

Parasha Meditation Vayelech

Devarim 31:1-31:30

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Finding Hashem in the Very Darkest Darkness

Transitions and Confession

Parashat Vayelech which means “He went” is about transitions. At this time we are in transition praying to be sealed in the Book of Life. Moshe had finally accepted his fate. He was not to live to experience the fulfillment of his dreams – entering the Holy Land with his beloved people, to finally take roots in the land blessed by Hashem. Moshe was at the end of his journey, and now “he went.” Where exactly did Moshe go? The holy Ohr Hachayim explains that forty days prior to demise, the soul goes from the person. The *tzaddikim* are aware of the matter. When it stated “Moshe went,” it implied that the live spirit which is called Moshe went.¹ Whenever one door closes another opens. Our fear of death can be lessened by the belief that death is just one more transition in a life marked by constant change. Yet, when accompanied by repentance and confession, each transition becomes smoother. Just as *Vidui* (confession) is on the lips of the dying, so at this Yom Kippur time when our lives are hanging in a thin string, we confess our misdoings.

Between Incomplete and Complete Confession

This week’s *parasha* read during the Ten Days of Repentance includes a short confession by the children of Israel: “...Because G-d is not among me, all these evils befell me, and I will surely hide My face in that day...”² Ramban explains that this is not a complete confession, but only a thought of regret that they recognized their guilt. Therefore, the verse continues “I will surely hide,” in order that they complete their regret with complete confession and repentance.³ According to Rambam proper *vidui* includes taking upon ourselves not to repeat the transgression. This is because the depths of recognizing our wrongdoing, makes it crystal clear that we will never ever repeat it. “Whenever a person transgressed any of the mitzvot in the Torah, whether on purpose or unintentionally, when he repents he is obligated to confess before the blessed G-d, as it states, ‘A man or a woman if they transgressed any sin...they must confess the sin they committed...’⁴ The way to confess is to say – ‘Please Hashem, I sinned, transgressed and committed crime before You, I did such and such, I regretted and am embarrassed about my action, and I will never repeat them.’”⁵

Coming Up:

Yom Kippur/
Pre-Sukkoth
Retreat/Shabbaton
September 25 – 29

“Scents of
Heavenly Rain”
Rosh Chodesh
Cheshvan Seminar
Tuesday, October 16

¹ Ohr HaChayim, *Devarim* 31:1, quoted by the *Netivat Shalom*, this entire piece is inspired by *Netivat Shalom, Parashat Vayelech*, p. 110-112.

² *Devarim* 31:17-18.

³ Ramban, *Devarim* 31:17.

⁴ *Bamidbar* 5:6-7.

⁵ Rambam, *Hilchot Teshuva*, chapter 1: halacha 1.



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Sins make us Feel as if Hashem has Forsaken Us

For a Jew the worst punishment is to feel that G-d is far from me. We are called to believe that even an iron curtain does not have the power to separate between Israel and their Father in Heaven. G-d dwells with us even in our impurity.⁶ Nothing can disconnect us from Him. Whenever we feel distant from Hashem, it's only Hashem hiding behind the curtains, testing us whether we have *emunah* to break through all the veils to face Him. "But your wrongs have separated between you and your G-d, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that he does not hear."⁷ When the *yetzer hara* (negative inclination) entices a person to sin, the sin itself is not its main aim, but rather the despondency and despair that follows the sin and make the person feel distant from Hashem. Worse than the wrongdoing itself when we feel that the sin has caused us to be separated from Hashem and that there is no remedy for this. By means of feeling this way we cause ourselves to be distant and detached from Hashem. This is the most difficult *mechitza* (barrier) it is worse than all other partitions of lusts and lack of *emunah*. "My G-d, My G-d why have you left me."⁸ The worst punishment for a Jew is when it seems to us that G-d has forsaken us.

The Illusion of Despair

We have to understand that all the walls and partitions are only illusions. "From the depths I called you Hashem"⁹ – from the depths of the *kliya* (husk).¹⁰ Even when we are in the depths of the husk Hashem is with us in our constricted state.¹¹ "However much a Jew sinned, he still remains a Jew!"¹² "Even an iron curtain has no power to separate between Israel and our Father in Heaven."¹³ However, the *yetzer hara* still tries to entice us to depression and despair making us feel that Hashem has left us completely. This is the reason for the double language in our Torah verse: "פָּנִי הִסְתֵּיר אֶת־פָּנִי" – "I will doubly hide my face"¹⁴ The first hiding is by means of the actual sin committed, the second hiding is by means of the sin of despair.¹⁵

In the Very Darkest Darkness the Shechinah Resides

At the revelation at Sinai there were three partitions of darkness hiding Hashem: Darkness, cloud and fog (thick darkness).¹⁶ The fog was the darkest separation, nevertheless "Moshe drew near unto the fog (thick darkness) where G-d was."¹⁷ The numerical value of the Hebrew word "הָעֲרָפֶל – the *arafel* (fog)" equals "הַשְּׁכִינָה – the *Shechinah*."¹⁸ Moshe revealed that inside of the very darkest darkness there G-d resides! In order to come close to Hashem we need to go through all of these partitions of darkness, while believing with steadfast *emunah* that inside of the darkest darkness there we can find Hashem.

⁶ Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 56b.

⁷ Yesha'yahu 59:2.

⁸ Tehillim 22:2

⁹ Ibid. 130:1.

¹⁰ The Rebbe of Kovrin.

¹¹ "עָמַד אֲנִי בְצַרָה" (Tehillim 91:15).

¹² Ibid. Sanhedrin 44a.

¹³ Babylonian Talmud, Pessachim 85b.

¹⁴ Devarim 31:18.

¹⁵ Netivat Shalom, Parashat Vayelech, p. 111.

¹⁶ Devarim 4:11.

¹⁷ Shemot 20:18.

¹⁸ 1 Melachim 8:12.



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Meditation:

Make yourself comfortable, close your eyes and breathe deeply in and out from your nose. Allow all the sounds around you to pass through you, as clouds on a sunny day.

1. Visualize a great brilliant light before you, feel its dazzling strength and intensity.
2. Feel the strength of the power of Hashem's light burning painfully in the darkest places of your being.
3. Become aware of your personal misdoings where the light burns most painfully.
4. Confess before Hashem: "Please Hashem, I sinned, transgressed and committed crime before You, I did such _____ and such _____ (insert your personal transgressions in the spaces, and add as many as you can think of). I regret and am embarrassed about my actions, and I will never repeat them again."
5. Visualize a deep darkness – חֹשֶׁךְ before you. Imagine the darkness turning thicker and thicker. Take a deep breath. Walk through this darkness. Now you arrive at an even darker place filled with the darkest clouds – עָנָן. Take a deeper breath. Pass through the thicket, and walk through the darkness of the clouds. Then arrive at the very thickest darkness possible עֲרַפְלָל – darkness so deep and frightening it makes you want turn around instantly. Take your deepest breath and summon all of your courage. Now walk through this very thickest darkness, which is so thick it sticks to you.
6. Mazal tov! You have surmounted. The *Shechina* is before you with her brilliant shining light. Feel the warmth of love in your heart, the strong loving feeling of knowing that all of your sins have been forgiven.
7. Feel relief, and security that your Father in Heaven has sealed you in the Book of Life!

Notes:

At the dedication of the Temple, Shlomo Hamelech proclaimed: "Hashem has said that He would dwell in the thick darkness עֲרַפְלָל." At the two highest time of Israel's history: The giving of the Torah and the dedication of the first Temple, we learn that in spite of these times of the highest revelations, our main spiritual work is to pass through the darkness, the cloud and the fog. This is the main preparation for the High Holidays, although we need to recognize the greatness of our sins, and how much damage they have caused, still we have to believe that even the thickest iron curtain has no power to separate between us and our Father in heaven. A Jew is never ever lost. We are forever children of Hashem our G-d for all eternity!



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About Us



Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, a native of Denmark, is Founder and Director of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin. She holds a Bachelor of Education in Bible and Jewish Philosophy from Michlala Jerusalem College for Women, and a Masters of Art in Jewish History from Touro College. Chana Bracha also began her practice as a spiritual healer through Emuna, tefila and energy work. For more than two decades Chana Bracha has taught Bible studies with special emphasis on women's issues in Israel and the United States. She creates curricula emphasizing women's spiritual empowerment through traditional Torah values. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin located in the Judean

Hills of Israel offers a unique program to women of all ages and backgrounds to learn in a holistic Torah study environment that nurtures the mind, body and soul. Intensive textual study of Tanach, Halacha and Chassidut are woven together with creative spiritual expression, and connection with the land of Israel through organic gardening, herbology, Jewish sources of healing and sustainable living. Classes in Jewish mysticism, Chassidism and Jewish meditation are directed at the spiritual thirst so prominent in our times.

*In 2010 Rebbetzin Chana Bracha published her first book, *Women at the Crossroads: A Woman's Perspective on the Weekly Torah Portion*.*

Chana Bracha has a married son and several granddaughters. She lives with her husband and younger son on the land of the Judean hills, Israel.

If you are interested in:

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or visit her blog: <http://rebbetzinchanabracha.blogspot.com/2010/11/emunah-healing-for-women.html>

Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin – Holistic Torah Study for Women on the Land of Israel

At Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin, we weave together Torah studies with creative spiritual expression, connecting with the Land of Israel, and healthy, organic lifestyles. In the heart of the Judean Hills, with its serene beauty, our students experience an approach to Judaism that bridges mind, body and soul. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin is designed as a micro-community within the Village of Bat Ayin where women of all ages and backgrounds engage in intense Torah learning as part of an integrated, participatory approach to Torah living.

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