

Hearing the Living Covenant

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · 22 July 2026

Va'etchanan on 8 Av 5786

A Torah-Geopolitical Reflection on Unity, Resilience, and Strategic Clarity Amid Empires

Parshat Va'etchanan · 8 Av 5786

Developed in partnership with Grok / xAI

Introduction: The Covenant Addressed to the Living

On this 8 Av 5786, as the Nine Days intensify and the fast of Tisha B'Av approaches with the setting of the sun, the fourth portion of Parshat Va'etchanan confronts us with a declaration of startling immediacy. Moses stands before the generation that will enter the Land and declares: Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us—we who are here, all of us alive today (Devarim 5:3). He then recounts the Ten Commandments in full, framing them not as ancestral inheritance alone but as the living constitution of a people whose very identity is covenantal. The Shema that follows—Hear, O Israel—is the summons to attentive presence above the noise of empires, the clamor of competing powers, and the internal divisions that historically invited destruction.

I. Exegetical Foundations: The Living Covenant and the Architecture of Command

The fourth portion opens with Moses assembling all Israel and declaring that the statutes and judgments he teaches are not for a bygone age. Rashi, drawing on the Sifrei, emphasizes that the covenant was made with those standing before Moses precisely so that every subsequent generation would understand itself as a direct party. The restatement of the Ten Commandments is not mere repetition; it is re-enactment.

II. The Hayom Yom Imperative: Ahavat Yisrael as Strategic Foundation

The Hayom Yom teaching of the day places Ahavat Yisrael at the foundation of Chassidic life, elevating it even above other core principles in moments of external pressure. This is not sentimentalism. It is strategic. Historical catastrophe—most starkly the destruction of the Second Temple—came through internal division more than external military superiority. Sinat chinam created the openings through which the legions entered. In the present hour, this teaching carries geopolitical weight.

III. Synthesis with Covenantal Republicanism

The living covenant of Va'etchanan finds a powerful resonance in the tradition of covenantal republicanism that informed the American founding and continues to shape debates about liberty as non-domination. Philip Pettit's conception of freedom as the absence of arbitrary

power, Daniel Elazar's mapping of biblical covenantal federalism, and Yoram Hazony's insistence on the particularist nation under higher law all echo the Torah's rejection of both pure hierarchical domination and pure atomized contract.

IV. Contemporary Resonances: Hormuz, Iran, Lebanon, and the Test of Hearing

The eleventh night of American strikes against Iranian assets used to interdict Hormuz shipping is a case study in the tension between necessary force and the longer work of covenant renewal. Military action can degrade capabilities; it cannot by itself create the internal cohesion or the alliance trust that sustained security requires. Iranian missile activity toward Jordan and the elevation of Khalil al-Hayya within Hamas signal the continuation of proxy strategies that thrive on Western hesitation and internal division.

V. Practical Horizons and the Work of the Living Generation

What, then, is required of those who receive the covenant as living? First, the discipline of hearing: daily study that keeps the Commandments and the Shema as living architecture rather than historical artifact. Second, the cultivation of Ahavat Yisrael as strategic necessity. Third, the pragmatic work of energy independence, alliance renewal, and military readiness pursued without illusion. Fourth, the Nine Days practice of turning mourning into constructive study and charity.

Conclusion: The Covenant Is Made with Us

Moses' words on the plains of Moab remain the most precise description of our situation: the covenant is not with the fathers alone, but with us—we who are here, all of us alive today. The empires of the present hour will rise and fall according to their capacity to hear or to ignore the moral and strategic realities that the Torah diagnoses with unmatched clarity.

Chazak chazak v'nitchazek.

Sources

Primary Torah and Chassidic sources: Devarim 5:3 and the restatement of the Ten Commandments; Rashi and the Sifrei on the living covenant; Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 3; Tehillim 44-48; Rambam on the laws of the Temple; the Hayom Yom teaching of the day on Ahavat Yisrael.

Republican and political theory: Philip Pettit; Daniel Elazar; Yoram Hazony; also Berman, Walzer, Mead, and Kissinger.

Contemporary reporting, July 2026: CENTCOM, Reuters, CNN, Jerusalem Post, and related coverage of Hormuz, Iran, Jordan, and Hamas.

This essay was developed in partnership with Grok and xAI.

Prepared in deep partnership and cooperation with Grok and xAI