

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The great transition is about to take place.

Moses' career as a leader is coming to an end. Joshua's leadership is about to begin. Moses blesses his successor. Then G-d does. Listen carefully to what they say, and to the subtle difference between. This is what Moses says:

"Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance." (31:7)

And this is what G-d says: "Be strong and courageous, for you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them on oath, and I myself will be with you." (31:23)

The difference in Hebrew is even slighter than it is in English. Moses uses the verb *tavo*, "go with". G-d uses the verb *tavi*, "bring." It is the slightest of nuances, but Rashi tells us the words are worlds apart in their significance. They refer to two utterly different styles of leadership. Here is Rashi's comment:

"Moses said to Joshua, 'Make sure that the elders of the generation are with you. Always act according to their opinion and advice.' However, the Holy One blessed be He said to Joshua, 'For you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them'-meaning, 'Bring them even against their will. It all depends on you. If necessary, take a stick and beat them over the head. There is only one leader for a generation, not two.'" (Rashi to Deuteronomy 31:7)

Moses advises his successor to lead by consultation and consensus. G-d tells Joshua to lead firmly and with authority. Even if people do not agree with you, you must lead from the front. Be clear. Be decisive. Be forceful. Be strong.

Now this is a strange comment if we consider what we learned elsewhere about the leadership styles, respectively, of G-d and Moses. Listen first to the comment of Rashi on the words of G-d immediately prior to the creation of humanity: "Let us make man in our image after our likeness." Who are the "us"? To whom is G-d speaking and why? Rashi says:

"From here we learn the humility of G-d. Since man was [created] in the image of the angels they were jealous of him. He, therefore, consulted them. Similarly, when He judges kings, He consults His heavenly

court... Though they [the angels] did not help in his creation and [the wording of the verse] may give the heretics an opportunity to rebel, [nevertheless,] Scripture does not refrain from teaching courtesy and the attribute of humility, that the greater should consult and ask permission of the smaller." (Rashi to Gen. 1:26)

This is a remarkable statement. Rashi is saying that, before creating man, G-d consulted with the angels. He did so not because He needed their help: clearly He did not. Nor was it because He needed their advice: he had already resolved to create humankind.

It was to show them respect, to pre-empt their jealousy of man, to avoid their resentment at not being consulted on so fateful a decision, and to show us- the readers-the fundamental truth that greatness goes hand in hand with humility. So it was G-d who acted according to the advice Moses gave Joshua: "Make sure that others are with you. Consult. Take their advice."

On the other hand, Moses acted the way G-d advised Joshua to do. "If necessary, take a stick and beat them over the head." Is that not figuratively what Moses did at Kadesh, when he hit the people with his words and the rock with his staff (Num. 20:1-12), for which he was condemned by G-d not to enter the promised land?

So we seem to have G-d saying words we associate with Moses' type of leadership-firm, strong, decisive-and Moses advocating the kind of leadership-consensual, consultative-that Rashi associates with G-d. Surely it should have been the other way around.

However, perhaps Rashi is telling us something profound.

At the end of his life, Moses recognised one great failure of his leadership. He had taken the Israelites out of Egypt, but he hadn't taken Egypt out of the Israelites. He had changed his people's fate, but he hadn't changed their character.

He now realised that for this to happen there would have to be a different kind of leadership, one that handed back responsibility to the people as a whole, and to the elders in particular.

So long as there is a Moses performing miracles, the people do not have to accept responsibility for themselves. In order for them to grow, Joshua would have to engage in participative leadership, encouraging diverse views and listening to them, even if that meant going more slowly.

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That is transformative leadership and it requires the leader to engage in what the kabbalists called *tsimtsum*, self-effacement.

Or as Rashi puts it: "Make sure that the elders of the generation are with you. Always act according to their opinion and advice."

As for G-d, He was not changing His mind. He was not suggesting that Joshua should become, in general, an authoritarian leader. He was suggesting that Joshua needed to do this just once. Listen carefully to the verse: "For you will bring the Israelites into the land."

Recall that there was one occasion that condemned an entire generation to die in the wilderness-the episode of the spies, in which the people lacked the faith and courage to enter and take possession of the land. It was then that two men-Joshua and Caleb stood firm, insisting against the other 10 spies, that they could conquer the land and defeat their enemies.

G-d was saying to Joshua that there will be one trial in which you must stand firm, even against the majority, and that will come when you are about to cross the Jordan. That is when the people are in danger of giving way to fear.

That is when your leadership will consist, not in consultation and consensus, but in allowing no dissent. That is when "It will all depend on you... There is only one leader for a generation, not two." Sometimes even the most consensual leaders must lead from the front and bring the people with him.

There is a time to discuss and a time to act, a time to seek agreement and a time to move ahead without waiting for agreement. That is what both G-d and Moses were telling Joshua in their different ways.

A leader must have the courage to lead, the patience to consult, and the wisdom to know when the time is right for each. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"You are standing this day, all of you, before the Lord your G-d - the leaders of your tribes, your elders and your officers, every person of Israel" (Deut. 29:9) ."

The festival of Rosh Hashana is always preceded by Parashat Nitzavim the first part of the double portion to be read this Shabbat. I suggest that this is hardly an accident.

I believe the true significance of Rosh Hashana is explained by the special covenant we find in Nitzavim.

In order to properly understand this covenant, it's important to analyze a number of textual problems at the beginning of our portion.

Firstly, the opening verse, quoted above: Which covenant is the Bible speaking about? Abraham entered into the Covenant of the Pieces, a national covenant promising the first patriarch progeny and a land; Moses and the Israelites entered into a Covenant at Sinai, granting and obligating the nation to a set of laws, both moral and ritual.

What could possibly emanate from a third covenant, after Israel had already been established as a nation and a religion? And how are we to understand the strange inclusion of not only those actually present, but even those who were not? If this refers to past generations, how can they not be "standing before G-d"? They are probably closer to Him than those who are alive. And if this refers to future generations, what of the fact that the Bible is constantly renewing the covenant: after the conquest of the Land in the period of Joshua, after the return from Babylonian exile, and every seven years in the dramatic event of *hakhel*, when all the Israelites are commanded to gather and reconfirm their special relationship with G-d.

So who are those "not standing before G-d this day"? Clearly this is the covenant first mentioned in Chapter 2 of Deuteronomy (*Re'eh*) - the blessings and the curses on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal to which the Israelites were bound just before their entry into Israel. They are instructed to erect large stones on their way to Shechem (Nablus, their entry point to Israel) on which "the words of this Torah" (apparently this particular covenant) were to be written "very well explained" - which means, according to our Sages, that they were to be translated into 70 different languages.

The content of these stones appears to be a kind of second Decalogue, because an altar is to be erected untouched by implements of iron - identical to the command concerning the first Decalogue (Deut. 27:1-8).

The content of these blessings and curses are 12 of the most significant of the Bible's moral and ethical laws: cursed are those who disobey and blessed are those who uphold the strictures against idolatry, cursing one's parents, moving one's neighbors' boundary markers (stealing, trespassing, invading one's privacy), misdirecting the blind (literally and figuratively), perverting justice for the stranger, orphan and widow, striking one's neighbor, taking a bribe and various sexual crimes. These are all universal laws which apply to every human being.

Hence, I submit that this third covenant contains the rules and regulations which the Almighty imposes upon humanity, the teaching of which is our mission. After all, part of the charge we received at Sinai was to be a "kingdom of priest-teachers" - teachers to the other nations. All the prophets envisage a time at the end of days when all the nations come to us to learn the message of ethical monotheism: "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, and humanity shall not learn war anymore."

Maimonides codifies the principle that just as the Bible was given to teach Jews the 613 commandments, so too it teaches the world the seven fundamental rules - such moral and ethical teachings as "Thou shalt not murder" and "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Therefore, our Bible says that when the Israelites enter the Land of Israel, they are to write the 12 ethical commandments to the world in stone, and in every one of the 70 languages; this is a lesson for every visiting dignitary as well as a clear message to every entering Israelite. This third covenant was for the Jews to communicate to those who were "not with them before G-d" at the time of their entry into Israel. Indeed, our future (as well as the future of the world) depends on our success in fulfilling our mission.

Ezra ordained that we read about this third covenant every Rosh Hashana. The primary meaning of Rosh Hashana is our acceptance of G-d's kingship throughout the world; the primary challenge of Rosh Hashana is to bring the world to recognize that kingship. The weeping cry of the shofar (trua) reflects our sadness at a world not yet perfected; the exultant, exalting sound (tekiya) reflects our faith that we shall ultimately succeed. © 2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

The Sky is NOT the Limit!

Parshas Nitzavim contains a statement that bothered me for years. "For this mitzvah (commandment) which I command you this day, it is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you could say: 'Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say: 'Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it?' Rather, [this] thing is very close to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can fulfill it." (Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

Rashi deduces something fascinating from the words of the Torah, "It is not in heaven." He adds, "For if it would be in Heaven, then you would have to go up and learn it."

Here is what bothers me.

1) In what context are we talking? If the Torah had not been offered to us, then why in heaven (pardon the pun) or on what grounds, would we have to go get it? Isn't there a rule in the Torah that one who is an onais is exempt? One is not required to do the impossible?

2) It seems that Rashi's comments on the verse refer to a scenario where we did not receive the Torah. (After all, if it was already given and we have it, why should we have to go to heaven and get it?) So, had we not been given the Torah and we would have had to go and get it either by crossing the sea or ascending to heaven, then I have a simple question. Why now? What happened in the first 2448 years of creation before Hashem gave us the Torah? Why didn't anyone go and get it earlier? At what point would we have had to go to heaven to get it?

3) Practically speaking, where would this Torah be? On the moon? I guess that if technology could bring us there in 1969, then perhaps we could have reached there 3000 years earlier. But if the heavens that the Torah refer to are the holy celestial spheres of which the Psalmist say, "The Heavens are for the L-rd and earth is for man" (Psalms 115:17) then how in the world would we be able to get there and get the Torah?

Though others explain the verse differently, it seems clearly from Rashi that the posuk refers to the actual Torah. So how do we reconcile this most difficult verse?

When I was a student in the Lakewood Yeshiva, I attended a lecture by the revered founder of Aish HaTorah, Rabbi Noach Weinberg. In his unparalleled style which melded humor with the gravity of the issue, he implored the audience to go out there and bring Jews closer to Judaism. Attesting that anyone who had the conviction, will, and the passion could do it, he told the story of Moishe, the administrator of a non-kosher nursing home.

Moishe had told Reb Noach about the time that he found out that one of the residents of his home, a female octogenarian, was Jewish, and he was instructed by his Rabbi that it was absolutely forbidden to serve her non-kosher foods.

When he presented a silver-foil-wrapped kosher airline meal to her, she recoiled in disgust. "What's the matter with you!? I don't want that garbage! I'll eat what everyone else is having!"

Moishe pleaded with her. "It's kosher! Kosher! Kosher is healthier!"

"Healthier! I am 88 years old! I'm not worried about healthier! I can eat just like everyone else!"

"Kosher is tastier!"

"Tastier?!" she exclaimed, "I hardly have a tooth left. Do I care about tasty?"

All Moishe's entreats fell literally on deaf ears. She threatened to call the Department of Aging, the Health Department, and any agency that would stop this religious fanatic from imposing his airline meals on her.

Moishe was at wits' end. His Rabbi would not give in and neither would the old lady.

"So what happened?" asked Reb Noach.

Moishe shrugged. "I'm not exactly sure, but today this lady does not leave her bed without saying Modeh Ani and will not eat a morsel of food without a blessing both before and after she eats!"

"How'd you do it?" asked Reb Noach.

"No idea!" explained Moishe. "I had no choice. It was either to convince her to eat kosher or they would shut me down. I had to do it, so I made her frum (observant)!"

Reb Noach turned to us and said. "If you knew that you had to, you'd figure out a way."

Our sages teach us that our father Abraham knew the whole Torah. I always wondered how he knew it. He lived centuries before Sinai and the Torah does not openly discuss a Sinai-type revelation to Avraham.

Based on this week's portion, I opine that once Avraham realized that there was a G-d, he could not exist without understanding His desires. Without Torah, though, it is virtually impossible. And so he had to figure it out. He searched, he probed. He studied the earth and heaven and figured out the Torah, the blueprint of the world, by analyzing the building. "He had to, so he did." And Avraham passed those teachings to his children, Yitzchak and Yaakov. Perhaps the Torah is telling us that if we were a Jewish nation, believers in the Almighty, and had not been given the Torah, we could not have survived without getting its knowledge. We would have had to do everything in our power, even ascend to the highest spheres, through technology or cerebral introspection, prayer, and spiritual strivings, to receive the lessons of the Torah just as our forefather Avraham did.

I guess if we feel that we have to attain the true meaning of life and the Creator's will, then even the sky is not the limit. Unfortunately, our exile in Egypt left us with knowledge of G-d and faith in His powers, but not much more. © 2011 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Moshe can no longer lead the Jewish people. He informs us that he is no longer allowed "to forth out or to come in." He whose eyes did not dim even in death is now shorn of his superhuman powers and subject to the mortality that faces us all. At that moment Moshe does not wallow in sadness nor does he seem to review in detail his life's achievements and the disappointments that occurred in his lifetime of greatness.

He expresses no regrets and voices no complaints. He does not refer to those who persecuted him, injured his pride, questioned his worth or doubted his words. Rather his whole focus is on the future of the Jewish people. He points out that their future failings will

clearly lead to tragedy and defeat but never to complete destruction. He cautions them against falling into the trap of adopting new ideas and mores simply for the sake of change or newness.

He makes it abundantly clear that the covenant of Israel with G-d and His Torah contains no escape or cancellation clauses. The bond is an eternal one. He sees the future and continues to look forward to new generations and recurring challenges. To the end he remains the leader and not the historian, the teacher and not merely the observer.

It is the presence of this implicit spirit of innate optimism, even in the face of known problems and Jewish failings, which characterizes Moshe's relationship with the Jewish people and his guidance of Israel through all of its generations. That is why "there arose none like Moshe" in all of Jewish history.

The Torah teaches us "Vayelech Moshe"-Moshe went and walked and proceeded. Immediately thereafter the Torah records for us that Moshe said "I cannot go forth or return any longer." So which is it? Did Moshe walk forth and proceed or did he remain housebound and passive. It is obvious that Moshe's inability to go forth and return describes the physical limitations placed upon him on his last days on earth.

But "Vayelech Moshe"-Moshe's goings and comings are the spiritual guidance and moral vision that he invested in the Jewish people that remain vital and active in all later generations of Israel even after Moshe's passing. Leadership and inspiration is rarely judged by physical criteria.

Franklin Roosevelt was afflicted with polio before he rose to become the president of the United States. He certainly is to be reckoned as one of the strongest and most influential presidents in American history though he could not physically go forth or come in. If we see this truism in the life of a "regular" human being such a Roosevelt, how much more so is this obvious in the life and achievements of the superhuman Moshe.

Vayelech not only means that Moshe once went but it also implies grammatically in Hebrew that Moshe is still going forth. The Jewish people are still guided by Moshe's Torah and teachings and his spiritual legacy continues to inspire and instruct. As long as there are Jews in the world, Moshe will continue to go forth and come into our hearts and minds. © 2011 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In the portion of Va-Yelekh, Moshe (Moses) declares that G-d has not permitted him to enter the land of Israel. (Deuteronomy 31:2)

There are specific reasons which explain why Moshe was denied this right. The classical approach is that Moshe sinned when he hit rather than talked to the rock. (Numbers 20:7-13) The Midrash points out that Moshe may have been denied entry for killing the Egyptian who had attacked a Jewish slave. (Exodus 2:11-12) Moshe, according to the Midrash, could have used less force to stop the Egyptian. But is there a more general message that can be learned from the decision to ban Moshe from setting foot into the land he longs to see?

The classic work on Jewish mysticism, the Zohar, stresses the spiritual growth from Noah to Avraham (Abraham) to Moshe and beyond. (Vayerah 218-220) While Noah remained silent when told by G-d that the world would be destroyed, Avraham engaged G-d in debate when hearing that the city of Sodom would be devastated. Moshe takes it to another level. Not only does he intercede when G-d tells him that the Jews would be "consumed" for building the Golden Calf, but throws his personal lot in with his people: If you do not forgive the people's sin, he says to G-d, "erase my name from the book You have written." (Exodus 32:32)

The message is clear. Avraham did what Noah could not do. Moshe reaches an even higher level than Avraham. But it can be suggested that even Moshe could not realize all of his dreams. He doesn't enter the land; this is left for his disciple Joshua and future generations.

"It is not for you to complete the task," says Rabbi Tarphon, "but neither are you free to refrain from it." (Ethics 2:21) We are all part of Jewish history, and the most crucial aspect of that history is that we are all part of a process.

Perhaps for this reason the Torah uses the expression, "and you will return until (ad) the Lord your G-d." (Deuteronomy 30:2) The word "ad" implies that as high as one reaches spiritually, as close as one comes to G-d, one never arrives, the goal is never completed, indeed, there are always more steps to be taken.

A delightful tale makes this very point. A rebbe once turned to his disciples and asked, "There is a ladder with 50 rungs. One Chassid is on the 25th rung, another on the 10th. Who is higher?" "Has our rebbe gone mad?" the students asked each other. "Of course, the one on the 25th." "No, my children," answered the rebbe. "It depends on which way you're going."

Just a few days before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur whose central theme is growth and transformation, this message deserves consideration. It teaches that the most important element of teshuvah (repentance) is moving in the right direction-reaching higher, higher and higher still. © 2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also

National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns.

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Last week's parashah contained the dire warnings of what will happen when we sin. This week's parashah continues to warn Bnei Yisrael not to sin and speaks of the need for repentance. However, the final verses of last week's parashah and the beginning of this week's appear to speak of other matters. R'Samson Raphael Hirsch z"l (1808-1888) explains: Moshe made a break in the announcement of the future of the nation for the purpose of bringing about a correct appreciation of the blessings and curses which he had announced. He did this by reminding Bnei Yisrael of certain facts they had experienced and by giving them certain explanations. The facts he reminded them of are found in verses 1-8 at the end of last week's parashah: Hashem took you out of Egypt, gave you food miraculously, and defeated the nations on the borders of Eretz Yisrael. The explanations that He gave them are found in our parashah in verses 9-20. Verses 9-14 announce that Hashem's covenant is made with all members of the Jewish people, from the righteous scholars to the humble water carriers, and with all generations, those born and those as yet unborn. This, R' Hirsch writes, averts "any taking if the duties of the covenant to be limited to certain conditions or generations or times." "Verses 15-20," R' Hirsch continues, "avert the misunderstanding that the proclamation of the blessings and curses had only the national defection in mind, so that an individual could assume freedom for his evasion of the Torah as long as the nation kept publicly faithful to G-d and His Torah." Moshe also warned, on the other hand, that it would not suffice to protect one's own level of observance; one had to ensure the spiritual solidarity of the whole nation. These admonishments were particularly important as the nation was about to disperse throughout the Land.)

"For this commandment that I command you today—it is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in the heavens... Nor is it across the sea... Rather, the matter is very near to you—in your mouth and in your heart—to perform it." (30:11-14)

Rashi writes that these verses refer to the mitzvah of Torah study. R' Menachem Mendel of Kotzk z"l (died 1859) explained that these verses are the source of the Talmudic statement, "If one will tell you, 'I have labored [in Torah study] but have not found it,' don't believe him." How could the Sages make a sweeping generalization that if one has not succeeded at studying Torah, it is because he has not tried hard enough? Such a statement is possible because the Torah already has promised that the mitzvah of Torah study "is not hidden from you and it is not distant... Rather, the matter is very near to you—in your mouth

and in your heart—to perform it.” (Quoted in Ramatayim Tzofim, Part II, Ch. 14, No. 11)

Why does the gemara quoted above say, “I have labored but have not found it?” It would seem more appropriate to say, “I have labored but have not succeeded.”

R' Chaim of Volozhin z”l explains: Even when one studies hard and becomes a Torah scholar, he should not take credit for his accomplishments. Just as an object that one finds in the street is a gift from Hashem, so the scholarship that one attains is a gift. (Ruach Chaim) © 2000 S. Katz & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI HERSCHEL SCHACHTER

TorahWeb

In the tefillos of Rosh Hashonah we assume that Adam ha'rishon was created on the first of Tishrei.

That day at that time was a Friday which today is impossible; according to the calendar that we use, Rosh Hashonah can never fall out on a Friday. Even though that day was the sixth day of creation, we refer to Rosh Hashonah as ze ha'yom techilas ma'asecha—the beginning of the creation of the world, because the first five days were pre-historic since there was no human being there to notice anything.

In the tefillos of Rosh Hashonah we mention that on this day of Rosh Hashonah we should all recall what happened on that very first Rosh Hashonah. The midrash tells us, commenting on the posuk in Tehillim, "Hashen ori v'yishi" that "ori" is a reference to Rosh Hashonah and "yishi" is a reference to Yom Hakipurim. On that very day that Hashem created Adam ha'rishon, he granted him illumination by instructing him to observe the basic mitzvot that apply to all of mankind. The Talmud comments that the possuk in Borch Nafshi, "Toshes choshech vihi layla" is a reference to olam ha'zeh. Many issues in this world are very unclear just like in the middle of dark night; there are mitzvot that people think are really aveiros and there are aveiros that people consider to be mitzvot. Without illumination granted by Hashem through the laws of the Torah, we will remain "in the dark". Rosh Hashonah for Adam ha'rishon was his day of kabbolas haTorah.

According to the tradition recorded in the midrash, Adam ha'rishon sinned on that very same first day that he was created. He was judged and punished on the same day and Hashem notified him that just as I have judged you on this day, so too will I judge your descendants in all future generations on this day. The fact that Rosh Hashonah is the yom ha'din is never mentioned in Tanach but is an oral tradition from Adam ha'rishon.

The story of the "original sin" does not really play a significant role in Jewish theology. It was recorded in the Torah, however, to teach us certain aspects about sin that are relevant to all of us today.

1. According to one midrash, if Adam ha'rishon would have waited until leil Shabbos, he would have been permitted to eat the fruits of the eitz ha'daas. He could not even contain himself for a few hours. We all have to train ourselves to realize that it is not that essential to have instant gratification. Hashem created us all to enjoy the world but it is not that absolutely necessary to have pleasure all the time. The Jewish farmer plants a tree and he does not eat of its fruits until a few years go by. The shochet slaughters an animal but he does not eat of the meat until he first checks the lungs. It is not that terrible to postpone a bit having pleasure from the world.

2. The reason Adam and Chava could not control themselves and sinned by eating from the eitz ha'daas is because the fruit seemed so delicious and appealing. When we read the pessukim in parshas Beraishis, the Torah gives the exact same description with respect to all the trees in Gan Eden. They were all delicious and appeared very appealing. But we always have the attitude that the grass is greener on the other side. We always think that "stolen waters are sweeter". To the reshaim, who have violated aveiros, the yetzer ho'rah appears like a strand of hair. They realize that they did not get any more pleasure from doing the aveiros than they would have had doing the mitzvot. To the tzaddikim who never violated the aveiros, the yetzer ho'rah appears as if it were a gigantic mountain. They conjure up in their mind an image of what tremendous pleasures one would certainly receive if he were to violate the aveiros. But the truth of the matter is that any forbidden pleasure has a parallel in the realm of heter. One can enjoy olam ha'zeh by keeping mitzvot to the same extent that the reshaim enjoy doing aveiros.

3. When Hashem confronted Adam ha'rishon and told him that he would be punished for having sinned, He says "ki sho'mata l'kol ish'techa". The midrash understands that expression to mean that Chava coaxed her husband to eat along with her from the forbidden fruit by crying in front of him. Very often we sin because we give in to social pressure.

On Rosh Ha'shonah and all year long we should take to heart the details of the original sin and realize that it simply does not make sense to violate the mitzvot of the Torah. © 2011 Rabbi H. Schachter & torahweb.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg,

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

The combination of the two words "Nitzavim-Vayeilech" is a paradox in itself. "Nitzavim" means to stand in place, while "Vayeilech" refers to progress and movement. Or Hachaim in fact explains the word Nitzavim in a different way, as an appointed official ("Hanitzav - the one in charge of the harvesters")

[Ruth 2:5]). In the same way we have all been appointed by G-d, every person according to his or her traits, to perform specific tasks in life. When a person fulfills his or her own appointed task and does not look in other directions at tasks of others, he will advance to a better status.

The Natziv goes into detail in the Torah portion of Eikev, on the verse, "And now, Yisrael, what does your G-d ask of you but to fear G-d, to go in His ways, and to love Him" [Devarim 10:12]. He explains that this is not a demand that every person in Yisrael fulfill all of these different types of obligations. Rather, the wise men and the Torah scholars must show love, the leaders must show fear since they hold the keys to the public funds, and the other parts of the nation have other obligations.

"Each of these groups is different from the others in what the Holy One, Blessed be He, demands of them. That is why it is written, 'Today you all stand, the leaders of your tribes, your elders, your officials...' [Devarim 29:9]. What would have been missing if the verse had been written, 'You all stand today, to observe the covenant of G-d,' which would include everybody? The answer is that every group has its own covenant, and what the Almighty demands from one is not the same as what He demands from others - and in fact it is almost forbidden for any other group. Thus, the people occupied with Torah are not allowed to abandon their studies and become involved in public service, just as public servants are not allowed to change their ways and to spend their time studying. As is written, 'welcoming guests is more important than greeting the face of the Shechina' [Shabbat 127a]." [Natziv].

Nothing is more important in principle than greeting the Shechina, but somebody who is skilled in such matters as welcoming new olim to the land is not allowed to ignore this and spend most of his time on learning Torah and on the love of G-d. And Rav Kook wrote that there were some people involved in Torah who went on a bad path because they ignored their own personal traits and studied parts of the Torah that were not suitable for them.

Rav Kook explains that this is the basis for our confession at the end of Yom Kippur: "My G-d, until I was created I was not worthy, and now that I have been created, it is as if I was not created." The fact that I was not created before now proves that the world was not lacking in anything without my presence, and the fact that I was created at this point evidently shows that there is a specific task that I must accomplish now. If I do my task properly, then I am worthy. But if I do not perform the actions for which I was specifically created, I have reverted to being unworthy, just as before.

According to Chassidic sources, the word "today" is a hint of Rosh Hashana. On Rosh Hashana we stand up to be given our appropriate role, the task about which we can truly say that our arrival in the world was worthwhile.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Following last week's "tochacha" (rebuke), where the severe consequences of straying from G-d and His Torah are detailed, in this week's Parasha (Devarim 29:17-28) Moshe discusses what will happen to those who don't take the "curses" seriously: "G-d will have no interest in letting him be, for then the wrath of G-d and His jealousy will be strong against that person, and the entire curse, which is written in this book, will come down on him" (29:19). However, those curses are primarily of a national nature. How can punishments that affect the entire nation simultaneously "come down in their entirety" on just one person? Obviously, G-d can limit any "curse" to only affect sinners, and several commentators (e.g. Ibn Ezra, Ramban and Abarbanel) explain the verses to be referring to three categories (individuals, families and Tribes), but the plain, straightforward meaning (of the expression that refers to the individual) strongly implies that the "entire curse" will be directed towards the individual sinner, not just those parts of the curse that can apply to individuals without the entire nation being affected. The context of the rest of the paragraph, where later generations and other nations will wonder aloud how/why such destruction could have occurred, also indicates that the curses described are on a national level, not a personal one. Why is there such large scale destruction, with the "entire land" being destroyed (29:22), and the nation as a whole exiled (29:27) because they abandoned G-d and worshipped idols (29:24-25), if it was just one individual (or several individuals) that sinned?

Chizkuni (29:22) addresses this issue, asking "could it be that because of the sin of one person G-d will get angry at the entire congregation? The answer to this matter comes from Micha's sculpture, whose root (referencing the Torah using the word "root" in 29:17) grew, for the Tribe of Dan strayed after it (i.e. worshipped Micha's sculpture), followed by the Ten Tribes (of the Northern Kingdom, see Shoftim 18:30)." Chizkuni cites an example where one person's sin spread to an entire Tribe and then to the entire kingdom, leading to its downfall and the exile of all of its inhabitants, proving that one person's sin can in fact bring the national curses. However, the point Moshe is making is that no individual should think they can avoid being punished just because everybody else is keeping the Torah and deserves blessings rather than curses (see Ibn Ezra and Seforno on 29:18). If these curses only come if others sin too, unless the sinner thinks he will cause others to sin as well, mentioning them is not an effective deterrent. [Chizkuni provides three other ways to understand 29:18, possibly to avoid this problem.] It could be suggested that the parts of the curse that could apply to an individual will occur right away, with the national aspects happening only if the

sinning becomes widespread. Nevertheless, the implication of the "entire curse" coming down on the individual (29:19) is that he will not only suffer parts of the curse, but "all of it," and that would include the aspects of the curse that affect everybody.

Rashi addresses this issue as well, explaining the connection between "the hidden things" being up to G-d (29:28) and the curses being fulfilled if we sin: "If you'll [ask] what can we do [to prevent the curses from coming if] You (G-d) punish the community (29:21) for the thoughts of the individual (29:17), since no one knows what thoughts someone else has, I (Moshe) am not describing how you will be punished for things that are hidden, for that is for G-d [to deal with], and He will punish that individual. But for things that are revealed, it is up to us and our sons (i.e. future generations) to remove the evil from within us, and if we don't deal with it (through our legal system), then the entire community will be punished." In other words, the sin that brings about national suffering is tolerating the sins of others without trying to prevent or correct them. Moshe is telling the individual who might sin that the community will get involved so that they won't get punished for looking the other way (and if they don't, everyone, including him, will suffer).

Netziv understands the "hidden" and "revealed" things to be referring to the reasons why G-d sent the curses. The verses that precede this one are discussing what the other nations think the reason G-d punished us is (idol worship), but they don't (and can't) know the real reason (see Netziv's commentary on 29:25). Rather, as indicated by G-d's telling Moshe that he can't see His face (Shemos 33:23, see Netziv there) and the context of Sefer Iyov, we can't know all the reasons; only G-d knows why He tests and/or punishes people. Nevertheless (the Netziv continues on Devarim 29:28), there are some "revealed" reasons, areas in which we've fallen short in our Torah observance (including, and perhaps specifically, Torah study), and we should do what we can to improve.

Aside from telling us that the curses come "because you did not listen to the voice of Hashem your G-d, to keep His commandments and statutes which He has commanded you (28:45), the Torah reveals to us a more specific cause for the curses; "because you did not serve Hashem your G-d with happiness and with a glad heart, from an abundance of everything" (28:47). Even if our actions are the correct ones, fulfilling all the commandments and not transgressing any prohibitions, if we are not thrilled with doing them (or with having to refrain from doing them), these terrible curses can result. Although it's true that "G-d wants our heart" (Sanhedrin 106b, see Mesilas Yesharim 16), the ramifications of keeping the Torah without having our heart fully in it goes beyond "actions without meaning," beyond not connecting them with getting closer to G-d.

Rav Moshe Feinstein, z"l (Darash Moshe) explains why, when we are told to "choose life in order

that you and your descendants shall live" (30:19), our descendants are included: "Choosing to do good, which is [choosing] life, should be in a way that influences our descendants and our students as well." How will the way we choose affect them? "Because there are times when even if we fulfill the entire Torah it will not influence our descendants in a way that they will also want to fulfill it; when he fulfills (the Torah) only because he has to, because he believes in G-d and His Torah, but it is obvious from the way he fulfills it that he gets no enjoyment or happiness from doing so, his descendants will say that they are not strong enough to conquer their inclination." If, on the other hand, "he fulfills the commandments and learns Torah with joy, it will greatly influence his descendants and students, as they will see that fulfilling the Torah gives more pleasure and happiness than living a material life." Which is more important to us, doing a mitzvah, learning some Torah, or going to a ball game? Our children, and our neighbors, sense our priorities from the enthusiasm we feel towards each of our actions. If we want to teach them to value Torah over material wealth, they have to sense that we are more concerned about figuring out what Tosfos means than what features a vehicle has, and get a greater "geshmak" (inner joy) from fulfilling G-d's will than from fulfilling our own (body's) wishes.

Although we are held accountable for not standing up for what's right when something wrong is done, we are also responsible for not motivating others to do what's right when we emit dissatisfaction with having to do it ourselves. We have to set an example not only by doing what's right, but by demonstrating that our lifestyle works, that it provides personal fulfillment. Theological discussions are important, and we have to know (and be able to explain) why the Torah is true and correct. But if keeping the Torah doesn't provide fulfillment, there is little motivation for others to try doing so as well.

In last week's Parasha, Moshe was speaking to the community, telling us we have to keep the Torah joyfully, as that is how to fulfill it properly and because otherwise it could be a factor in others not keeping it at all. In this week's Parasha, he is addressing the person who might sin, telling him that he shouldn't think that the community keeping the Torah automatically means he will be protected. Not only will he be punished personally, but the "curses" will come down on the entire community because of him. His sins brought the curses, but the entire community shares in the responsibility for his sins. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer



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