

The Hidden Witness (Vayelech)

“Words fly away, written ones remain.” (“Verba volant, scripta manent.”) – Latin proverb

Every covenant needs a witness. When two people make a promise, they call others to stand by and testify that the agreement was made. Words alone can fade, but when a witness is present the promise is bound by something greater than memory.

The Torah describes itself in the same way. At the end of Moshe’s life, he places a written scroll in the Ark of the Covenant and declares that it will serve as a witness between God and Israel. According to Rabbi Ovadia Sforno, this was not a symbolic gesture but a living safeguard. Hidden in the holiest place and seen only by the High Priest once a year on Yom Kippur, that scroll was preserved beyond human reach. Its very concealment protected it. Generations later, anyone who wondered if the Torah had been altered could look to this hidden scroll as the unbroken original, proving that every copy in circulation was faithful to the revelation at Sinai.

History shows the weight of this witness. During the reign of King Yoshiyahu, the Torah scroll was discovered in the Temple, and its words struck the people with the realization of how far they had drifted from their covenant. The Torah was not meant to be locked away as a silent relic. It was also meant to rise up in moments of crisis and call the people back. Even when forgotten, it could reemerge as a voice of conscience and demand a return to God.

There are therefore two aspects to Torah. There is the Torah that we hold and read, guiding us daily with study and practice. And there is the hidden Torah, silent but steadfast, reminding us that beyond our interpretations and even our failings lies an eternal covenant that never wavers.

May the Torah we learn and the witness beyond our reach guide us back to our commitments to God.

Shabbat Shalom and Gmar Chatima Tova,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the memories of: Rabbanit Miriam Amital, Rabbi Yosef Adler and Dr. Joseph Waldman.

May their families be consoled among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.