

Parashat V'etchanan

Despite Moshe's pleading in Parashat *V'ethanan* ("I plead"), God angrily refuses to let him enter the Land of Israel. "Enough! Never speak to Me of this matter again... look at it well, for you shall not go across this Jordan" (Deut. 3:26-27). Moshe explains to the Israelites that "I must die in this land; I shall not cross the Jordan" (4:23). Why the redundancy? If he is going to die in the wilderness, of course he won't cross the Jordan. The midrash explains that "I shall not cross the Jordan" indicates that even Moshe's bones won't cross into Canaan (Sifrei Bamidbar 135). Unlike Joseph, Moshe can't even be buried in the land. We often wish the Torah had a different ending for Moshe. As a loyal servant and prophet we would expect that he would receive everything he wanted. But like all of us, Moshe does not get to accomplish all that he had hoped to. Franz Kafka wrote of this injustice in his diaries: "He is on the track of Canaan all his life; it is incredible that he should see the land only when on the verge of death." On this Shabbat *Nahamu*, the haftarah from Isaiah comforts us and promises redemption following the destruction of the Temple. What is our comfort following Moshe's all-too-human end? Kafka wrote: "The dying vision of [the land] can only be intended to illustrate how incomplete a moment is human life, incomplete because a life like this could last forever and still be nothing but a moment. Moshe fails to enter Canaan not because his life is too short but because it is a human life." Moshe was a great prophet and leader of the Israelites, but ultimately he is human like all of us. Moshe is fortunate to see the land his descendants will enter. Before he dies he gets to see himself as a critical link in the chain connecting the Israelite past with its future. I hope he felt comforted by this. May we all feel comforted knowing that our lives are the sacred link connecting our family's past to the ones who will come after us.