



As We Approach the Finish Line

וַיֵּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם בֵּן מֵאָה וָעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה אֲנִכִּי הַיּוֹם לֹא אוֹכֵל עוֹד לִצְאֹת וְלָבוֹא וְהִ' אָמַר אֵלַי לֹא תַעֲבֹר אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה.

And Moses went, and he spoke the following words to all of Israel. And he said to them, “Today I am one hundred and twenty years old. I can no longer go or come, and the Lord said to me, ‘You shall not cross this Jordan.’” (Devarim 31:1–2)

Vayeilekh is the shortest *parasha* in the entire Torah and it is always read at the end of the year, as we approach Rosh HaShana, the New Year. Rabbi Berel Wein explains that this is no coincidence. We are not the only ones who are in an introspective mood at this time; Moses also reviews his life in his final days. The ends of the year, the Torah, and Moses’ life are all interconnected.

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As the year draws to the end and we are engaged in reviewing our actions, we can look to Moses’ speech for guidance in this process. Moses speaks frankly and expresses his feelings. He talks of his disappointments and successes and calls on the Children of Israel to keep the Torah and to continually reaccept it.

This is the essence of this time of the year during the months of Elul and Tishrei. It is the annual opportunity for an honest assessment of what is good and bad in our lives. If necessary, it is the chance to turn a new page, to correct, and to refresh. This is not a time to be depressed; rather we should be optimistic and look for our winning and strong points. One of the most positive comments I have heard about the month of Elul tells us, “When you want to correct yourself, it is very important to know what your bad qualities are, but it is far more important to know your positive qualities.” ■

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