

וַאֲתַחֲנַן

VA'ETCHANAN/AND I BEGGED Devarim/Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11

This Shabbat is known as **Shabbat Nachamu** (נַחֲמֵנוּ) referring to the opening words of the Haftara from Isaiah 40:1 – **Comfort** (נַחֲמֵנוּ), **comfort** my people. The past three weeks have been a time of **mourning the destruction and ruin** that has so much been a part of the Israelite's lives. Now it is time to put the past behind them and to focus on **rebuilding** and **restoration**. It is a time to be **reenergized**. To begin this period, Jews typically take outings to the country to enjoy the **sea, sunsets, the landscape, and all other wonders of יהוה's** (Yahwey) **creation** in order to be both **physically and spiritually reinvigorated**.

This Torah portion provides us with the **manna** we need for this **spiritual recharge**. This week we touch on important **foundations of our faith**. We will read of the **awesomeness of Yah, His chosen people, His 10 Words (commandments), the good Land He has promised, and the love and fear of the Almighty**. Moses takes a trip through **history** to remind the Israelites of the **giving of the Torah** and will teach them **the most basic declaration of faith – The Shema**. As believers, we are also able to see how **Yeshua** brought His followers back to these **basics**.

We begin, however, with the **disappointment of Moses** as he begs to be given **entrance into the Promised Land**:

Devarim 3:23 " Then I pleaded with יהוה at that time, saying: ²⁴ 'O יהוה Elohim, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do anything like Your works and Your mighty deeds? ²⁵ 'I pray, let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon.'

Most of us feel sorry for Moses. The word **pleaded** comes from a root meaning “**grace**”. Moses knew that he did not **deserve to enter** the Promised Land. Still he begs for the **unmerited favor** of יהוה. But there is a reason why Moses **could not cross over the Jordan**. As the **representative of Torah**, he could only bring Israel **to the border of the Land**. **Joshua (Yeshua)** will be **the one to lead them into the Land**. Still the **grace** of יהוה is given to Moses as he is directed to the top of a mountain for a **view of the Promised Land**:

Devarim 3:27 'Go up to the top of Pisgah, and lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east; see (רָאָה) it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan.

Was יהוה really just giving Moses a **peak of the Land** which he would never be able to enter? What was it that Moses actually **saw**? The word for **see** (רָאָה) can mean much more than literally taking in images with one's eyes. It can also imply a **spiritual understanding** or an **acceptance of the Word** of יהוה:

Psalms 34:8 Oh, taste and see (רָאָה) that יהוה is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

Now **Moses** lifted his eyes in **all four directions**. We read of that **same vision** given to **Abram**:

***Bereshith (Genesis) 13:14** And **אָרָב** said to **Abram**, after Lot had separated from him: "**Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are -- north, south, east, and west;**"¹⁵ "for all the land which you see (**אֶרֶץ**) I give to you and your descendants forever.*

Even though literally speaking, **Abram** was **in the Promised Land** and "saw" the Promised Land in **all four directions**, what he (Abram) was longing for was **something more** according to the book of **Hebrews**:

Hebrews 11:8** By faith **Abraham** obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.⁹ **By faith he dwelt in the land of promise** as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;¹⁰ **for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is Elohim...

Is the "**something more**" what **Moses** was able to see (**אֶרֶץ**) from the mountain top? Did the **spiritual vision** given to Moses enable Him to see the **heavenly city Abram** was waiting for? Well, we know that **Moses did make it to the Promised Land**:

***Matthew 17:1** Now after six days Yeshua took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves;² and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.³ And behold, **Moses and Elijah appeared to them**, talking with Him.*

Back to Devarim...along with the **physical and spiritual vision** of the Promised Land that Moses would **perceive**, he was **commanded to make Joshua strong and brave**:

***Devarim 3:28** 'But command **Joshua**, and encourage him and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you will see.'*

Now let's think about this. **Joshua** is a picture of **Yeshua**. **Moses** is synonymous with **Torah**. **Joshua was strengthened by Moses**. In the same way, **Yeshua was strengthened by Torah**. Do you remember when Yeshua was 12, and His parents lost track of Him? They found Him in the **temple**, and the Gospels tell us that He was there discussing **Torah**!

Luke 2:46** Now so it was that after three days **they found Him in the temple**, sitting in the midst of the teachers, **both listening to them and asking them questions**.⁴⁷ And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers.⁴⁸ So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously."⁴⁹ And He said to them, "**Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?**"⁵⁰ But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.⁵¹ Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart.⁵² And **Yeshua increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with Yah and men.

When **Yeshua** was tempted in the desert by hasatan, how did He remain **strong**? **He recited Torah to the evil one!** This may be a **pattern** for us to **learn** and **follow ourselves** when we need to be **strengthened** during times of trouble!

As Moses has been given the **vision** of the **plan of Yah in the Promised Land**, he now turns his attention to those who will **physically enter the Land**. As a **loving shepherd**, he begins with **fatherly advice** to this **second generation of Israelites** that has been **raised in the wilderness**:

Devarim 4:1 "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which יייה the Elohim of your fathers is giving you.² "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of יייה your Elohim which I command you.

It was **absolutely forbidden** to **“add to”** or to **“take away from”** the revelation of the **Word** that was **given on Mt. Sinai to Moses**. Later in Devarim, this is repeated:

Devarim 12:32 "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

Now we know that **Yeshua** was the **prophet “like Moses”** that **Torah prophesied to come**:

Devarim 18:18 'I will raise up for them a Prophet like you (Moses) from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.

Rambam, the well-known Jewish rabbi from the 12th century, relates that the **prophet** that is being referred to in Devarim **would not come to establish a new religion**, but to **confirm the words of the Torah and to warn the people not to break it**, as the prophet **Malachi** also wrote:

Malachi 4:4 "Remember the Torah of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments.

Therefore, **Yeshua’s words** had to be in **TOTAL agreement with the Torah of Moses** in order for Him to **qualify** to be the **“prophet like Moses”**. **Yeshua** supported this thought in **Matthew**:

Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Torah or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.¹⁸ "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the Torah till all is fulfilled.¹⁹ "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Obviously, the **Jesus** that most of the church has preached for almost **2,000 years....the one who did away with the Torah**, does not even qualify to **BE the Messiah**. We are **blessed** to be living in the age of the **restoration of the Torah to our Messiah**. The question may still be asked, **“Didn’t Yeshua “add to” or “take away from” what was said in the Torah?”** The answer is that any command **following the Torah**, whether it be in the **Prophets, Writings, or the Apostolic Scriptures**, should only make the meaning of what is in **Torah clearer**. You should find **nothing** that **mandates new requirements**. The **root principle from Torah** should **stand**, although the way

of “walking it out” may be **open to interpretation** and may vary according to individual communities. Where a **ruling** is made concerning **how to walk out a particular principle**, those **under the authority of the one making it**, are **bound by it**. This is why it is important for us to have **people in authority over us** who are **well founded** and **walking in Torah!** Now check out **Yeshua’s words**, and see if they make more sense to you:

Matthew 23:1 Then Yeshua spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, ² saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³ "Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.

Okay let’s skip over to Devarim 6 and take a look at the **Shema**. The **Shema** (hear - שְׁמַע) is the **core Hebrew prayer**. In the **reciting** of the Shema, **special emphasis** is given to the **first six Hebrew words** (Devarim 6:4):

Devarim 6:4 " Hear (שְׁמַע), O Israel: יהוה יהוה, our Elohim, יהוה is one!

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:

Then a **six word response** is said with a quieter voice:

Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever!

בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מְלַכְתּוֹ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד

After a bit of a pause, **Devarim 6:5-9** is recited:

Devarim 6:5 "You shall love יהוה your Elohim with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶ " And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷ "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. ⁸ "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The **Shema** is the **central prayer** in a **siddur** (Hebrew prayer book). It is often the **first bit of Scripture** that a young child will learn and the **last words on the lips of the dying**. The **Shema** has been associated with the **final, defiant declaration of martyrs**. Traditionally, it is recited **twice a day** – once in the morning and once in the evening. It is also sometimes said as a **bedtime prayer**.

The word **Shema** (שְׁמַע) is filled with meaning. It does not just mean “**Hear, O Israel**”. It is better defined like this:

Listen. Concentrate. Give the Word of Yah your most focused attention. Strive to understand. Engage all your faculties, intellectual and emotional. Make His will your own. For what HE commands you to do is not irrational or arbitrary but for your welfare, the welfare of your people, and ultimately for the benefit of all humanity.

Another Hebrew word worth noting in the Shema is the unusual word for “**teach**” in verse 7 – *ve’shinan’tam* (וְשִׁנַּנְתֶּם). The word comes from a root associated with **repetition**. It is sometimes used as a verb to describe **the act of sharpening a blade or a sword**. In other words, **the type of instruction of which this command speaks cannot be accomplished in a single lesson**, but the **goal of the Shema is to foster the discipline of constant awareness and unceasing attentiveness**. It must be **taught, repeated, and stated again**. It is a **living teaching**, intended to **guide our lives**. Therefore it must be learned and learned well, **memorized** until it **becomes part of our very being**.

As verses 7 through 9 testify, there is **no environment** where the words of **Torah** would be **considered out of place**. We are to **meditate** on the Torah **day and night**:

Psalm 1:1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; ² But his delight is in the Torah of הַתּוֹרָה, and in His Torah he meditates day and night.

Joshua 1:7 "Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the Torah which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. ⁸ "This Book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

The **emphasis** in the **Shema** is on **hearing**. In an insightful article penned in the 1800’s, **R. Jacob Leiner** wrote (emphasis mine):

“From a human perspective it often seems as if seeing is a more precise form of knowledge than hearing. In fact, however, hearing has a greater power than seeing. Sight discloses the external aspect of things, but hearing reveals their inwardness. The aspect of G-d which prevails is ‘Be silent, O Israel, and listen’ [Deuteronomy 27:9 ... Keep silent and hear, O Israel: This day you have become the people of the Lord your G-d]. The idea of being silent is that the person practices a self-imposed limitation on his senses, no longer looking at the events in this [external] world and he is then able clearly to understand that ‘You have now become the people of the Lord your G-d’.”

When G-d cannot be seen, argues Leiner, **He can still be heard**. **Hearing** represents a **depth-encounter more intimate and transformational than seeing**. The ideas of Leiner provide us with a segue into one of the most important **differences** between **two great civilizations – ancient Greece and ancient Israel**. As we pursue our **Hebrew roots**, most of us have become aware that we are always struggling with our “**Greek**” way of thinking. The following will provide some history for why this is so.

Greece of the 5th to 3rd centuries B.C.E. excelled in **art, architecture, sculpture and the theatre – the visual arts**. In these it achieved a greatness that has never been surpassed. **Renaissance Italy** was essentially a **rediscovery of the world and skills of ancient Greece**. During the same time period, **Jews** excelled at none of these things. The reason for this is that their interest lay not in **sight, but in sound**...not in **seeing things**, but in **hearing the voice**. Ancient Israel was a culture of the **ear**, not of the **eye**.

Heinrich Graetz, a great 19th century historian, explained the **difference** (emphasis mine):

“The **pagan** perceives the **Divine in nature** through the medium of the **eye**, and he becomes conscious of it as **something to be looked at**. On the other hand, to the **Jew who conceives G-d as being outside of nature and prior to it**, the **Divine manifests itself through the will and through the medium of the ear**. He becomes conscious of it as **something to be heeded and listened to**. The pagan **beholds** his G-d, the Jew **hears** Him, that is, **apprehends His will**.”

Now the **Christian church** has been affected by this coming together of these **Hebrew and Greek ideas**. The congregation in **Acts** began as a **sect within Judaism**, but within a few decades the Gospel message of a **Jewish Messiah** was taken to Rome and the world of **Hellenistic (Greek) culture**. Although more and more scholars believe that the Apostolic Scriptures were first written in **Hebrew**, the texts were soon written and **published in Greek**. The result was that although **Christianity brought many Hebraic ideas to the world**, it did so in a **translation....**and the **deepest Hebrew concepts are not translatable into Greek**. Now for almost 2,000 years, **Hebrew thought** has been **filtered through language and culture....**Hellenistic inspiration or **Greek thought...which simply cannot express the exact meaning of the text**.

Let's bring this idea closer to home. Today when we speak about **knowledge and wisdom**, we use metaphors drawn from the world of the **eye**. We talk about **insight, foresight, hindsight, and people of vision**. The word “**idea**” comes from the same Latin root as the word “**video**”. When we want to communicate that we understand something, we say, “**I see**”. On the contrary, Hebrews say, “**I hear**.”

Friends, the first sin occurred as a result of “**seeing**”. Eve thought that **wisdom** would come from the tree of the “**knowledge**” of good and evil, therefore she ate of its fruit:

***Bereshith 3:6** So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.*

The **wisest** man who ever lived understood that the **source** of wisdom came from **hearing** (שָׁמַע) the words of Elohim:

***Proverbs 1:1** The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: ² To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the words of **understanding**, ³ To receive the instruction of **wisdom**, Justice, judgment, and equity; ⁴ To give prudence to the simple, To the young man knowledge and discretion -- ⁵ A wise man will **hear** (shema שָׁמַע) and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,*

For anyone to **hear** (shema שָׁמַע), there must be a **voice**. To find that **voice** (קוֹל), let's go back to the mountain:

***Shemot (Exodus 19:5)** Now therefore, if you will indeed **obey My voice** (קוֹל) and keep My covenant, then you shall be a **special treasure to Me** above all people; for all the earth is Mine.*

Now, wouldn't you agree that Moses is trying to get the message across that they must **OBEY** His **voice** if they want to be **His special treasure**? Knowing that the Torah is filled with **ordinances, statutes, and commandments**, would you be surprised to learn that there is **not one Hebrew word** that specifically translates "**obey**"? Yes, it is an utterly astonishing fact that there is **NO VERB** in **Biblical Hebrew** that means "**to obey**". So what do you suppose the word **translated as "obey"**, in **nearly every English translation**, is in **Hebrew**?

It is very interesting that when the **language of Hebrew** was being **revived** to be used as a **spoken language**, beginning in the late 19th century, the Jews literally had to come up with a **Hebrew word** that meant "**to obey**". Consider the **IDF** (Israeli Defense Force). An army depends on **obedience** to its **commander**. They chose the word "**letsayet**", an Aramaic term that **you will not find in the Bible**, to mean **obey**. In fact, the word that the **Torah** uses in reference to **obedience** is "**hear**" (**shema** שִׁמַע). **Shema** is a key term in the book of **Devarim** where it appears nearly **100 times** as Moses pleads with the people to **hear the voice** (קוֹל) of יהוה. By way of comparison, it appears only 6 times in the whole book of **Vayikra** (Leviticus).

So now we have seen that the Israelites must **hear** (shema שִׁמַע) the **voice** (קוֹל) of יהוה. What does this **voice** tell us?

***Shemot 19:16** Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the **voice of the shofar** was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.¹⁷ And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with Elohim, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.¹⁸ Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because יהוה descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly.¹⁹ And when the **voice of the shofar** sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and Elohim answered him by **voice**.*

The first thing we notice, is the "**voice**" of the **shofar**. Chapter 20 in **Shemot** continues with the **10 Words (Commandments)**. They are followed up with more "**voices**":

***Shemot 20:18** Now all the people **saw** the **voices**, the lightning flashes, **the sound of the shofar**, and the mountain smoking; and when the people **saw** it, they trembled and stood afar off.¹⁹ Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will **hear**; but let not Elohim speak with us, lest we die."*

That's an odd way of putting things, don't you think? They **saw** the **voices**. This is a rare instance of "**hearing**" and "**seeing**". We can glean a little more information from our Parasha this week:

***Devarim 5:24** "And you said: 'Surely יהוה our Elohim has **shown us His glory** and His greatness, and **we have heard His voice** from the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that **Elohim speaks with man; yet he still lives**.²⁵ Now therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; **if we hear** (shema שִׁמַע) **the voice** (קוֹל) of יהוה our Elohim anymore, then we shall die.*

The Israelites were frightened and **asked Moses to intercede for them**. They promised to **hear** (shema שָׁמַע) the words spoken by Moses as the **intercessor**:

Shemot 20:19 Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will **hear** (shema שָׁמַע); but let not Elohim speak with us, lest we die."

Moses relates to the people that יְהוָה has **heard their voice**, and that it was a **good thing** to ask for an **intercessor**:

Devarim 5:28 "Then יְהוָה heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and יְהוָה said to me: 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. **They are right in all that they have spoken.**'"

The **intercessor** came in the **1st century**. The Israelites were once more able to “**see**” **His glory** and “**hear**” the “**voice**” of the **Living Word**:

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have **heard**, which we have **seen** with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the **Word of life** --

What are some of the words that were spoken by the “**voice**” of **Yeshua**?

Mark 12:28 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"²⁹ Yeshua answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: '**Hear** (shema שָׁמַע), O Israel, יְהוָה our Elohim, יְהוָה is one.³⁰ 'And you shall love יְהוָה your Elohim with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.

Yeshua's response to the question of what was the **most important commandment** was the **Shema!** **Yeshua** was a rabbi...a **teacher of the Torah**. In fact He was the **Living Torah!** His “**voice**” spoke the same message as what was **heard** and **seen** up on that mountain!

Now you may be a little bit confused. We started this commentary with Moses “**seeing**” the Promised Land that he would not be allowed to enter. Then we learned that the Hebrew way of knowledge was through “**hearing**”, not “**seeing**”. In fact the first sin happened as a result of “**seeing**”, not “**listening**” to the Word of יְהוָה. Then we read that the Israelites “**saw**” and “**heard**” “**voices**” up on the mountain. Now we have just observed that Yeshua was “**seen**” and “**heard**”. How can we possibly make sense out of all of this?

Let's take ourselves back up to **Mt. Sinai**. The Israelites “**saw the voices**”...a kind of “**spiritual sight**” that came as a result of agreeing to “**hear**” (shema) the “**voice**” on that mountain. That “**voice**” brought them the **Torah**. In the same way, **Moses**...synonymous with the **Torah**...was given “**spiritual eyes**” to “**see**” the future Promised Land because he was faithful in first “**hearing**”

(shema) from יהוה. And Yeshua...for those who had “eyes to see”...those who “heard” His voice would “see” Him as their Messiah:

John 10:14 "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own ...²⁷ "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."²⁸ "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

Yeshua's conversation with Pilate speaks to the importance of “hearing the voice” of Messiah:

John 18:37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Yeshua answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

The book of Revelation is filled with voices, with hearing and with seeing. This makes sense as John, the writer of the book, was given spiritual eyes to see the unfolding plan of Yah:

Revelation 22:8 Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things ...²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Adonai Yeshua!

As we are drawn towards our Hebrew roots, we are more and more aware of the relationship that we have with the Almighty through words, language, and speech. Romans 10:17 tells us that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Yah.” יהוה created the world with words. He gave to us the gift of words...the Scriptures - His love letter to us. Now it will be these very same words that according to our Torah portion this week, will restore us:

Devarim 4:30 "When you are in distress, and all these words come upon you in the latter days, then you shall return to יהוה your Elohim and shema His voice.

Baruch HaShem יהוה!

Shabbat Shalom!

Ardelle