

Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality

From Rav Binny

(Portion of Vayelech)

Ramallah; 1988; in Mutzav Sivan right next to the Arab 'refugee' camps of Al Bireh and Al Amari during the first intifada; a nasty time, in a nasty place. After a week of intense action, non-stop patrols, riots, chasing kids throwing rocks, and endless briefings and late night ambushes, I had a few hours to catch my breath and was lying on my bunk with a good book and a bag of Wise barbecue potato chips which my mom had somehow gotten to me and I had been saving for a quiet moment. It was around 11am, the Arab kids were all in school, and the prayers in the Mosques that incited many of the riots were still twenty-four hours away.

Technically I was the Officer in charge of the ready-alert squad (the Kitat Konenut) and thus still on duty with my boots and uniform on, but it was a quiet Thursday morning; In the middle of all that chaos I had found a little corner of time and peace and quiet.

It lasted about twenty minutes. Shouts of "Hakpatzah!" meant there was an emergency somewhere and we were being sent so after a minute or less of running, yelling, grabbing gear, and grabbing all the guys, I was suddenly in a jeep heading towards the main road where apparently a riot had started... and the whole time all I could think of was I had left the chips and my book thrown on the floor next to the bunk and hoped I would get back to finish them; I never did.

The riot, caused by two kids being caught by a different patrol throwing rocks, turned quickly into a massive event with hundreds of Arabs including women and children blocking the road where local Jewish residents had to drive, which led to accompanying a truck to the local border patrol holding station which led to an impromptu road block all afternoon followed by an evening mission and late night ambush. When I finally got back to our base, the chips and the book were long gone and someone else was sleeping in the bunk reserved for the ready-alert squad... I never did find that book or those chips...

Sometimes, it's just time to go, even if you're not ready...

This week, as Yom Kippur approaches, we read the portion of **Vayelech**, which literally means 'and he went'. Strangely, it refers to the final soliloquy of Moshe, on the banks of the Jordan as he bids farewell to the Jewish people and prepares to go to meet his maker.

"And Moshe went and spoke all of these words to all of Israel. And he said to them: I am one hundred and twenty years old today and can no longer come and go, and Hashem (G-d) has told me : 'you will not cross this Jordan (river).'" (Devarim (Deuteronomy) 31:1-2)

Clearly, Moshe is about to die, so where exactly is he going? It would seem that he is , rather ending his journey, so why does the Torah, quite uncharacteristically, add this verb describing Moshe as 'going'? Going where? When Miriam dies, as an example, there is no discussion of her

going anywhere prior to her death, it simply says she dies. (*Bamidbar* (Numbers) 20:1) So why does the Torah tell us Moshe is going somewhere?

Rav Moshe Feinstein, in his ***Darash Moshe***, has a fascinating insight:

Generally, when a person passes away, and particularly a righteous person, it means he or she has completed their task in this world; he or she has fulfilled the mission for which they were here. And because they have passed when they were meant to go, we do not consider them as having 'gone' or 'left', much like a person who finishes his job is not described as leaving (i.e. leaving before having finished the job) but rather is described as having finished the job.

But Moshe did not finish his job; he has not yet brought the Jewish people home to the land of Israel, so he is not finished with what he began; he has not completed his mission. So Moshe is described as a person who is leaving prematurely; hence his words to the Jewish people here are meant to explain why he is leaving before the job is done: not because he does not want to accompany them home to the land of Israel, nor for that matter due to being unable physically to lead. Rather, because Hashem has commanded him: "*you shall not cross this Jordan River...*".

One last time, Moshe is sharing a powerful message with us: no matter what we think, if we figure out what Hashem is asking of us, then that is what we must do. And we must always be ready to go....

We think we know where we are headed, and we fill ourselves with goals and plans and assume we will do what we set out to do. But this world is a temporary hallway, and the question we must constantly be asking ourselves, in every moment is 'am I doing what I think Hashem really wants me to do?'

This Shabbat, the Shabbat prior to Yom Kippur, is known as Shabbat Shuva, which prepares us for the ultimate Shabbat: Yom Kippur. This week, we take a pause to consider where we are headed, and why we choose to go there. And hopefully we commit and open ourselves to being ready to go, wherever we believe Hashem asks us to go...

Wishing all a Shabbat Shalom and a sweet happy and healthy year full of blessings and joy, and a ***Gemar Chatimah Tovah*** from Jerusalem,

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