

<p align="center">וַיִּגְלוֹ מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֶל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם בְּן־מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה אֲנִכִּי הַיּוֹם לֹא־אוּכַל עוֹד לָצֵאת וּלְבוֹא וְהָ אָמַר אֵלַי לֹא תַעֲבֹר אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה: דְּבָרַי לֹא־אֶבֹּ</p>	<p><i>Now Moshe went</i> <i>and spoke these words</i> <i>to all Israel.</i> <i>he said to them:</i> <i>A hundred and twenty years old</i> <i>am I today;</i> <i>I am no longer able to go out</i> <i>and to come in,</i> <i>and God has said to me:</i> <i>you are not to cross over</i> <i>this Jordan!</i> Deut. 31:1-2</p>
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וַיִּגְלוֹ מֹשֶׁה or *וַיִּגְלוֹ מֹשֶׁה*: *A Scribal Error?* *וַיִּגְלוֹ מֹשֶׁה* are the first words Parashat Vayeilekh. But is this text correct? *וַיִּגְלוֹ* means *he went*. This refers, of course, to Moses who *went*. But the text doesn't tell us where he *went*. Exactly where was Moses going? And on top of it, in the very next verse, we read that he can no longer go anywhere!

Welcome to the world of the critical study of the Bible. The traditional text that we have in front of us is called the Masoretic Text. This became the authoritative text. But ancient translations of the Bible, most notably the Greek translation known as the Septuagint (LXX), and other ancient manuscripts of the Bible, most notably the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), sometimes have significant variants from the Masoretic Text. This is the case with Deut. 31:1. In both the LXX and the DSS, instead of *וַיִּגְלוֹ*, it says, *וַיִּכְלֶה* (the כ and the ל are reversed). Which version is right? *וַיִּגְלוֹ* of the Masoretic Text or *וַיִּכְלֶה* of the DSS and the LXX? There is a strong case to be made for *וַיִּכְלֶה*, which means, *And Moses finished*. Robert Alter explains that *the order of the last two consonants could easily have been reversed in a scribal transcription*. Richard Friedman points out that this is a nice wordplay: *וַיִּכְלֶה*-*he finished* sounds a lot like *לֹא אוּכַל*-*I am not able* in the next verse. At this point in the book, Moses has indeed *finished* all of his major discourses, so this variant makes a lot of sense. Moreover, *וַיִּכְלֶה* is a word that we recognize from other key moments of completion in the Torah, namely when God *finishes* creating the world: *וַיִּכְלֶה אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ*-*God had finished, on the seventh day, his work that he had made, and he rested*. (Gen. 2:2); and



when Moses *finishes* the work of the sanctuary: *וַיִּכְלֶה מֹשֶׁה*-*And Moses finished the work* (Exod. 40:33). In our next Parasha, Ha'azinu, the word *וַיִּכְלֶה* occurs again, this time as Moses *finishes* his last poetic address to the people: *וַיִּכְלֶה מֹשֶׁה לְדַבֵּר אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל*-*And Moses finished speaking all these words to all Israel*. (Deut. 32:45). Therefore, some scholars think that *וַיִּגְלוֹ* is an error.

The word *וַיִּכְלֶה* also signals to the reader/listener that we are at a major turning point. Just as there is no going back from Creation and the completion of the sanctuary, there is no going back here as well. With the completion of Moses' words, like the completion of a great symphony, we get a feeling of tremendous pathos. Moses' main accomplishment is done and now all that is left before his passing are some parting words of blessing. All of Jewish history will unfold from this pivotal moment.

On לָצֵאת וּלְבוֹא: Going Out and Coming In.

When Moses says, *לֹא אוּכַל עוֹד לָצֵאת וּלְבוֹא*-*I am no longer able to go out and to come in* we tend to think that he is simply making an observation about his old-age. After all, he was 120 years old! But in a couple of chapters, the Torah specifically remarks that he was pretty fit for his age: *וּמֹשֶׁה*-*Now Moshe was a hundred and twenty years old at his death; his eye had not grown-dim, his vigor had not fled*. Clearly, he was not blind and not lame. Rashi tries to resolve the contradiction. Even though he was still *physically able* to lead, he was not *divinely authorized* to lead: *שִׁנְטֵלָה מִמֶּנִּי הָרְשׁוּת*-*because the prerogative of leadership was taken away from me and given to Joshua*. Alternatively, Rashi says, he no longer had the right to impart Torah or wisdom because: *שִׁנְטֵטְמוּ מִמֶּנּוּ מְסֻרוֹת וּמַעֲשֵׂי הַחֲכָמָה*-*the traditions and fountains of wisdom were capped from him*. In other words, according to Rashi, Moses is saying: *I no longer have political or spiritual authority over you*. He is, quite literally, incapacitated. He no longer has the capacity to lead. He can't come and go as he once did.

For other commentators, this phrase is a specific term for military leadership. For example, Joshua uses the exact same phrase when he gives a kind of valedictory address upon completing many battles. He is 85 years old and: *עוֹדֵנִי הַיּוֹם חֲזַק כַּאֲשֶׁר בְּיוֹם שְׁלַח אוֹתִי מֹשֶׁה כִּכְחִי אֲזוּ וּכְכֹחִי*-*I am still as strong today as on the day of Moshe's sending me—as my might was then, so my might is now for battle, for going out and for coming in*. Robert Alter comments that it should be translated: *I can no longer sally forth and come in. It is an apt phrase for Moses to use because Joshua, whom he is about to designate as his successor, figures above all as the military commander of the conquest*. In other words, Moses is either saying, *Even though I'm still strong, I'm not strong enough to lead you in battle*, or *Even though I'm still capable, I've been decommissioned, and I am no*

longer authorized by God to lead you in the next phase of our lives, which is the conquest of Canaan.

As we know, there is more than one way of reading the Bible, and the joy of Torah study is being able to appreciate multiple layers of meaning at the same time. It's hard to read **לצאת ולבוא** without thinking about another occurrence of this pairing in the preceding parasha, Ki Tavo: **ברוך אתה בבואך וברוך אתה בצאתך**. *Blessed will you be when you come in and blessed will you be when you go out* (Deut. 28:6). It is very plausible that that verse could also be referring to military achievement, after all, it says right afterwards, *Your enemies will be routed before you*. But it's also pretty clear that **ברוך אתה בבואך וברוך אתה בצאתך** applies to all of life: *Blessed you will be in the town and blessed you will be in the field. Blessed the fruit of your womb and blessed the fruit of your soil*, etc. *Blessed when you enter; blessed when you exit*, ie. at every juncture.

Turn to Psalm 121 and you find this: **ה' ישמר צאתך ובואך**. *May God guard your going and coming, now and forever*. While that Psalm could certainly apply to a someone about to go to war, when we read it, we construe it in the broadest and most figurative sense: life is a journey, and throughout the course of a life there are many **comings and goings**. Psalm 121 is the go-to Psalm for all pivotal moments: milestones, graduations, sickness, travel, the end of Shabbat, the end of a year and the beginning of a new year, and of course the ultimate journey from life to beyond life. The phrase **going and coming**, is common enough to not require much interpretation. But when Moses says it at the end of his life, he is recognizing that despite all of his gifts, he no longer has a free range of movement. There is an actual **geographic** border that he cannot cross, the Jordan river, and there is also an actual **temporal** border before him, a boundary which he cannot cross as well. *I am no longer free to come and go as I please. I cannot live beyond my final moment, the final boundary. I now inhabit the final zone of my life, in time and space, and I cannot break out of that zone. I must face the inevitable fact of my mortality.*

One more item ought to intrigue us. We should recall that at the beginning of the Torah, as human lives extend into several centuries, (see under: Methuselah, 969 years!) God decreed that the human lifespan will no longer exceed 120 years. **ויאמר ה' לא ידון רוחי באדם לעולם בשנים הוא**. *And God said, "My breath shall not abide in the human forever, for his but flesh. Let his days be a hundred and twenty years."* (Gen. 6:3). What a coincidence! Here, Moses remarks that he is 120 years old! It is one thing that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob live to 175, 180 and 147 years of age respectively. But Moses, the man of Torah, the person most closely linked to the Torah and its laws, if Moses himself didn't live up to the Torah's prescription of the lifespan, then, ironically, he would be undermining the entire Torah that he wanted everybody else to uphold! In stating his age, Moses therefore is performing a final act of validation. He validates the Torah,

and he validates God's original plan for humanity, which was stated all the way back at the beginning of the Torah.

<p>ויכתב משה את התורה הזאת ויתנהג אל הכהנים בני לוי הנשאים את ארון ברית ה' ואל כל זקני ישראל. ויצו משה אותם לאמר מקץ שבע שנים במעד שנת השמיטה בחג הסוכות. בבוא כל ישראל לראות את פני ה' אלהיה במקום אשר יבחר תקרא את התורה הזאת נגד כל ישראל באזניהם. דברים לא-ט-יא</p>	<p><i>Moshe wrote down this Instruction and gave it to the priests, the Sons of Levi, those carrying the Coffer of the Covenant of God, and to all the elders of Israel. And Moshe commanded them, saying: At the end of seven years, at the appointed-time of the Year of Release, on the pilgrimage-festival of Sukkot, when all Israel comes to be seen at the presence of the Lord your God, at the place that he chooses, you are to proclaim this Instruction in front of all Israel, in their hearing. Deut. 31:9-11</i></p>
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In light of everything that we said above regarding Moses and the recognition of his mortality, and in light of all the times that he complained about not being able to go into the land with the people, we have to give him credit for figuring out at least one clever way that he will accompany the people: with words. Moses may not **literally** make it into the land, but he guaranties that he will make it in, **literarily!** By writing his words and entrusting the document to the custodians of all the holy things, the priests, and by instructing them to read the document to the people every seven years at the Temple on Sukkot, Moses ensured that some part of him will actually be there with them. He might not make it into the land, but his words definitely will.

Many have pointed out that this the nucleus of the Oral Torah. After all, if the Torah is going to be read publicly, somebody listening is inevitably going have to explain it. And so begins the conversation: the Oral Torah.

But sometime after Ezra, Jews discovered that once every seven years was not enough for a public reading, so the entire Torah was divided into weekly portions, and here we are every week, reading it, studying it, and participating in Oral Torah, the eternal conversation about Moses' words. While he didn't make it into the land, his words outlasted him and will continue to spark conversation forever.



An aside: When the great Yiddish writer, Sholem Aleichem died in 1916, he left instructions in his will for his family and friends to gather on his *yahrzeit*: "Read my will," he wrote, "and also select one of my stories, one of the very merry ones, and recite it in whatever language is most intelligible to you. Let my name be recalled with laughter, or not at all." He, like Moses, understood that words have power to outlive us. It's a lovely lesson for us all. Why not write down your own words and live on through them?

Shabbat Shalom! שבת שלום!