshua.

Moshe emphasized G-d's continued presence and protection, even though, Moshe himself would not be with them any longer. Ever since assuming the leadership of Israel, Moshe had the conflicting job of fostering the nation's dependency upon G-d while de-emphasizing their dependency upon him as a leader and provider. Now, as he prepared his final good-bye, it was clear that by day's end, with his death, the nation would have no other choice but to reassess their dependency on Moshe and direct their attention to G-d. However this was far more complex than it first seemed. True, on the one hand, Moshe's death would be a definitive "cutting of the apron strings," forcing the nation to depend on G-d and not Moshe. However, on the other hand, living by the laws of nature, rather than miracles, would de-emphasize G-d's overt role in all aspects of their lives and present them with the illusion of their own independence.

**5th Aliya:** By writing the entire text of the Torah, entrusting it into the care of the Kohanim, and explaining the unique mitzvah of Hakhel (gathering), Moshe hoped that the people would retain the perspective of their dependency upon G-d. The Kohanim represented the continued presence of "G-d in the midst of the camp". As teachers and role models, they kept an otherwise dispersed and decentralized nation focused on their national and individual missions. Once every 7 years, the entire nation was to gather in the Bais Hamikdash in a reenactment of the giving of the Torah. This national expression of devotion would serve as an essential reminder that adherence to the Torah is the reason why the nation occupied and retained the land.

**6th and 7th Aliyot:** Moshe and Yehoshua were summoned to the Ohel Moed (meeting tent) and told the harsh future of their charges. In spite of all the warnings, the people would sin and lose sight of their dependency upon G-d. They would be punished, and instead of accepting responsibility for the consequences that their neglect of G-d's commandments caused, they would have the chutzpah to blame G-d's absence and neglect for the calamities and disasters that have befallen them. (31:17) It would then be the words of this "Song" (the Torah) which would testify to the reality of their defection from G-d and the inevitable consequences which had been forewarned in this Torah.

Yehoshua was encouraged to be strong and courageous and lead the nation with the same devotion that Moshe had displayed. The Torah, written by Moshe himself, was then placed in the Ark as proof of the conditions by which the Jewish people would live or die.

## **Preparing For Selichos**

The moment we hear the Chazan (cantor) sing the hauntingly beautiful melodies of the Yomim Noraim, a hushed sense of expectation descends over the congregation. The Day of Judgment is almost here. Am I ready? Am I prepared? If not, it is definitely time to begin. This is the intended reaction to the Selichos which we will begin Saturday night, at midnight.

Chazal established two basic rules for Selichos. 1. Always start on a Sunday. 2. We must say Selichos for a minimum of 4 days prior to Rosh Hashana. We start on Sunday to give ourselves the added advantage of starting our appeal while still cloaked in the sanctity of Shabbos. We start at midnight so as to grab every possible moment of preparation for the Day of Judgment. We say Selichos for a minimum of 4 days to imitate the 4 day process of preparation that a Korban - sacrifice underwent before it could be offered on the Mizbeach (alter).

The Selichos themselves capture the hopes and tears of generations as they beseeched G-d for continued protection, forgiveness, and benevolence. Highlighting the entire service is the repetition of the 13 names of G-d as He manifests His love, compassion, and mercy for His people and universe. The names by which we refer to G-d (Hashem - the Name) describe how we wish G-d to relate to us at any given moment. Taught to Moshe in the aftermath of the Golden Calf, this 13-name formula evokes G-d's mercy.

Rosh Hashana means going to court, which should foster in us an overwhelming sense of vulnerability. This feeling should humble us into recognizing how much we need G-d's mercy and forgiveness. Motzoei Shabbos (Saturday night), through the words of the Selichos, we will be able to express that sense of humility and vulnerability.