

PARSHAT NITZAVIM-VAYEILECH
21 ELUL 5780/10 SEPTEMBER 2020
18 Elul 5438 – Birth of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov



GET READY TO WRITE

1. “Now, therefore, write down for yourselves this poem...” (Deuteronomy 31:19)
2. From “Give ear, O heavens,” until “and God will appease God’s land and God’s people” [namely, Deuteronomy 32:1-43]. (Rashi)
This refers to the entire Torah. (Talmud, Nedarim 38a)
3. There is a distinction between poetry and prose. In poetry the subject matter is not plainly set forth as in prose. Additional explanations are necessary in order to indicate the allusions condensed into each expression. Such is the nature of Torah. Its story is not elaborated. It requires additional explanations in order to appreciate its allusions. (Netziv, 1817-1893)
4. The Hebrew Bible and the Odyssey are opposing types of ancient epic literature. The former is various and multilayered in its characterization of people and events. The latter is the epitome of detailed, organized and logical storytelling. Homer’s motivation is to represent phenomena in a fully externalized form, visible and palpable in all their parts. The desire of the Hebrew Bible is not to mimic reality but to convey truth. Homer uses dazzlingly detailed descriptions so that each scene is set out pictorially as if bathed in sunlight. By contrast, Biblical narrative is spare and understated. The decisive points of the Biblical narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is non-existent...they call for interpretation. The whole remains mysterious and fraught with background. (Erich Auerbach, “Odysseus’ Scar”)
5. If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. (Ernest Hemmingway, *Death in the Afternoon*).

6. Midrash articulates the unconscious of the text: the hidden narratives, almost entirely camouflaged by the words of the Torah, emerge from the spaces, from the gaps in meaning, from the dream resonance of those words....Ultimately, conscious and unconscious layers of meaning inform one another; the written and oral Torah are not separated by an impermeable wall....It is the interplay of conscious and unconscious motifs that makes for the grand narrative, which is capable of providing the matrix within which future narratives can take shape. (Avivah Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*)

7. Deuteronomy 31:19 is the scriptural basis for the 613th commandment. (*Sefer HaChinuch*)