

Vayelech**And He Went****Torah:** Deuteronomy 30:1-30**Haftarah:** Hosea 14:2-10; Joel 2:15-27; Micah 7:18, 20**Brit Chadashah:** Romans 10:1-17

I will leave the Prophetic portions and the New Testament passage for your own study. Today is the 20th anniversary of 911. I think it is sad that the Americans pulled out of Afghanistan before finishing the job they started in response to 911. However, there is a big difference between being chased out, like the Russians were, and pulling out, like the Americans did. They transferred a fair amount of sophisticated weaponry to the Afghan army, which is now in the possession of the Taliban. I am sad and angry, both at the same time.

Today's Torah portion is the first of the three last chapters of Deuteronomy and deals with both grave warnings to the people about backsliding and the promised of a successful conquest under the leadership of Joshua.

This passage introduces us to the Hakhel or assembly ceremony. Every seven years, during the festival of Sukkoth, all Israel was to gather together at the tabernacle, and have portions of the Torah read to them. This ceremony was to be both a reminder of the never ending goodness and provision of YHVH and a warning of the grave consequences of violating the stipulations of the Covenant.

In verse one, we learn that Moses is now 120 years old. In the next verse he uses a figure of speech to say he was no longer able to lead because he can no longer go out and enter. He does not discuss the reason that YHVH told him he was not to lead the people across the Jordan. He tells the people that YHVH Himself will walk before them and destroy all the Canaanite nations. YHVH will treat these nations in the same way He treated Sihon and Og.

Joshua is mentioned as the new replacement leader and the people are told to be strong and courageous, because even though it will not be an easy task, just as YHVH said He would walk in front of them, He will also walk with them. This is because Moses says that YHVH will never leave them, nor forsake them.

There are two separate mentions of the transfer of power to Joshua. One is a public transfer in front of the people. The second is YHVH giving His seal of approval by appearing in front of the tent of meeting as Moses and Joshua are inside. The presence was concealed by smoke, so that neither Moses nor Joshua were harmed in any way.

The people are told again to be courageous and a copy of the Law (or a portion of what Moses had written), was to be given to the priests and it was to be read every seven years, during the Festival of Sukkoth. The scroll or scrolls were to be kept beside the ark, but we are not told whether it was placed on the lid or beside the cherubim. The priests or the High Priest would have to go back in behinds the veil twice. Once to bring the scroll out and also to put it back in, once the reading was completed. This Hakhel reading was to ensure that the people were always aware of their rights and obligations and to the potential consequences any disobedience would bring.

Part of the rationale for this special reading at the gathering, was so that future children who had not experienced the Exodus and their victorious entrance into the Land, still heard the stories. As well as a reminder of the miracles which YHVH performed, this reading was to ensure that each new generation would be reminded to fear YHVH and abide by the stipulations of His Word.

Just after Moses and Joshua are ushered into the tent of meeting in front of all the people, YHVH warns Moses about the people's imminent apostasy which would come after the death of Moses. He was warned that the people would prostitute themselves with strange gods as they abandoned YHVH and violated the Covenant.

When this would occur, YHVH will hide His face from them and they would be devoured and subject to a multitude of troubles and afflictions, because G-d would no longer be in their midst.

Moses was to prepare a song about what was going to happen and he was to teach it to the people and have them sing it as a witness against them for their backsliding. This is referring to the song in chapter 32 which would be sung at least every seven years at the Hakhel gathering.

Once the people settle into a land flowing with milk and honey, YHVH says they will eat and be satisfied and fattened up. In this state of plenty, that is when they will turn to other gods as they despise and violate the covenant. This passage and the song itself would be part of the Hakhel readings and would thus serve as a warning to all future generations about the consequences of turning their backs on YHVH and violating the stipulations of His Covenant.

When it says this Law, it is both referring to the relevant sections of Deuteronomy and even to the other portions of the Torah. These may have been a collection of manuscripts which the prophet Samuel combined into the Torah that we have today.

One of the messages of this section is that rebelliousness has not been fully weeded out of the camp and may rear its ugly head after the deaths of Moses and Joshua – and even in subsequent generations. We have to be generationally vigilant and never let any paganism grow in our midst.

G-d then calls the sky and the earth to be witnesses of this warning testimony, as the people do evil in the eyes of YHVH by the evil works of their hands.

As I researched this portion in the Talmudic Chumash, it got really weird. The commentary claimed that all righteous people are still spiritually alive after their deaths. They also claimed that the portion says that Moses would still be alive as long as Joshua would be alive and that Moses would somehow be alive eternally through his words. This is not what the text teaches.

They go further and add up the number of verse in this portion and the previous one, to end up with the number 70. When the letters of this number are written out, the Masoretic text claims that the number spells out: "My L-rd is G-d. Be careful not to attach further content or any further meaning to any portion or portions of the written Word.

Sermon: Shabbat Shuvah: Fixing What Got Broken

Far too often repentance is considered as part of the spiritual beating which you give yourself any time you have slipped into sinfulness. Some people teach that you have weep and wail in order to access G-d's forgiveness and that we need to be filled with regret and shame in order to be forgiven. This is not the nature of biblical forgiveness.

I John 1:9 says that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Psalm 32:5 says that G-d not only forgives, but He removes the stain of our sin. Rather than wanting to make us feel worse and be filled with guilt and regrets, YHWH wants to remove the filth which we have let into our lives and repair any damage it has done.

You know that I do not agree with the teaching that says we are sinners by nature. It takes several passages out of context and gives the devil and sin too much credit. Yes we live in a sin infected world and yes the enemy and his henchmen are after us from the moment of our birth. However, the Bible teaches that we are choosers by nature and our spiritual duty is to keep sin at the doors of our hearts and lives, and not let it take up residence in our hearts and lives. We are only ever sinners by choice, not by nature.

Sin wants to defile and to break us spiritually so that we become firmly chained to the darkness, away from the healing of G-d's light. This chaining to darkness is growing in our world as more and more people continue to make bad choices and wallow in the filth of darkness and sin.

Some teachers even go further and say that many of us are sinful and broken because of something called: "generational curses". Supposedly some where in history, one or more of our ancestors sinned and the cursing they received is being passed on to us and might even be passed on to our children. This is not what the Bible teaches.

The Bible teaches that G-d's gracious favours will last unto a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His Word. He will punish those who walk away from His Word to the third and fourth generation. This is referring to the living generations. Patti is a daughter, a mother and a grandmother. Problems are only transmitted by the living generations, unless the negative behaviour is learned and passed on as new generations are born.

The Bible says that the father shall not be put to death for the son, nor the son for the father and that each shall individually bear the punishment for their own sins. Generational curses are actually negative learned behaviour that has no genetic or spiritual link beyond those who practice them or learn them.

At Shabbat Shuvah and during our special times during the Fall Feasts we want to break the power of sin by learning new behaviours. We also want to heal any brokenness sin brought into our lives. We may suffer the consequences of our own actions or for decisions others have made on our behalf, but we will only be held accountable to our reactions and responses. I was brought to Canada, without being asked if this was something I wanted to do. As an adult, I chose to remain in this beautiful, cold country and it is this response which makes me a proud immigrant to Canada. Well, what about dealing with the consequences of the sins of our ancestors?

Our First Nations were horribly abused as they were robbed, beaten and killed by the noble pioneers who pushed them off their land and corralled them onto tiny reservations. Black people were stolen from their homes and forced into slavery throughout North and South

America and they lived most of their lives under very harsh conditions. Japanese Canadians were forced from their homes and interned into camps. The same happened to Ukrainians during World War One.

Violence against Jews is a thing of recent memory and has not fully stopped even as I speak. Gypsies, Armenians, East Indians and other peoples of colour have suffered too often unfairly persecution and prejudice. And lets not forget how hard women had to fight to be recognized as equal citizens with their male counterparts.

I could go on, but on Shabbat Shuvah how should we deal with the sins of our ancestors? We need to apologize to the victims of violence and discrimination and do whatever we can to repair and restore the children and grandchildren of those who suffered at the hands of persecutors and abusers who came before us. We need to stand up for the rights of minorities and condemn racism wherever we encounter it.

Our society is working now towards reconciliation and making sure that we all live and work on a level playing field and that abuses of the past are dealt with as much as possible. We can right past wrongs, but we do not punish people for the misdeeds of their ancestors. Monuments to oppressors are being removed and I can hardly wait until the truth is told about the squaw killer, Colonel Custer, who slaughtered so many innocent Native women and children.

The truth about past abuses and oppression is also being told, not increase people's feelings of guilt, but to help heal the wounds so many horrible things have left our generation with. I am both a human rights advocate and a spiritual rights advocate and I see things through the lens of my Bible. I am a pro life creationist who upholds biblical spirituality and I will not be forced to accept or promote that which the Bible forbids and condemns.

However, I would never promote violence against my opponents and even though I do not support or even like our current Prime Minister, I firmly condemn those who pelted him with gravel and tried to incite riots at some of his rallies. I delete posts that are disrespectful and the only way which I will voice my opposition is twofold. I will support other candidates and I will vote for another party. I know people who support him and that is their right and I would never show them any hostility or disrespect for exercising their right to support the candidate of their choice and vote for the party of their choice.

Anyone who wants to have a political discussion with me or even a debate, must show respect and not get all riled up and angry with anyone who disagrees with them. I would say that this applies south of the Border too and should apply throughout the world.

This is the power of positive repentance which works for healing and cleansing, so that things could be made better and not worse. I would encourage all of you to get out and vote at both elections. Never let yourself be dragged into sinful disrespect. Violence, vandalism and defamation should have no part in politics. I am not impressed when candidates start bashing each other, but as I watched the French Language debates on Wednesday, I am happy to say that very little of this occurred.

Today we celebrate the healing, cleansing power of biblical repentance and I want to deal with another misunderstanding when it comes to those who have fallen into sin and backslid. You see there is a big difference between falling into sin and being possessed by an evil spirit.

People give Satan too much credit and see him all over the place – he leaves most of the dirty work up to his henchmen and tries to steal, kill and break in as many lives as possible.

A believer can not be possessed by a demon unless they have fully renounced their faith. Believers can be hurt and become broken and defiled, but as long as there is a tiny spark of faith in their heart, they cannot be possessed by an evil spirit. They can be tortured and tormented as evil spirits scream through broken windows and doors that have been forced open, but they are not possessed by an evil spirit. They are just letting themselves get kicked around by the henchmen of the enemy of our souls.

Now, it is possible for someone to completely renounce their faith and Peter says that their last condition will always be worse than their first one. They wallow in a fierce darkness as they sink lower and lower under the influence of the enemy. Today's Torah portion warned of the consequences of turning your back on G-d and His Word. It is sad to say that some fully backslidden former believers become active agents of the enemy, and try to drag others away from the sheepfold and into the dark.

I have known people who have taken this route and others who live such corrupt and immoral lives that unless you know them, you would never guess that they were once believers. As well, sadly some are talked out of their faith by liberal theologians and atheists. Sharing your faith, especially in an academic setting can be a dangerous thing. A former associate evangelist with Billy Graham, Charles Templeton, lost his faith and became an atheist. Fortunately, it can work the other way too. One of the sons of the world famous atheist, Madeline O'Hare, became a believer and later went into ministry.

We have to constantly be on our guard against sinfulness of any kind and especially be careful of the secularism which will constantly be trying to overthrow your faith and drag you into the intellectual darkness of sin.

On Shabbat Shuvah we remind ourselves to expel the dirt and the damage which sin has caused in our lives and then give our energy over to cleaning up our hearts and lives as we repair the damage and remove all and any stains which sinfulness has left behind. In all things and in every part of our lives, we want to remove the enemy's hold over us and also crucify the flesh that is so prone to be in open rebellion against G-d and even against our own conscience.

Believers can be torn apart by infighting and the slandering which falsely passes as exhortation. I know of churches which abuse and misuse their flock. I know of spiritual leaders who have abused their followers and have told great lies about them. Some of them would not know how to tell the truth if it hit them over the head. Let us aggressively purpose to let none of this kind of carnal nonsense to infect and damage our community or any of those who call our shul home.

I want to deal with another category of backsliders that we may even encounter among those who wander through our doors. I know of people who have been abused and offended out of the faith. Are they really turning their backs on the G-d of love and truth? Not always. Yeshua warned about offending any of the little ones who call upon His name and even in their pain and suffering, they are upheld by their guardian angels until they recover from their anger and bitterness and begin to heal from the damage wolves and other false brethren have subjected them to. This current surge in anger over the lost little ones who perished in

residential schools should be dealt with so that any perpetrators who are still alive get punished and so that any victims who are still alive get the help and healing they deserve.

I have met people who have been raped or sexually abused by members of the clergy and it was a dark secret that the Catholic Church did not handle until thousands of victims began to come forward. Children who were beaten and abused by their parents and care givers are also coming forward.

On Shabbat Shuvah we need to determine to give these people all the help we can and we need to speak up on their behalf. Our shul has a very firm Abuse Policy and let me repeat that any felon convicted of child molestation is not welcome to attend, even if they are on parole. They can watch our services on line. But let me comfort our parents. No convicted felon of this kind is allowed within a hundred meters of a minor child. In a crowd, they are not allowed to stop and speak with minor children and are never allowed to be alone with them.

How do we deal with people who have been abused out of the kingdom? First we want to apologize to them and reaffirm that we would never allow or participate in this kind of horror in our community. We would also want to show them how completely this horrible misconduct is condemned in the Bible and tell them that even if some of the perpetrators are not brought to justice in this life, they will be judged and punished in the next life.

We also would want to talk about the power of forgiveness that brings healing as we learn to release the pain and the brokenness which some may have experienced. What we would not say is that it was alright what happened to them and that they should just get over it. We should never say that it was the will of G-d for them to be hurt and abused. There is such wrath and judgment waiting for these monsters and that is the will of G-d for them. The will of G-d for us is to learn forgiveness and find healing.

Some of the emotional, spiritual damage may be so severe that complete release may only come in the next life. But we need to always set straight paths for our feet so that which is wounded may be made better and not worse. We have to help some who feel it was their fault that they let themselves get abused.

The punishment and discipline of G-d will come upon any of His people who abandon His Word and slip back into the darkness from which they were once delivered. His wrath and judgment will come upon those who hurt, abuse and damage any of His sheep. The wrath of G-d will come upon those who helped murder hundreds and millions of innocent babies in their mother's womb.

We need to distinguish between the who have willingly backslid with full knowledge and those who were the victims of false brethren and other creeps who crawl around looking for more victims. All who have been broken and victimized need to be encouraged to seek help and not become consumed by wrath and bitterness as they come to terms with what has happened to them. Cleaning and fixing what got broken is the main theme of authentic repentance and is also the main theme of this Shabbat Shuvah service. Shabbat shalom and Shavua Tov.