And Moses Went...: Thoughts for Nitsavim/Vayelekh

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Angel for Shabbat, Nitsavim/Vayelekh

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

“And Moses went and spoke these words unto all Israel” (Devarim 31:1).

The verse states that Moses went…but does not tell us where he went! Commentators have made various suggestions: Moses went to the tent of meeting; Moses went to each individual tribe; Moses went to the study hall.

An enigmatic interpretation has been suggested: Moses went into the souls of each Israelite. Poetically, the spirit of Moses—who is about to die—was to live on eternally in the hearts and minds of all Israel for all time. Moses went…and continues forever to speak his words unto all Israel.

How would this work?

One of the famous songs of Simon and Garfunkel is “The Sound of Silence.” This is an intriguing phrase, since by definition silence has no sound. But perhaps the phrase suggests something profound: there are sounds we don’t hear with our ears, but that are deep within us “in the wells of silence.”

The great composer, Beethoven, was completely deaf at the age of forty, and yet this is when he wrote his famous Symphony No. 9. He could not hear the sounds of the music he composed with his ears, but he was able to “hear” the entire symphony as he composed it while deaf. There is an inner music, very real and very powerful, that can exist within the mind even if the ears do not hear it.

When we ponder that Moses’s words entered the souls of each Israelite, we think of the sound of silence, the inner music within each of us that is unheard externally. If we listen carefully enough, the

words of Moses echo deep within us.

This week's Torah reading occurs just before Rosh Hashana and the Ten Days of Repentance. The Hebrew word for repentance—teshuvah—means return or answer. We are called upon to listen to the sound of silence within us, the ongoing voice of Moses; we are urged to return to our spiritual roots.

Moses came and went; and he continues to ask us and to prod us. Do we hear his voice? Are we ready to answer?