



# TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Parshas Vayelech

September 10, 2021

## A Taste of Torah Two-Way Communication

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

The opening word of this week's *haftara*, *shuva* (return), is the basis for the name given to this Shabbos - Shabbos Shuva. The focus on *teshuva* (repentance) during this Shabbos between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is highlighted by the aforementioned *teshuva*-centric *haftara* and a *drasha* (lecture) customarily delivered by the congregational rabbi on that subject of repentance.

The second verse of the *haftara* offers some food for thought. It states (Hoshea 14:3), "Take words with you and return to Hashem." What words are we supposed to take with us to inspire and jumpstart our process of return?

A look at the parsha will provide enlightenment as to the meaning of this enigmatic verse.

As they age, bodies begin to fade physically and, sometimes, mental capacities diminish, as well. It's just the reality of the world Hashem created; physical, finite things break down as they age. Moshe, however, appears to be a notable exception. As he approaches his imminent death, the Torah (Devarim 34:7) tells us that Moshe retained his physical vigor, belying his 120 years. Strangely, though, it appears his mental capacities did, indeed, wane. Moshe tells the Jewish People (Vayelech 31:2), "I am no longer able to go out and come in." Rashi in one approach explains that "the *mesoros* (lit., transfers) and wellsprings of Torah had been closed up for him." How could this occur? Inasmuch as Hashem maintained Moshe's physical

health, why did He withdraw Moshe's ability to study Torah on the level he had been accustomed to during the rest of his life?

The Kozhnutzer Maggid (Rabbi Yisrael Hopstein; 1737-1814) says that in fact, when a great person stands on the cusp of leaving this world, and he is not as encumbered by the physical body and world, he achieves great spiritual heights and levels of Torah knowledge that he was unable to reach during his lifetime.

Moshe, the father of all prophets and the Torah teacher of the Jewish People, was no exception. Moshe's limitation was not that he could no longer properly study and understand Torah. On the contrary, says the Kozhnutzer Maggid, Moshe reached such supernal heights in his understanding of Torah that he could not transmit that knowledge to the Jewish People! Moshe, whose role was to bring the infinite Torah down to the finite world and teach it to the Jewish People, had reached such a zenith of connection at the end of his life to Torah that it was beyond his capacity to impart his Torah knowledge in a finite form. As Moshe says, he could no longer "go out and come in" - he could "go out" and discover new vistas of Torah, but he could not "bring it in" to the Jewish People. This, says the Maggid, is what Rashi means when he says that the "transfers of Torah" had been closed - Moshe lost the ability to transfer his Torah knowledge to others.

With this idea in hand, let us return to the Shabbos of Return. The Bnai

### Stories for the Soul

#### Confidence in Crisis

A cholera epidemic swept through Eastern Europe during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, taking the lives of tens of thousands. In the city of Vilna, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883) gathered a group of young men to help treat the ill. People protested that this was quite dangerous, as the young men would be in direct contact with the disease. Rabbi Salanter assured them that the volunteers would be protected from harm.

In the days leading up to Yom Kippur, Rabbi Salanter publicized that people needed to eat on Yom Kippur, as fasting would weaken them and expose them to infection. Other rabbis strenuously objected to Rabbi Salanter's approach, saying that it was improper to issue a cart-blanc allowance to eat on Yom Kippur. But Rabbi Salanter held firm, and, on Yom Kippur itself, he ascended the *bimah*, made *kiddush* and ate in front of the entire congregation!

When one rabbi complained to Rabbi Salanter for being so permissive, Rabbi Salanter sharply retorted, "I made a guarantee to the mothers of the volunteers that their sons would return unharmed. When you can take that responsibility, then you can rebuke me for my approach!"

In this week's parsha, Hashem tells Yehoshua that as leader of the Jewish Nation, he must stand firm in his decisions and not allow others to challenge his authority. Taking other opinions into consideration is vital, but a leader must have the confidence to make decisions and stand by them.

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## Kollel Happenings

### RABBI YOSSI EPHRATHI NOW TEACHING LEARN 2 LEARN GESHMAK

You may have limited experience learning Talmud. You may think that you don't enjoy serious Talmud study, that it's just not for you. But you haven't tried Learn 2 Learn Geshmak. A gemara program crafted to give you the satisfaction and joy of learning, Learn 2 Learn Geshmak is now being taught by Kollel Scholar Rabbi Yossi Ephrathi, and is beginning a new topic. Sunday nights 8-9 pm in-person and on Zoom. Contact Rabbi Nesanel Kipper at [rnk@denverkollel.org](mailto:rnk@denverkollel.org) for further details.

### THE BOOK OF KOHELES & SUKKOS ON SEPTEMBER 13 IN-PERSON AND ON ZOOM

Join Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher and explore the connection between the Book of Koheles and Sukkos on Monday, 9/13 at 8 pm. In-person class at the Kaufman home and on Zoom. Visit [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org) for more details.

### TALMUDO BIYADO GEMARA CLUB FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS

Learn, review, and acquire a masechta! Boys in grades 6-8 are invited to join Rabbi Chaim Gross at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center/Ohel Yissoschor weeknights Mon.-Thu. from 8-8:30 pm for a Gemara shiur followed by review. Contact Rabbi Nesanel Kipper at [rnk@denverkollel.org](mailto:rnk@denverkollel.org) for further details.

## Halacha Riddles

**Last week's question:** Why would one potentially not make a blessing upon drinking water on Erev Yom Kippur?

**Answer:** One makes a blessing on water only if one is thirsty (i.e., you will enjoy the water) (Sha'ar Hatziyun 204:34; see Mishna Berura 204:40). On Erev Yom Kippur, it is not unusual for a person to drink a great deal of water to hydrate ahead of Yom Kippur.

If one is about to drink water for this purpose but is not at all thirsty, some authorities rule that no blessing would be recited on water. (For a flavored drink, a blessing is recited regardless of thirst.)

**This week's question:** When would the order of two blessings change based on the day of the month?

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbi Meir Shapiro - Part XVI

World War I began in 1914, and its battles affected Jewish communities across Europe, particularly Eastern Europe. Rabbi Shapiro's community of Galina was not spared the upheavals of World War I. Galina was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but it was invaded by the Russians. The Jewish community fled

Galina for Tarnopol and Lemberg; Rabbi Shapiro would never return to Galina.

World War I, while disastrous and deadly for all of Europe, was particularly catastrophic for the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. When the war's front arrived in an area, Jews were forced to flee.

## A Taste of Torah

*continued from front*

Yissoschor (Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov; 1783-1841) explains that when a person offers *tochacha* (rebuke) to another, there is only one way it will have an effect – the recipient must take those words of reproach to heart. The taking of words mentioned in the verse, says the Bnai Yissoschor, is a reference to the words of *tochacha* that a person hears from another. The very first step in *teshuva* is to “take the words” of criticism one receives, instead of allowing them to simply fall upon deaf ears. Once a person is willing to listen to the improvements he must make, he can begin taking steps to make changes and improve his spiritual state.

This, continues the Bnai Yissoschor, is the idea of the Shabbos Shuva *drasha*. The rabbi speaks to his congregants, exhorting them to mend their ways and to beat a path back to Hashem.

But it is up to each individual to “take those words.”

The parsha and the *haftara* thus connect and come full circle. Moshe bemoans that while he is understanding Torah on heretofore unrealized levels, he cannot impart that Torah to his students, the Jewish People. Immediately afterwards, we read a *haftara* that instructs us to make sure that the Torah words of reproach sent in our direction on this Shabbos of *teshuva* find receptive ears. We must avoid the situation Moshe found himself in, one in which he could not reach his students! By taking the words of the *haftara* to heart, we can take the words of inspiration that we will hear on this Shabbos to heart as well, and engage in serious soul-searching that will lead us to true and lasting *teshuva*.

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