

Shabbat Va'etchanan/Nachamu Shalom



by Phyllis Chesler

Every single parasha contains multitudes. Theoretically, could our greatest scholars recover the entire Torah if they studied a single parasha? True, explanations evolve. For example, why we must observe Shabbos is not only because G-d rested after Creation (Shmot) but, in our current parasha, involves remembering that, as slaves in Egypt we were never allowed to rest.

Still, one can read one parasha and hear the reverberations, the very words and melodies of other parshiot. For example:

In Lech Lecha, G-d tells Avraham to “sah na eneycha” or lift up your eyes, and look about from the place you are, and “tzafona, v’negba, v’kedayma, v’yama” or to the north, to the south to the east and to the west. “Ke et kol-haaretz asher ata roeh l’cha etnena”—for all the land you see I give to you...(13:14-15).

In Va’Etchanan, Moshe Rabeynu pleads with G-d to be “allowed to cross over to see the good land.” God angrily refuses his wish but then tells him to “aley rosh pishgah v’sah eneycha,”

look around or lift up your eyes “yama, v’tzafona, v’taymana, ooh mizracha” west, north, south, and east (and) “ooh raeh b’eynecha” see with your own eyes....(3:27).

I see the amazing similarity but I do not understand the differences, namely this: Why is Avraham told to look “north” first and Moshe told to look “west” first? Arguably, Avraham is somewhere near the border of Iraq and Turkey, and perhaps moving west—towards Egypt. Moshe is, arguably, approaching Jordan from the Sinai. I looked for commentaries on this point but could not even find a discussion. If anyone has thought about this, please tell me.

Second, why is G-d so very generous, almost maternally so with Avraham and so angry with Moshe who has borne the burden of our people for nearly 40 years?

Ah, the given answer is that we, his people, have been so faithless, so foolish, so badly behaved that Moshe is being punished for our sins, not for his having struck the rock instead of speaking to it.

Are we still endangering our leaders by our cruel or indifferent behaviors?

Yishayahu writes: “Nachamu, nachamu, ami” (1) Comfort oh comfort My People and tells us all to “siooh m’rom eynachem v’roo” Lift high your eyes and see (26).

May we all be empowered and privileged to do so.

P.S. We were told to continue east, ever-east of Eden—and yet here we are, forever going West. Can someone explain this to me?