

## Parashah Vaetchanan

The one where Moses pleads with God for the opportunity to enter the Promised Land, Moses preps the Israelites to enter the Promised Land, and the Shema is introduced.

**Parashah Vaetchanan is a pivotal portion in the Book of Deuteronomy where Moses pleads passionately with God for the opportunity to enter the Promised Land.** He recalls his previous pleas to God, which were denied due to an incident involving striking a rock to produce water. Despite his appeals, Moses is reminded that he will not set foot in the land. However, he is given the opportunity at least to go up Mount Nebo to see it from a distance before his death.

**Moses stresses the importance of the Israelites' rules to follow, stressing monotheism (the belief that there is only one God) and the rules against idolatry.** He retells the Ten Commandments, emphasizing their significance as the fundamental moral code for the nation. Moses encourages the people to observe these commandments diligently, as they are the key to their prosperity and well-being.

**Parashah Vaetchanan stresses the importance of teaching these lessons to future generations.** Moses reminds the Israelites to teach these principles to their children and grandchildren, making sure their faith and cultural identity will continue.

**The parashah also introduces the concept of "Shema Yisrael," one of the most significant teachings in Judaism.** It begins with the declaration, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone," emphasizing the monotheistic core of Judaism. The Shema reminds people that there is only one God. Additionally, Parashah Vaetchanan contains instructions for the establishment of cities of refuge for individuals who unintentionally committed manslaughter. These cities serve as places of sanctuary for those seeking protection from potential avengers and ensure a fair trial.

**Parashah Vaetchanan sets the stage for the Israelites as they prepare to enter the Promised Land,** providing them with a strong moral and spiritual foundation to guide their actions and decisions in the challenges that lie ahead.

## Teen Takeaways from Parashah Vaetchanan

1. **Stay true to your beliefs:** Just like the Israelites in the story, it's important to stick to your core values and beliefs, even when faced with challenges or temptations that might lead you astray. The Israelites are being prepared for their transition to the Promised Land, where there will be many temptations to stray from what they know is right. As you approach "Jewish adulthood," what kind of temptations will you be facing as a teenager?
2. **Respect authority:** Understanding and respecting the authority figures in your life, such as parents, teachers, and mentors, is crucial. Sometimes they make decisions that you might not like, but learning to accept and work with them can lead to growth and understanding. Have you ever felt two things at one time - that you are angry at your parents or teachers and that you are grateful to have them in your life?
3. **Teach and learn:** Remember to share with your peers and younger generations the lessons you've learned and the wisdom you've gained. In doing so, you contribute to preserving your culture and helping others grow. With whom can you share these?
4. **Justice and fairness matter:** Treating everyone fairly and seeking justice is important. The concept of cities of refuge teaches us to provide a safe place for those in need and to ensure that justice is served compassionately. Is there a difference between doing something wrong intentionally and causing bad results accidentally? Should the punishment be the same for the person who does the damage?
5. **Be grateful and remember your roots:** Take time to appreciate the people and events that have shaped your life. Understanding your history and the struggles your ancestors went through can give you a greater sense of gratitude and purpose. Can you imagine that Moses and Aaron and Miriam are your ancestors and are part of your family, if you just go back far enough?
6. **Strength in unity:** Just as the Israelites were stronger when they came together as a community, remember that working together and supporting one another can help you overcome challenges and achieve your goals.
7. **Take responsibility:** Your choices have consequences, so it's essential to take responsibility for your actions. Learning from mistakes and making better choices is part of growing up.
8. **Connect spiritually:** The Shema reminds us of the power of prayer and having a spiritual connection. It can provide guidance and comfort during challenging times. "Recite them (the words of the Shema) when you lie down and when you rise up". This is why the Shema is recited in the evening and in the morning.
9. **Many people who meditate use a mantra**, a key word or phrase which they repeat over and over. Many Jews use the words of the **Shema** to create that meditative **mood**.
10. **The Shema teaches us that there is one and only one God.** How does that encourage us to see others as our equals? Is every human being the creation of the same God? Are there some people who are so evil that we have a difficult time imagining that they are also created by God?

## Summary

These lessons are not just about religion; they **apply to your everyday life as a teenager**. They can help you **make better decisions, build strong relationships, and grow into a responsible and compassionate individual**.