SUMMARY OF PARASHAT VAETCHANAN

MOSHE'S SUPPLICATION AND GOD'S RESPONSE

Moshe Rabbenu tells us, in the first person, that he begged HaShem to allow him to enter the land of Israel. But God did not accept his request. God commanded Moshe to go up to a mountain from where he could see the Promised Land, but he would not enter it. Moshe instructs the Jewish people to follow the laws of God, without adding or subtracting anything to the Divine ordained precepts. Moshe also mentions what happened to Pinehas in Baal Pe'or to show the people that those who are faithful to God were protected from the epidemic and survived.

THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

Moshe asks the people to take carefully observe the Tora, and appreciate the wisdom of its precepts and commandments. The Tora brings us closer to God and allows us to know what He wants from us. Moshe also exhorts the people not to forget the day that God made a covenant with us on Mount Sinai. He asks them to recount this event to their children and grandchildren: God did not appear in a visual image or form. We only perceived His voice. Making or worshiping images that represent God is a very serious sin, which can lead the Jewish people to lose their right to the land of Israel and go to exile. But Moshe anticipates that even when the people are exiled, God will not abandon them. The people will eventually repent and return to God. The nation of Israel is the only one that has been freed from slavery directly by God, and it is the only people that God has chosen to reveal His commandments. Moses designates three cities of refuge on the east side of the Jordan River. These cities provided refuge for an individual who unintentionally murdered another person.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Tora reiterates the Ten Commandments, recalling that the Mount Sinai covenant is not limited to those who were physically present at Mount Sinai, but to their descendants as well. Moshe reminds the people that when they experienced God's revelation, the voice of God, at Sinai they were frightened, and the leaders of Israel asked Moses that God not speak to them directly, because they felt as if they would die. It was an out of this world experience that they could not physically or mentally tolerate. They asked Moshe to act as an intermediary and convey God's words to them.

THE SHEMA ISRAEL

We also read in this Parasha the Shema Israel. It contains the fundamental principles of our Tora: the existence and oneness of God; the love we should have for God; the obligation to teach our children the Tora; and to remember our duties to God through Tefillin and Mezuza. God promises us a land of blessing and abundance (Israel). And Moses warns the people that when they inherit that abundance, they should not forget the Creator who provided them with this wealth. Parents should also teach their children that they should observe all of God's commandments. Jews are at God's service because in Egypt, we were slaves to Pharaoh until God brought us out of Egypt "to serve Him". The big difference between serving Pharaoh and serving God is that Pharaoh wanted us to serve him for his own benefit. HaShem however, is like a loving parent that asks us to serve them, that is: to obey His commandments, because His commandments are the recipe for a life of righteousness and happiness. God asks us to serve Him, for our own benefit.