



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

19 – 20 Aug, 2005

15 AV, 5765

Parashat Va'etchanan
(Deuteronomy 3:23–7:11)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz
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D'var Torah by Rabbi Joseph Goldman

When God Would Not Listen To My Plea Divar Torah – Va'etchanan

How many times have we prayed for God to permit us one special request, one heart felt need, and how many times have we thought that God was not listening?

It was not quite the same with Moses. God had heard his plea to enter the Promised Land. Moses made it perfectly clear to the Israelites that he knew that God had heard his plea. Imagine if you will, the biblical scene. The Israelites had gathered around their aging leader. He was days away from becoming 120 years old. The tribes were gathered on the edge of the Promised Land. What was taking place?

Moses was making his farewell address. He was recalling the events from the Exodus, the promises that God had made and the doubters who could only believe when they felt no fear of enemies, or struggles, external or from within. He spoke of the commandments and the laws and the rules that God expected them to obey. He reminded them that the contract was simple. **Follow the rules! Keep the mitzvot! Learn the practices!** It is the Divine price not just for entering the Land, but for being allowed to live there.

Moses let them know that he would not enter the Promised Land with them. His life would be an example, a reminder that their past failures to obey God's rules had kept God from allowing him to join with them.

"Therefore, observe the laws faithfully, for that will be proof of your wisdom and discernment to other peoples, who on hearing of all these laws will say. Surely that great nation is a wise and discerning people."

Yes, it was Moses' last sermon. He reminded all of the obligation that the children should be taught by positive example. For when the example is not positive, it will be easier for them to fail. The "ten great word like events" would be inscribed on tablets. People could count them with their fingers. They would be easy to remember.

Oh, Moses was so specific. "Don't make a sculptured image of any likeness, whether the form of a man or a woman. And, when you look up to the sky and behold the heavenly host, don't be lured into bowing down to them, or serving them."

Yes, it is his last plea, and his last teaching. He repeats the words of the Ten Commandments, and makes the requirement of "Observing the Sabbath" precise. He declares the "oneness of God in the simple framework that we revere as the Shema. He articulates the revolutionary formula of how we may "love God with our heart, and soul and might."

He also makes clear that we have "free will." It's our call! I put it this way: for faith to exist, of even be abundant, we must nurture it with deeds. Perhaps that is why our sages taught, we have ten great word like events, and altogether, they help us to form 613 Commandments or Mitzvot.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Joseph Goldman
13 Av 5765

18th August, 2005