

**A Few Thoughts on Parashat Vayeilech (Devarim 31,1 - 30; Hos 14,2 – 10; Micah 7,18 – 20; Joel 2,15 - 16)
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What a wonderful day! What a wonderful day? Yes, we are in the middle of the Ten Days of Teshuva, the days of repentance. Repentance usually fills us with regret and sorrow, regret for things we have done that turned us away from the Torah and away from Hashem, and sorrow for the missed opportunities when we had the chance to do something good and we didn't.

How can this be a wonderful day, a day of joy?

Our parashah gives us two hints:

Our sages pay very close attention to the choice of words. *Ve'asaftim ve histarti* "... I will abandon them and hide My countenance from them" (31:17) To abandon and hide, not to close His eyes and ears. That reminds me of a scene that one can witness every day on a playground. The mother wants to go home and calls her three-year-old child. "I want to go home now." "No, I want to play." "I have to go." "No." "OK, I will go, and you stay here." No reaction from the child. The mother turns her back on the child and starts walking home.

I'm sure you have all witnessed such scenes. And we all know what is going to happen in the next moment. As soon the mother is no longer visible, the child will call out and follow her. This image gives us an idea of what is meant by teshuva, repentance. The experience of feeling abandoned when we have chosen a path away from Hashem is followed by the joy of finding our way back home.

Teshuva – especially on this very day, on Shabbat Shuva, promises ultimately the experience of joy.

"Moses wrote down this teaching and gave it to the priests, sons of Levi, who carried the Ark of יהוה's Covenant, and to all the elders of Israel." (31:9) This is truly a reason to be full of joy. The first Torah scroll is finished. What a joyful moment when a congregation receives a new Torah scroll! The Torah itself is a reason to rejoice. The very same time we conclude the reading with the narration of Moshe's death we start all over again with Genesis 1, the creation of heaven and earth. The festival of Simchat Torah marks this moment at the end of Sukkot. All Torah scrolls are removed from the ark and carried around the sanctuary seven times with dancing and singing. Although only seven *hakafot* (circuits) are prescribed, the dancing and singing will often continue much longer and eventually will even overflow from the synagogue to the streets.

Teshuva, returning to Hashem, means returning to the Torah. A sage once compared it to the son of a king who was imprisoned for a long time and now returns to his father, the king. The regret and sorrow turn into rejoicing in the return.

This idea is mirrored in today's prophet readings, the Haftara. "Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have fallen because of your sin. ... I will heal their affliction (speaks Hashem)." (Hosea 14:2-5) Therefore "Blow a horn in Zion, solemnize a fast, proclaim an assembly! Generously will I take them back in love; gather the people, order the congregation to purify themselves. Bring together the old, gather the babes and the infants at the breast; let the bridegroom come out of his chamber, the bride from her canopied couch. For My anger has turned away from them." (Joel 2:15-16)

May we all be able to join in the joy of Teshuva, the joy of returning. May we all be inscribed and sealed for a good year, a year of joy and of health, a year of peace and spiritual development.

Shabbat shalom!