



# Parshas Nitzavim / Vayelech

For the week ending 25 Elul 5757  
26 & 27 September 1997

## Overview

## Insights

### NITZAVIM

On the last day of his life, Moshe gathers together all the people, both young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations yet unborn. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship, because in spite of having witnessed the abominations of Egypt, there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality. Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel which will be a result of the failure to heed Hashem's *mitzvos*. Both their descendants and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desolation of the Land and its apparent inability to be sown or to produce crops. The conclusion will be apparent to all — the Jewish People have forsaken the One who protects them, in favor of idols which can do nothing. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled. However assimilated they will have become among the nations, eventually Hashem will bring them back to Eretz Yisrael. Moshe tells the people to remember that the Torah is not a remote impossibility; rather its fulfillment is within the grasp of every Jew. The Parsha concludes with a dramatic choice between life and death. Moshe exhorts the people to choose life.

### VAYELECH

On this, the last day of his life, Moshe goes from tent to tent throughout the camp, bidding farewell to his beloved people, encouraging them to "keep the faith." Moshe tells them that whether he is among them or not, Hashem is with them, and will vanquish their enemies. Then he summons Yehoshua, and in front of all the people, exhorts him to be strong and courageous as the leader of the Jewish People. In this manner, he strengthens Yehoshua's status as the new leader. Moshe teaches them the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel*: That every seven years on the first day of the intermediate days of Succos, the entire nation, including small children, is to gather together at the Temple to hear the King read from the Book of *Devarim*. The sections that he reads deal with faithfulness to Hashem, the covenant, and reward and punishment. Hashem tells Moshe that his end is near, and he should therefore summon Yehoshua to stand with him in the *Mishkan*, where Hashem will teach Yehoshua. Hashem then tells Moshe and Yehoshua that after entering the Land, the people will be unfaithful to Him, and begin to worship other gods. Hashem will then completely "hide his face," so that it will seem that the Jewish People are at the mercy of fate, and that they will be hunted by all. Hashem instructs Moshe and Yehoshua to write down a song - *Ha'azinu* - which will serve as a "witness" against the Jewish People when they sin. Moshe records the song in writing and teaches it to Bnei Yisrael. Moshe completes his transcription of the Torah, and instructs the *Levi'im* to place it to the side of the *Aron* (Holy Ark), so that no one will ever write a new Torah Scroll that is different from the original - for there will always be a reference copy.

### THE HIDDEN FACE

**"My anger will flare against him on that day and I will forsake them; and I will hide My face from them and they will become prey... He will say on that day 'Is it not because my God is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?'" (31:17)**

When tragedy befalls the Jewish People, we may think that Hashem has abandoned us to our enemies. When we are beset by those who wish to destroy us and they seem to be unstoppable while we are powerless, and they slay us from morning till evening, let us remember this verse.

Hashem will never desert us; rather we *feel* that He has forsaken us because He has 'hidden His face.' When Hashem 'hides His face' it means that we cannot see Him controlling events. It seems to us that chaos rules. Of course, nothing happens that He does not decree. The decree for every event that has happened this year was sealed last Yom Kippur: "Who will live and who will die..."

And if we look carefully at events, even though we cannot see Hashem's 'face,' we can, at least, discern His 'back.' We can see the telltale footprints in the snow of History.

We sometimes feel that we have failed Hashem so totally that there is no way we can find our way back to Him. We should remember that He is always there behind the mask of the world, waiting for us to return through prayer and *teshuvah* (repentance).

### ROOT AND BRANCH

**"Not with you alone do I seal this covenant... and with whoever is not here" (29:13-14)**

When the Jewish People accepted the Torah at Sinai, they accepted it not only for themselves, but on behalf of all their descendants till the end of time.

One might ask "What right did they have to obligate me to keep the Torah? If they wanted to keep it, fine! But why should I have to keep it!"

Take a look at a young tree which has yet to grow branches. Every branch which will grow from this tree is part of the tree itself. The branches cannot secede from the tree. If it were not for the tree there would be no branches, and even though the branches have not yet appeared, they are part of the tree now. Similarly every Jew is a branch of the tree which is the Jewish People. We are all bound by the acceptance of Torah because our potential to exist was already rooted in our forefathers.

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Thus, since our forefathers accepted the Torah, it is as though we accepted it ourselves.

There is also a mystical concept that every Jewish soul that would ever live "stood" at Sinai in an incorporeal form and accepted the Torah. So, in reality, each individual was there as well.

#### THE SPEED OF THOUGHT

**"For this commandment that I command you today, it is not hidden from you... it is not in Heaven... nor is it over the sea... for it is very near to you, in your mouth and your heart to do it." (30:11-14)**

The Torah tells us that this commandment is not over the sea; it is in your mouth and your heart to do it.

In other words, one might have thought that it is over the sea.

How is it possible that something as close as the mouth and the heart could ever be confused with being as distant as the heavens or over the sea?

Man consists of two opposing elements, body and soul. If we put our *neshama*, our soul, in charge of our body we can reach a level greater than the angels. If, on the other hand, we allow our body to dominate our spiritual side we become like animals.

For just as an animal has no taste for wisdom and intellectual discernment, preferring hay, straw and the like, so too a person who centers himself on physicality finds things of the spirit without taste. Thus, man is an amalgam of two elements as disparate as *heaven and earth*.

This is what the Torah is teaching us here. When a person turns his back on the great worth of the spiritual world, that world is indeed extremely distant from him — literally "in the heavens." However the Torah tells him that really "it is very near to you." If you just give the spiritual dominion over the physical, then "it is in your mouth and your heart to do it."

These words illustrate the enormous potential of man. In one second, he can rise to the heights by bringing Torah *into his mouth and his heart*, by bringing the furthest thing in the world close to him: In a split second, a thought can transport him from languishing in shadow to basking in great light; to being elevated to the loftiest heights. Surely — "it is not hidden from you."

#### RESTING IN THE HEART

**"And Moshe went and spoke these words to all Yisrael" (31:1)**

Why doesn't the Torah tell us *where* Moshe went?

In every Jew throughout the ages, there is a little spark of Moshe Rabbeinu. That's where Moshe went. That was his resting place. Thus the end of the verse: "**And Moshe went** (and spoke these words) **to all Yisrael.**"

Maybe that is one of the reasons that no one knows where Moshe is buried, because Moshe's final resting place is in the heart of every Jew.

#### BEST BEHAVIOR

**"At the end of seven years... you shall read this Torah before all Israel... the men, the women and the small children" (31:10-12)**

How often do we see people who are very far from religion, when faced with educating their children, suddenly becoming much more religious!

Rashi, commenting on the verse above, says that the reason small children should be brought to hear the Torah read at the time of *Hakhel*, is to "cause reward to those who bring them." This implies that the reason for the children coming has nothing to do with the influence that it might have on *them*, but rather on those who bring them.

By wanting to set a good example to their children, *the parents themselves* will become more careful in their observance of mitzvos, and be sure to come to hear the King read the Torah at *Hakhel*.

## Haftorah: Yishayahu 61:10-63:9

In this last of the seven Haftorahs of Consolation, the prophet Isaiah describes how just as the land will seem to bloom and flourish in the time of the *Mashiach* without any prior cultivation, so too Hashem will redeem his people and shower them with kindness without any prior action on their part, and without them deserving it. Rather, Hashem will bestow His kindness through His infinite generosity.

The Targum Yonason translates "For Zion's sake, I will not be silent" to mean that there will never be peace in the world while the Jewish People are scattered in exile.

In the final days, Hashem will come "stained with blood from the battle with Esau/Edom/Rome and its spiritual heir" to liberate His people and reveal that He has been with them in every exile, frustrating the designs of those who wished to obliterate them.

#### ONLY HAPPINESS IS A TWO-WAY STREET

**"I will rejoice intensely with Hashem, my soul shall exult with my G-d." (61:10)**

Our Sages teach us that "a person is obligated to make a blessing on adversity just as he makes a blessing on good." (*Berachos 54*)

However, this is only when the misfortune happens to *oneself*, but if one's neighbor is beset by tragic events, it is forbidden to rejoice. In fact, a person is obligated to empathize with the pain of his neighbor.

This is the intention of this verse: "*I will rejoice intensely with Hashem...*" When I perceive Hashem through the aspect of His Mercy, when He blesses me with an abundance of revealed good, then I can both rejoice and give others cause to rejoice with me.

However, when I perceive G-d through the aspect of His Judgment, "*my soul shall exult with my G-d.*" When affliction befalls me *only I am allowed to exult*, for "*a person is obligated to make a blessing on adversity just as he makes a blessing on good.*" But when misfortune befalls others, then not only am I forbidden to exult, I must seek out every way to empathize with them in their loss.

Sources:

Root And Branch - Rabbeinu Bachya

The Speed Of Thought - Ohel Yoel

Resting In The Heart - Mayana shel Torah

Best Behavior - Rabbi Michoel Schoen

Only Happiness - Avodas Yisrael in Mayana shel Torah

## Fatherly Advice - tidbits from the Ethics of the Fathers traditionally studied on Summer Sabbaths

**"Be cautious in your judgment."**

- Members of the Great Congregation (Avos 1:1)

We conclude this year's series of "Fatherly Advice with the very first piece of advice given in Pirkei Avos.

This directive was not intended for court judges alone. Every one of us is called upon to judge situations in our own lives. Writers must therefore be cautious in judging what to communicate and the comments received from readers of this and other columns in OHRNET are therefore appreciated.

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