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PARSHA WEEKLY

PARSHAT NITZAVIM-VAYELECH 5783 • 2023



ISRAEL Parsha Picture

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וְשָׁב ה' אֶ-לֶקֶיךָ אֶת שְׁבוּתֶךָ
וְרַחֲמֶךָ וְשָׁב וְקִבְּצֶךָ מִכֹּל
הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הִפִּיצֶךָ... שָׁמָּה

דברים ל:ג

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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrachi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.



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Homecoming

Teshuva vs. Repentance



Rabbi Doron Perez
Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

The word that our sages consistently use to describe the process of repentance is the Hebrew word תשובה – *teshuva*. It is self-evident from the word that it means something altogether different from repentance which is about remorse and regret.

Teshuva means, as we know – to return. This is an altogether different concept and a total paradigm shift as to what the process of repentance is all about. It's about something much broader than regret and remorse for something we have done wrong. Return means coming back to where we began – in essence to where we belong. The institution in human life that anchors us in place and identity is that of the home. We sometimes need to leave our home and travel great distances to do what we need to do, but we all return home regularly because that is where our life is based and where we truly belong. The process of *teshuva* is therefore clearly a sense of homecoming – a return to the state of where we ultimately should be.

A clear example of this is regarding the great prophet Samuel who was an itinerant prophet who would travel all across the land, teaching, judging, inspiring and uplifting. After all, his mother had dedicated him as a Nazirite to G-d and his life was therefore spent with deep commitment to G-d's children.

The verse states regarding his homecoming after his travels:

וְתִשָּׁבֹתוּ הָרְמָתָה כִּי־שָׁם בְּיָתוֹ וְשָׁם שָׁפַט אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל
וַיְבָרֶשֶׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה:

“Then he would **return** to Ramah, for his home was there, and there too he would judge Israel. He built an altar there to the LORD.” (I Shmuel 7:17)

The word *teshuva* here clearly means homecoming in the deeper sense of the word. The process, the intense days of *teshuva* that we are about to engage in are a spiritual homecoming.

Parashat Nitzavim Always Precedes Rosh Hashanah

Every single year without fail the weekly *parasha* that is always read on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah is *parashat Nitzavim*. On some years, such as this year, when Rosh Hashanah and Sukkot are on Shabbat, it is a double *parasha* of Nitzavim and Vayelech, however more often than not Vayelech is after Rosh Hashanah. In any case, the short *parasha* of Nitzavim always precedes Rosh Hashanah. It seems to be *hashgacha* – providential, the work of providence that this *parasha* always precedes the *Aseret Yemei Teshuva* as it is the source of *teshuva* in the Torah. The word *teshuva* in the context of repentance and returning appears more in this *parasha* than anywhere else in the entire Torah.

There are two separate sections that deal with *teshuva*, the first and main section we will analyze in this article as its contents

are quite telling as to the essence of what *teshuva* really means.¹

Happy New Year vs. Rosh Hashanah

The New Year's Eve experience in the Hebrew calendar is unlike any other and could not be more different from the Western world's experience of January 1. Rather than being a raucous experience at the stroke of midnight, the Jewish calendar ushers in Rosh Hashana as a time of envisioning and reflection, a time when we envision with great anticipation the ideal world we would like to live in for the year ahead and the role that we ought to play in bringing it to fruition. It's a time of deep cognitive reflection when we examine our spiritual and mental paradigms, our thought processes and our mindset in order to best address the salient issues of life in preparation for the year ahead.

That is only the beginning. The two days of Rosh Hashana are part of a ten-day cycle that ushers in the new year, culminating in Yom Kippur, known, of course, as the *Aseret Yemei Teshuva*, the Ten Days of Repentance and Returning. The days of spiritual mind-mapping which began on Rosh Hashana continue through an intense week of preparation for Yom Kippur, the culmination of these days. The days revolve around a detailed spiritual plan to align our lives with the Divine in every area of our lives. In the *vidui* – personal confession – we strike our chest and heart dozens of times acknowledging where we have deviated and expressing our deepest desire to return to Hashem and our better selves.

In short, it is a time of *teshuva* – returning. We begin the year with the end in mind. Our deep desire to return to first principles, to the values in life that are most important – our relationship with Hashem and the spiritual and moral values that we hold to be most dear.

The Torah's Teshuva – A Dual Homecoming

What are these values? It is quite fascinating to go back to the source of *teshuva* in the Torah, the section known as *Parashat*



How blessed we are to be continually witnessing and participating in the incredible process of dual return – to the Land and to Hashem.

HaTeshuva,² which speaks about our return to Hashem.

Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai, one of the great rabbinic precursors to the Zionist movement, mentions a critical insight regarding the process of *teshuva*.³ He highlights the inextricable link between the spiritual return of the Jewish people to Hashem and the physical return to the Land, as clearly evidenced in the Torah in the section dealing with *teshuva* (Devarim 30:1-10)

“וְשָׁבוּ... עַד-ה' אֵל-לִקְיֹד וְשָׁמְעֶתָ בְּקוֹלוֹ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-אָנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם”

“And you will **return** to the L-rd, your G-d and heed His voice, according to all that I command you today ...”

And immediately afterward in the next verse it says:

“וְשָׁבוּ ה' אֵל-לִקְיֹד אֶת-שְׁבוּתְךָ וְרַחֲמֶךָ וְשָׁבוּ וְקִבְּצָךָ מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הִפְיָצָךָ ה' אֵל-לִקְיֹד שָׁמָּה”

“Then, the Lord, your G-d, will **bring back** your exiles.... He will **return** and gather you from all the nations, where the Lord, your G-d, had dispersed you.”

The concurrent processes of the spiritual return to Hashem and the collective return of the Jewish People to the Land are clearly part and parcel of the same process, notes Rabbi Alkalai. It is no surprise, therefore, that the incredible return of millions of Jews to Israel, primarily since the founding of the State, has transpired in tandem with the rebuilding of the spiritual world of Torah learning and living.

This dual return is one of the most extraordinary events, not only in all of human history. It is a rich mosaic of miracles

somehow incredibly woven together – the establishment of an independent Jewish State only three years after the ovens of Auschwitz; the creation of a country of refuge for millions of returning Jews from over 100 countries, speaking more than 80 languages, after almost 2,000 years of wandering; the transformation of the Land of Israel from a barren backwater into a flourishing oasis; the revival of Hebrew from an ancient static textual language to the living lingua franca of the Jewish State; the building of a thriving economy which emerged from the depleted pre-State Yishuv – and to crown it all: the remarkable rebuilding of the Torah world in general with more Torah learning in our generation, arguably more than any other.

How blessed we are to be continually witnessing and participating in the incredible process of dual return – to the Land and to Hashem.

Since the Torah's dual process of return incorporates both our relationship to the land of Israel and to Torah values in our life, it is these two that we ought to always strive to return to. We wish to always have as deep and meaningful a relationship as possible with the centrality of the land of Israel in Jewish life and the primacy of the Torah as the driving force of all of our moral and spiritual lives.

1. The second section is three *psukim* long (Devarim 30, 11-13) and refers to this *mitzvah*. Ramban sees this *mitzvah* as referring to the *mitzvah* of *teshuva* and hence he explains it in this context. Rashi sees it as referring to the *mitzvah* of learning Torah. All agree that the first *parsha* deals with the *mitzvah* of *teshuva*.
2. Devarim, 30:1-10. The root word שׁוּב – return appears here more than in any other place in the Torah, 8 times in these 10 *pesukim*.
3. The Writings of Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai, Mosad Harav Kook (pg 237, 323-324). He was a prolific writer and activist internationally for the restoration of Jews to the land and reinstatement of eventual Jewish sovereignty.

PERSONAL GROWTH

How to Respond To Suffering

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Rabbi Reuven Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi
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Expressing Our Faith

The *Mizmor Tehillim* we recite each Shabbat declares the “goodness” of singing Hashem’s praises: “*Tov lehodot laShem u’l’zamer l’shimcha elyon.*”¹ The *mizmor* continues with the famous *pasuk*: “*L’hagid ba’boker chasdecha, v’emunat’cha ba’leylot.*” This second *pasuk* encourages speaking about Hashem’s kindness in the “*boker*” and His faithfulness in the “*leylot.*”

Though *erev* (evening) is the time parallel to *boker* (morning), the *pasuk* uses the term *leylot* (nights) instead. The *mizmor* refers not to physical night but, rather, to times of darkness. Just as we thank Hashem for his kindness during the “mornings,” when His Hand is clear, so we need to express our belief in His faithfulness at “night” — at times when His Hand is hidden.²

During the “dark nights,” when people are suffering, we need to not only believe that things are for the good but also *express this belief*. This is why Rebbi Akiva used to emphasize the importance of *saying* that everything Hashem does is for the good.³ We need to verbalize our faith that things will turn out well. This is part of what causes things to work out that way.⁴

This is how Rav Shlomo Kluger⁵ explains the *pasuk* in Hallel: “*Hodu laShem ki tov, ki l’olam chasdo* — Thank Hashem because things are good; His kindness is forever.”⁶ Rav Kluger explains that the phrase “*ki l’olam chasdo*” includes times when Hashem’s kindness is hidden. At these times (as well), we must “*hodu laShem ki tov.*” Like “*v’emunat’cha ba’leylot,*” this *pasuk* also teaches the importance of expressing our *emunah* (faith) and confidence at difficult times.

Reflecting and Changing

Difficult times should inspire reflection and improvement. This is why the word we use to describe life lessons — *mussar* — shares a root with the word *yisurin* (suffering).⁷ *Yisurin* should inspire us to learn and internalize *mussar* lessons.

The *gemara*⁸ encourages those experienc-

ing *yisurin* to “search through” their deeds to find the sin causing the suffering. Parshat Nitzavim⁹ describes this process. It explains that after we experience the *kelalot* (curses) depicted in the *tochachah* (section of curses),¹⁰ we should return to ourselves — and then to Hashem. Suffering should inspire reflection and *teshuvah*.¹¹

The *tochachah* in Parshat Bechukotai¹² describes a scenario where people fail to react this way. Hashem responds by intensifying their suffering. Interestingly, the *tochachah* (repeatedly) describes such people as following Hashem “*b’keri.*” The Rambam explains that the word connotes the attribution of suffering to chance, the natural “way of the world.”¹³ This kind of response causes Hashem to “raise the volume” of the suffering until people recognize His Hand and respond accordingly.

The Rambam¹⁴ explains that this is why we respond to suffering by blowing the *chatzotrot* (trumpets) and fasting. We stop our regular routine, pray to Hashem (with the *chatzotrot*), and reflect on the message He is sending us.¹⁵

The aforementioned *gemara* continues that one who cannot find any wrongful deeds should view his suffering as *yisurin shel ahavah*, “suffering expressive of (pure) love.”

If we have not sinned, why does Hashem cause us pain? The Ran explains that this kind of suffering aims to get us to change our life’s direction. Suffering is not always a punishment for wrongdoing; it can also be a warning sign.

Elihu made this point to Iyov, who saw his suffering as unwarranted. No sin of his could justify the terrible suffering he was experiencing. Elihu explained that Hashem often uses suffering to communicate with man, to get him to stop and reflect more carefully upon his life’s path. He may not have done anything wrong yet, but he is heading in the wrong direction.

A Time for Hoda’ah

In addition to expressing faith and reflecting upon our lives, suffering should also inspire thanks to Hashem. This may seem

surprising, but it is how the *gemara* explains the meaning of the Torah mandate to love Hashem “*b’chol me’odecha.*” The *pasuk* teaches us to thank Hashem in *all situations* — irrespective of the way “He treats us.”

What should we thank Hashem for at times of suffering? The Alshich encourages thanking Hashem for all the good we (often) take for granted. In actuality, we should *all* (even those who are healthy, safe, and secure) *constantly* thank Hashem for sustaining and assisting us. We should recognize Hashem’s role in keeping us healthy and protecting us from danger. As we often do not realize that He is helping us and (thus) do not express enough appreciation, Hashem places us in dangerous situations and vulnerable positions to remind us of His role in our lives. In such circumstances, we must remind ourselves of and express our appreciation for His constant assistance.

We can appreciate this point by recalling the story of the *chasid* who came home one night to an empty dinner table. He waited and waited, but his wife did not serve dinner. The next night, he returned home, and besides no dinner, the house was a mess. The third night, he found no dinner, a messy house, and his children unattended and running wild.

The *chasid* went to his Rebbe to ask what to do. The Rebbe smiled and inquired when the *chasid* had last thanked his wife for serving dinner, keeping a clean home, and caring for the children. Sometimes, we appreciate things only once we no longer have them. We, too, sometimes need to be reminded to thank Hashem for the miracles He does for us “every day... all the time, evening, morning, and afternoon.”

Rabbeinu Yonah goes further and encourages thanking Hashem for the *suffering itself*. As suffering teaches us important lessons and ultimately yields a positive result, we should thank Hashem for it as well. Rabbeinu Yonah explains that Sefer Tehillim teaches us to say to Hashem, “I thank You for Your *mussar*, which I accept with love.”

Along these lines, the Bnei Yissaschar explains that one’s davening at difficult

Continued on page 7

HAFTARAH - PARSHANUT ON THE PARSHA

Repentance, Redemption and Relationship with Hashem



Rabbanit Shani Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

This week we read the final *haftarah* of the *Sheva DeNechemta*, the seven weeks of readings of consolation between Tisha B'Av and Rosh HaShana. The prophet Yeshayahu (61:10-63:9) begins his prophecy by comparing the anticipation and joy that we will experience with redemption to that of a newly married couple - "For Zion's sake I will not remain silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be still, until her righteousness emerges like shining light..." He implores the stones of Jerusalem not to be silent, day or night, until Hashem restores Yerushalayim's former glory.

His magnificent prophecy of redemption does not only serve as a further development in the process of consolation following the weeks of commemorating destruction; it also serves as *parshanut* on this week's Torah reading of Nitzavim-Vayelech.

(1) In contrast to the curse in the *parasha* - a curse that will come upon the land if Israel violates the covenant - "brimstone and salt and burning in all the land; it shall not be sown, nor shall it bear produce, nor shall any grass grow in it" (29:22), at the time of the redemption a blessing will come upon the land: "and your land will no more be called 'desolate'..." (62:4)

(2) The *parshiyot* of the Torah (particularly Nitzavim chapter 30) and the *haftarah* relate to the process of repentance as a prerequisite for redemption. Rav Yehuda Shaviv z"l elucidates how both processes are accompanied by *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. The Torah promises: if you will "return to Hashem your G-d and listen to His voice" (30:2), then "Hashem will BRING BACK your captivity and have mercy on you, and He will RETURN and gather you from all the nations where Hashem your G-d scattered you" (30:3). Rashi, quoting Rav Shimon Bar Yohai in *massekhet Megilla* (29a) comments: "The text should have read, 'He will RETURN your captivity.' Our Sages learned from this that the *Shekhina* remains with Israel, as it were, in the distress of their exile, and when they are redeemed He brings redemption to Himself, for He will return with them."

This principle, explains Rav Shaviv, is echoed in the closing *pasuk* of the *haftarah*: "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and His pity He redeemed them" (63:9). (The Ibn Ezra explains how the "*keri u-ketiv*" - the traditional reading of the *pasuk* which differs slightly from the written text - reflects how Hashem

Himself, as it were, is afflicted, and therefore He hastens to deliver them.)

This covenant of love and identity of destiny, is maintained throughout periods of exile and accompanies us through our personal and national processes of introspection and repentance. It is what ensures the ultimate redemption, and it is a most worthy conclusion to the series of prophecies of consolation during these weeks of intense repentance.

May this year bring the fulfillment of the words of Yeshayahu - "Behold, your salvation has come!" (62:11)

Shabbat Shalom & Shana tovah!

Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council
Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

Question: Does a four-cornered towel hoodie which one wears require tzitzit to be attached? Should I round one the corners? If this does pose a problem, could a child under 3 wear it without tzitzit?

Answer: The Shulchan Aruch (OC 1:11) rules that a four cornered cloth which one puts around the neck (such as a scarf) is exempt from *tzitzit*. The Beit Yosef explains the exemption: these are worn to warm the body from the cold as opposed to serving as normal clothing. Therefore, even if it is used for the body, it has a status of “*kesut rosh* – headwear” and is exempt from *tzitzit*. The Beit Yosef adds another reason: these scarfs are multi-purpose, as one uses it to clean hands, carry fruit, etc.. Therefore, they do not get the status of regular clothing which require *tzitzit* even if they are used as clothing as well.

The Biur Halacha writes that the Gr”a and Magen Avraham agreed to the second reason, and concludes by saying that a G-d fearing individual should make one of the corners round in order to absolve himself from the doubt. This stringency applies only if the scarf has the necessary *shiur* to be required in *tzitzit*. Very thin scarfs likely do not have that *shiur* and there would be no need to rule stringently.

In our case of a towel, there is no need to rule strictly. It is clear that the main purpose is to dry yourself and you only wear it for convenience. The stringency of the Biur Halacha applies when there is a garment which serves another function, and we aren't sure if that removes its status as a garment which requires *tzitzit*. This doubt would not apply to a towel.

In practice, the four cornered towel hoodie would be exempt from *tzitzit*. (There are those who would be stringent to cut off a corner, as this seems to be the *psak* of the Mishnah Berurah. For a young child this certainly would not be necessary. For more on the necessity to follow all of the stringencies with a child, see Sha'ar Tzion 658:36)

Question: Can one wear a sunhat on Shabbos with a large brim?

Answer: The Shulchan Aruch rules in OC 301 that one may not wear a hat with a brim wider than a *tefach* because of the concern of *ohel*.

However, it seems that the Shulchan Aruch did not intend to prohibit many of the types of hats that we have.

1. If the hat's purpose is not to create shade, there is no concern
2. If the hat's purpose is to create shade, but the hat is soft and flimsy, it is not considered an *ohel* but rather clothing.

In your case, the second condition is certainly met (editor's note: a picture was sent of the hat and it was clearly flimsy) and therefore it would be permissible.

Question: A young boy's bar mitzvah date is the 28th of Elul. His father would like to know whether the son can lein on the first day of Rosh Hashanah. The father is the ba'al koreh for the shul and teaches all of the bar mitzvah boys, so it seems fair to assume the child will lein almost perfectly.

Answer: There are many discussions regarding the different roles on the *yamim nora'im*. If the *tzibur* agrees, there is certainly room to allow for the child to *lein* if it is his *bar mitzvah shabbat*.

Question: Is one allowed to take a picture of a rainbow and show the picture to others?

Answer: The Shulchan Aruch (OC 229:1) delineates the *bracha* that should be said when seeing a rainbow, and immediately thereafter rules that one should not look at a rainbow for too long. However, this does not mean that it is prohibited to take a picture of a rainbow. If the picture is not being taken for professional reasons, one should try not to spend too much time taking the picture, but rather quickly snap a few pictures. When staring at a picture of a rainbow, one is not looking at the rainbow in real time.

● Compiled by Yaakov Panitch.

“כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד”

הרבנית שרון רימון
Tanach teacher and author



ממנה. הם עלולים לחשוב שהיא רחוקה מהם, קשה מדי, ואולי אפילו מוטעית. אך התורה מזכירה להם שדווקא האתגר הזה יקרב אותם אל עצמם, אל שורש נשמתם. זה מה שיעשה להם טוב.

למעשה, הבחירה בקיום המצוות היא בחירה בחיים ובטוב, כפי שמדגישה התורה בפסוקים הבאים:

רְאֵה נְתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם אֶת הַחַיִּים וְאֶת הַטּוֹב וְאֶת הַמּוֹת וְאֶת הָרָע... הַחַיִּים וְהַמּוֹת נְתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבֹּרֵךְ וְהַקֹּלֵל וּבְחַרְתָּ בְּחַיִּים לְמַעַן תְּחִיָּה אִתָּה וְזָרַעְדָּ (ל', טו-כ)

אם היה כל כך פשוט לבחור בדרך החיים, דרך הטוב, לא היה צורך להדגיש זאת שוב ושוב.

אכן, הבחירה בטוב היא אתגר ומאמץ, אך האתגר הזה איננו נובע מכך שהמצוות רחוקות מנפש האדם אלא להפך – מכך שהאדם לעתים מתרחק מעצמו וההתקרבות פנימה היא עבודה.

המפרשים נחלקו האם “המצווה הזאת” שעליה אומרת התורה שהיא קרובה אל האדם, היא מצוות התשובה או כל התורה כולה. לפי הפרשנות שהבאנו כאן, נראה כי ניתן לחבר בין שתי הגישות: **קיום המצוות הוא עבודה תמידית של תשובה – שיבת האדם אל עצמו** – תיקון בכל המישורים של חיי האדם, במעשה, בדיבור, במחשבה וברגש.

ככל שהאדם מחובר יותר אל הפנימיות המקורית שלו, הוא גם מצליח להרגיש עד כמה המצוות טבעיות לו, מותאמות לנפשו, קרובות אל לבו “כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיה ובלבבך לעשותו”.

בכל תחומי החיים של האדם, מדריכות אותו ונותנות מענה להתמודדויות שהוא חווה במהלך חייו, החל מיחסים משפחתיים, דרך בניית חברה תקינה, ועד לעניינים רוחניים. המצוות אינן דורשות מהאדם להתנתק מחיי העולם הזה, או לעשות מעשים קיצוניים מופרכים. הן מעשיות, ומותאמות לאנשים החיים את המציאות הטבעית.

אמנם, המצוות מציבות רף גבוה של התנהלות רוחנית ומוסרית, ולא תמיד נח ופשוט לאדם לעמוד ברף הגבוה שהתורה מציבה לו. יש הרבה דברים הגורמים לאדם לסטות מהמסלול הטבעי והפשוט, מונעים ממנו לראות את הדרך הנכונה, מרחיקים אותו מעצמו ומהחיבור שלו אל המצוות. במצב כזה האדם מרגיש שהמצוות רחוקות ממנו, בעוד שהאמת היא שהוא זה שהתרחק מן הדרך.

לכן התורה רואה צורך להבהיר, שהמאמץ והאתגר שבקיום המצוות איננו אומר שהמצוות רחוקות מהאדם, אלא להפך – הן הכי קרובות אליו, גם אם הוא לא רואה את זה. המצוות מותאמות לנפשו של האדם; מחזירות אותו אל עצמו המקורי הפנימי; מאירות את הנשמה האלקית שבו; מזכירות לו את עמוד השדרה הפנימי שלו; מזכירות לו מהם גבולות המוסר; מהם יחסים בין-אישיים חיוביים ותקינים; מהו חיבור אל הנשמה ואל הקודש. כך, המצוות עוזרות לאדם לבנות את עולמו הפנימי.

ההתקרבות של האדם אל עצמו, הבנת נפשו ותיקונה, היא משימה מאתגרת, שאנשים נוטים להתחמק

י המצווה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוה היום לא נפלאות הוא ממך ולא רחוקה הוא: לא בשמים הוא לאמר מי יעלה לנו השמימה ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשנה: ולא מעבר לים הוא לאמר מי יעבר לנו אל עבר הים ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשנה: כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיה ובלבבך לעשותו (דברים ל', יא-יד).

פסוקים אלה מדגישים שהמצווה איננה קשה ואיננה רחוקה מן האדם אלא להפך – קרובה אליו מאד. למה צריך להדגיש זאת?

כנראה מפני שאנשים מרגישים שהמצווה רחוקה מהם מאד.

במיוחד לאחר ששמעו נאום ארון בו הוזהרו שוב ושוב על קיום המצוות, ובו נאמר להם עד כמה משה חושש שהם יעזבו את דרך ה'. **המסקנה מנאום של משה עלולה להיות שקשה עד בלתי אפשרי לקיים את המצוות.** שמה הן אינן טבעיות עבור האדם, אולי הן דורשות מהאדם משהו שרחוק ממנו (מעבר לים), גבוה הרבה מעל השגתו והבנתו (בשמים), ולכן יש חשש גדול שהאדם יתחמק ויתרחק מקיום המצוות.

דווקא משום כך יש צורך להדגיש, שהסתכלות זו איננה נכונה. **המצוות אינן רחוקות מן האדם או נשגבות מבינתו – “לא בשמים היא”, אלא להפך – “קרוב אליך הדבר מאד” – יש בהן הגיון פנימי רב, והן מותאמות לנפש האדם ולדרך התנהלות טבעית בחיים.** כל עניינה של התורה הוא להדריך את האדם במציאות החיים האנושית הארצית. המצוות עוסקות

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times should focus on *shevach* (praise), not *bakashah* (request). We are meant to respond to our suffering by showing greater appreciation of Hashem; our *tefillah* should reflect this.

Based on Hallel, which includes six *pesukim* of thanks (*Hodu laShem ki tov*) and four of *bakashah* (*Anah Hashem...*), the Beis Yisrael taught that one's *tefillah* at difficult times should consist of sixty percent praise and forty percent *bakashah*. Times of need are opportunities to focus on and express our appreciation for Hashem's attendance to our needs each day and all year round.

Bringing a Yeshuah

Rabbeinu Yonah concludes that it is this thanks that ultimately brings salvation. When we show appreciation for Hashem's kindness, He shows us more.

In addition to expressing thanks at difficult times, the Kaf HaChayim recommends committing to recite Nishmat publicly after the difficulty is resolved. Our intention to praise Hashem merits His salvation.

Recognizing and appreciating Hashem's kindness is a central part of our mission in life. Difficult times are meant to remind us of this, and inspire us to express appreciation for Hashem's past and current kindness and reinforce our commitment to doing so in the future.

● *Written up by Rafi Davis*

1. Sefer Tehillim 92:2-3.
2. See Be'er HaParasha, Vayeichi 5782.
3. Talmud Bavli, Masechet Berachot 60b.
4. See Ben Yehoyada, Masechet Berachot 60b.
5. Yeri'ot Shlomo commentary on the Siddur.

6. Sefer Tehillim 118.
7. See Rashbam (Devarim 11:2) who connects the Torah's usage of the term “mussar” to yisurin.
8. Talmud Bavli, Masechet Berachot 5a.
9. Sefer Devarim 30:1-2.
10. It is noteworthy that we use the term “tochachah” (rebuke) to refer to the section that describes the curses. The curses are meant to rebuke — not to punish.
11. See Sefat Emet, Likutim, Shabbat Shuvah.
12. Sefer Vayikra 26:1-27.
13. See the earlier pieces, entitled “The Director Behind the Scenes” and “When Strange Things Happen” for more on the topic of “chance.”
14. Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Ta'aniyot 1:1-3.
15. The Sefat Emet (Likutim, Shabbat) explains that this is the proper response to suffering: instead of thinking that suffering demonstrates that Hashem is not with us, it should indicate to us that we have a problem that we need to address.

Thoughts for the New Year



Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

“You are all standing this day before the L-rd, your G-d: the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, every man of Israel.” (Devarim 29:9)

In the next verse, the Torah spells out all the people who stood together before G-d: “Your young children, your women, and your convert who is within your camp, both your woodcutters and your water drawers.”

Parshat Nitzavim is always read in one of the weeks preceding Rosh Hashanah and the Torah appropriately suggests several ways to approach the New Year.

The first is that we come together as one: “You are all standing here today.” The power and influence of individuals coming together to pray is greater than an individual’s prayer. At the New Year we join together many times to fulfill commandments such as blowing the shofar or saying the *Selichot* penitential prayers. “Unity” is a popular buzzword. However, in this verse the unity we should strive for is “before the Lord, your G-d.”

Second, all the different sections of the people are included when we come together. The leaders and the woodcutters; the upper echelons of society and the man on the street. We are all in this together and share the same story.

The third approach is based on chassidic thought and explains this verse as speaking to the individual. We are told to bring together all the different parts of our personality, from “the heads of your tribes” to “your woodcutters and your water drawers.” These describe the compartments of our soul. During the soon-to-be-finished year, there were periods when we were the “heads” and others when we were “woodcutters.” Sometimes we were successful and happy and at other times we

sinned, were confused, and missed out on opportunities. As the year draws to a close, we enter the period of the Days of Mercy with the sum of all our parts. Sometimes we felt on top of the world and at other times we were in a downward spiral. In the month of Elul, as we approach Tishrei and the New Year, we bring together all the parts of the past year and pray for a better year ahead.



“Moses commanded us a law, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob.” (Devarim 33:4)

In one of the final verses in the Torah, we are told that the Torah is an inheritance belonging to the entire congregation and this treasure is now our responsibility. “Moses commanded us a law, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob.”

When I was growing up, I thought that the Torah only belonged to those annoying religious fanatics, the primitives who went on a rampage during demonstrations, the extremists who were involved in all kinds of unclear protests. I was angry at them, I did not understand them, and I was forever criticizing them.

Sometime in my teenage years, I heard an amazing comparison from the world of sports that changed my perspective. In a sports match, there are fans who sit in the stadium and think they run the whole show. They criticize the umpire, the goalkeeper, the coach, and the owner. Throughout the game they shout, curse, and blame everyone for how the game is played, and this pattern repeats itself each and every season. They would not consider, for even one second, going onto the field and trying to score a goal, to work hard to be part of the team and join the game. They do not think that the game actually belongs to them, or that they are part of it. These fans are happy to observe

from the sidelines, and do no more than criticize.

The same applies to the Torah. We can choose to remain in the stadium and complain nonstop, or we can decide to get on the field and take responsibility. We may then discover that what we thought about the other players is not exactly the truth. It is our choice whether we remain sitting on the sidelines or decide to take the plunge and be part of the team by learning Torah and connecting to our heritage and previous generations. We choose whether we want to look for the relevance and meaning in the Torah in our generation.

As Moses concludes his historic speech, in the moments before he leaves this world, he addresses the entire Jewish nation and tells them, “I am bequeathing an inheritance to you. Take responsibility for it, all of you together.”



פרשת “וילך” היא הפרשה הקצרה ביותר בתורה. לא סתם קוראים את פרשת “וילך” לקראת סוף השנה ותחילת השנה החדשה.

הרב ברל וויין מסביר זאת כך: לא רק אנחנו בחשבון נפש בימים האלה, גם משה רבנו, שאמר את הדברים הללו לפני פטירתו. יש קשר בין סוף השנה, סוף התורה וסוף חייו של משה.

בימים שבהם גם אנחנו אמורים לערוך דין וחשבון, אפשר להתבונן בהדרך שבה משה עושה זאת בפרשה: הוא מדבר בגילוי לב. מספר על הרגשות שלו, על האכזבות וההצלחות, ולאורך כל הדרך מבקש מהעם לשמור על התורה, ואף לחדש בכל פעם את תחושת קבלת התורה.

זו בדיוק המהות של הימים הללו, של אלול ותשרי. הזדמנות שנתית לבחון בכנות את הטוב ואת הרע, והיכן שצריך – גם להתחיל מחדש, לתקן, לרענן, אך לא מתוך דכדוך ועצב אלא מתוך אופטימיות ומציאת העוצמות והנקודות החזקות שבנו. אחד המשפטים היפים ששמעתי על חודש אלול אומר כך: בבואנו לתקן - חשוב שאדם יידע מהם לסרוגותיו, אך חשוב פי כמה שיידע מהן מעלותיו.

For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis

Deputy CEO, World Mizrahi

Rabbi of Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“If your dispersed ones shall be at the ends of the Heavens, from there Hashem your G-d will gather you and from there He will take you. And Hashem your G-d will bring you to the Land that your forefathers inherited and you shall inherit it, and He will do good for you and He will make you more numerous than your forefathers” (Devarim 30:4-5).

Following the blessings and curses of last week’s *parsha*, this week’s *parsha* contains many encouraging sentiments and speaks of repentance and ultimate redemption. Even if our dispersed ones will find themselves “at the ends of the Heavens,” Hashem will gather us together and bring us back to Land which he gave to our forefathers.

At first glance, the wording of this promise seems somewhat strange. Surely when describing our gathering in from exile to the Land of Israel, it would have been more appropriate to say, “If your dispersed ones shall be at the ends of the EARTH...” Why does it say, “at the ends of the HEAVENS?”

In truth, the verse is not only speaking of a physical redemption or a geographical ingathering from exile. It is speaking of a spiritual return. Even if we reach the spiritual depths where our dispersed ones are “at the ends of the Heavens,” nevertheless, “from there Hashem your G-d will gather you and from there He will take you.”



Our *teshuva* must not be confined to our mouths and our hearts, but must also be translated into action.

One of the greatest barriers to *teshuva* (repentance) is our lack of faith in our ability to truly return to Hashem. We may feel that certain expectations are beyond us, that we have drifted too far from certain ideals, or that we cannot identify with or aspire to the lofty goals of *teshuva*. The message of this week’s *parsha* is that however dispersed we are from Hashem, the ability to return remains.

As we continue reading through the *parsha*, we learn that not only is *teshuva* possible, it is entirely within our reach.

“For this commandment (of *teshuva*) that I command you today, it is not too wondrous for you and it is not too distant. It is not in Heaven that you should say, “Who will go up to Heaven for us and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and perform it?” And it is not across the sea that you should say, “Who will cross the sea for us and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and perform it?” For the matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart to perform it.” (Devarim 30:11-14)

Teshuva is not far away or beyond our capabilities. The potential for *teshuva* is within each and every one of us, “in your mouth and in your heart to perform it.” Ramban (Devarim 30:11, based on Eruvin 54a) explains that these words do not only describe the accessibility of *teshuva*, but the process of *teshuva* as well, involving the heart (recognition of guilt), the mouth (confession) and translation into action, “to perform it.”

As Rosh Hashana approaches, we must focus on controlling our mouths and using them for genuine prayer, honest confession and correcting the harm we have done to others. We must direct our hearts towards the service of Hashem and control our hearts to only love that which is appropriate for us. Most importantly, our *teshuva* must not be confined to our mouths and our hearts, but must also be translated into action.

By taking advantage of the accessibility of *teshuva* and genuinely returning to Hashem, may He accept our repentance and gather us in from the ends of the Heavens and the ends of the earth.

Shabbat Shalom!

To Renew Our Days



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

The moment had come. Moses was about to die. He had seen his sister Miriam and brother Aaron pre-decease him. He had prayed to G-d – not to live forever, not even to live longer, but simply, “Let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan” (Deut. 3:25). Let me complete the journey. Let me reach the destination. But G-d said no:

“That is enough,” the Lord said. “Do not speak to me anymore about this matter.” (Deut. 3:26)

G-d, who had acceded to almost every other prayer Moses prayed, refused him this.¹

What then did Moses do on these last days of his life? He issued two instructions, the last of the 613 commands, that were to have significant consequences for the future of Judaism and the Jewish people. The first is known as *Hakhel*, the command that the king should summon the people to gather during Succot following the seventh, *Shemittah* year:

“At the end of every seven years, in the year for cancelling debts, during the Festival of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your G-d at the place He will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people – men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns – so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your G-d and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your G-d as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.” (Deut. 31:10-13)

There is no specific reference to this command in the later books of Tanach, but there are accounts of very similar gatherings: covenant renewal ceremonies, in which the king or his equivalent assembled the nation, reading from the Torah or reminding the people of their history, and calling on them to reaffirm the terms of their destiny as a people in covenant with G-d.

That, in fact, is what Moses had been doing for the last month of his life. The book of Deuteronomy as a whole is a restatement of the covenant, almost forty years and one generation after the original covenant at Mount Sinai. There is another example in the last chapter of the book of Joshua (see chapter 24 of the book of Joshua), once Joshua had fulfilled his mandate as Moses’ successor, bringing the people across the Jordan, leading them in their battles, and settling the land.

Another occurred many centuries later in the reign of King Josiah. His grandfather, Menasseh, who reigned for fifty-five years, was one of the worst of Judah’s kings, introducing various forms of idolatry, including child sacrifice. Josiah sought to return the nation to its faith, ordering among other things the cleansing and repair of the Temple. It was in the course of this restoration that a copy of the Torah was discovered,² sealed in a hiding place, to prevent it being destroyed during the many decades in which idolatry flourished and the Torah was almost forgotten. The king, deeply affected by this discovery, convened a *Hakhel*-type national assembly:

“Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. He

went up to the Temple of the Lord with the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets – all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord. The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord – to follow the Lord and keep his commands, statutes, and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the Covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the Covenant.” (2 Kings 23:1-3)

The most famous *Hakhel*-type ceremony was the national gathering convened by Ezra and Nehemiah after the second wave of returnees from Babylon (Neh. 8-10). Standing on a platform by one of the gates to the Temple, Ezra read the Torah to the assembly, having positioned Levites throughout the crowd so that they could explain to the people what was being said. The ceremony that began on Rosh Hashanah, culminated after Succot when the people collectively “bound themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of G-d given through Moses the servant of G-d and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our Lord” (Neh. 10:29).

The other command – the last Moses gave the people – was contained in the words: “Now write down this song and teach it to the Israelites,” understood by rabbinic tradition to be the command to write, or at least take part in writing, a *Sefer Torah*. Why specifically these two commands, at this time?

Something profound was being transacted here. Recall that G-d had seemed brusque in His dismissal of Moses' request to be allowed to cross the Jordan. "That is enough ... Do not speak to me anymore about this matter." Is this the Torah and this its reward? Is this how G-d repaid the greatest of the prophets? Surely not.

In these last two commands G-d was teaching Moses, and through him Jews throughout the ages, what immortality is – on earth, not just in heaven. We are mortal because we are physical, and no physical organism lives forever. We grow up, we grow old, we grow frail, we die. But we are not only physical. We are also spiritual. In these last two commands, we are taught what it is to be part of a spirit that has not died in four thousand years and will not die so long as there is a sun, moon, and stars.³

G-d showed Moses, and through him us, how to become part of a civilisation that never grows old. It stays young because it repeatedly renews itself. The last two commands of the Torah are about renewal: first collective, then individual.

Hakhel, the covenant renewal ceremony every seven years, ensured that the nation would regularly rededicate itself to its mission. I have often argued that there is one place in the world where this covenant renewal ceremony still takes place: the United States of America.

The concept of covenant played a decisive role in European politics in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, especially in Calvin's Geneva and in Scotland, Holland, and England. Its longest-lasting impact, though, was on America, where it was taken by the early Puritan settlers and remains part of its political culture even today. Almost every Presidential Inaugural Address – every four years since 1789 – has been, explicitly or implicitly, a covenant renewal ceremony, a contemporary form of *Hakhel*. In 1987, speaking at the bicentennial celebration of the American Constitution, President Ronald Reagan described the constitution as a kind of "covenant we've made not only with ourselves but with all of mankind...

It's a human covenant; yes, and beyond that, a covenant with the Supreme Being to whom our founding fathers did constantly appeal for assistance." America's duty, he said, is "to constantly renew their covenant with humanity... to complete the work begun 200 years ago, that grand noble work that is America's particular calling – the triumph of human freedom, the triumph of human freedom under G-d."⁴

If *Hakhel* is national renewal, the command that we should each take part in the writing of a new Sefer Torah is personal renewal. It was Moses' way of saying to all future generations: It is not enough for you to say, I received the Torah from my parents (or grandparents or great-grandparents). You have to take it and make it new in every generation.

One of the most striking features of Jewish life is that from Israel to Palo Alto, Jews are among the world's most enthusiastic users of information technology and have contributed disproportionately to its development (Google, Facebook, Waze). But we still write the Torah exactly as it was done thousands of years ago – by hand, with a quill, on a parchment scroll. This is not a paradox; it is a profound truth. People who carry their past with them, can build the future without fear.

Renewal is one of the hardest of human undertakings. Some years ago, I sat with the man who was about to become Prime Minister of Britain. In the course of our conversation he said, "What I most pray for is that when we get there (he meant, 10 Downing Street), I never forget why I wanted to get there." I suspect he had in mind the famous words of Harold Macmillan, British Prime Minister between 1957 and 1963, who, when asked what he most feared in politics, replied, "Events, dear boy, events."

Things happen. We are blown by passing winds, caught up in problems not of our making, and we drift. When that happens, whether to individuals, institutions, or nations, we grow old. We forget who we are and why. Eventually we are overtaken by people (or organisations or

cultures) that are younger, hungrier, or more driven than us.

The only way to stay young, hungry, and driven is through periodic renewal, reminding ourselves of where we came from, where we are going, and why. To what ideals are we committed? What journey are we called on to continue? Of what story are we a part?

How precisely timed, therefore, and how beautiful, that at the very moment when the greatest of prophets faced his own mortality, that G-d should give him, and us, the secret of immortality – not just in heaven but down here on earth. For when we keep to the terms of the covenant, and making it new again in our lives, we live on in those who come after us, whether through our children or our disciples or those we have helped or influenced. We "renew our days as of old" (Lamentations 5:21). Moses died, but what he taught and what he sought lives on.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- Why do you think these two *mitzvot* were the last to be given to the Jewish people?
- What more regular *mitzvot* achieve the same outcome as *hakhel*?
- Have you ever been involved in the writing of a Sefer Torah? How did it feel (or how do you imagine it must feel)?

1. There is an important lesson here: It is the prayers we pray for others, and others pray for us, that are answered; not always those we pray for ourselves. That is why when we pray for the healing of the sick or the comfort of the mourners we do so specifically "in the midst of others" who are ill or bereaved. As Judah Halevi pointed out in *The Kuzari*, the interests of individuals may conflict with one another, which is why we pray communally, seeking the collective good.

2. This is Radak and Ralbag's understanding of the event. Abarbanel finds it difficult to believe that there were no other copies of the Torah preserved even during the idolatrous periods of the nation's history, and suggests that what was discovered sealed in the Temple was Moses' own Torah, written by his hand.

3. See Jeremiah 31.

4. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Ronald Reagan, 1987, 1040-43.*

Chizuk



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid and do not be broken before them ... Moshe summoned Yehoshua and said to him before the eyes of all Israel, “Be strong and courageous, for you shall come with this people to the Land that Hashem swore to their forefathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it.” (Devarim 31:6-7)

Shortly before his death, Moshe gave *chizuk* (strengthening) both to Bnei Yisrael and to Yehoshua, since conquering Eretz Yisrael and establishing a Jewish *Medinah* requires perseverance. The Gemara in Berachos (32b) lists four other activities that require *chizuk*: *limmud haTorah*, the practice of good deeds, *tefillah*, and pursuing a livelihood. Eating, relaxing, and sleeping come very naturally to a person; they do not require concentrated effort. However, these four activities demand our close attention; we must focus on them and ignore all of life’s many distractions.

The Mechaber writes that one should hold onto the sefer Torah while reciting the *berachos* upon receiving an *aliyah*. The Rama comments that this practice is based on *pessukim* that relate the notion of *chizuk* to *limmud haTorah*, “This Book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth ... Be strong and courageous” (Yehoshua 1:8-9). The Rama writes that the *minhag* to declare “*Chazak*” upon completion of a *sefer* of *chumash* during *kri’as haTorah* is based on the same idea.

Likewise, many aspects of *tefillah* require *chizuk*. The Gemara in Berachos (6a) teaches that it is proper to daven in a Beis HaKnesses, even if one is davening *b’yechidus* (as an individual): “A person’s prayer is heard only [if he recites it] in a *shul*.” Similarly, the Yerushalmi interprets the *passuk*, “Seek Hashem where He can be found” as a reference to the potency of *tefillah* in Batei Keneisyos

and Batei Medrashos, where Hashem is “found.” One stands a better chance of having his prayers answered if he davens in a Beis HaKnesses.

Rebbi Akiva Eiger cites Tosfos who had an alternate *girsas* of the Gemara in Berachos: “A person’s prayer is heard only [if he recites it] with the *tzibbur*.” Likewise, the Gemara in Berachos (8a) teaches, based on the *passuk*, “Behold, G-d does not despise the numerous”, that “The Holy One, Blessed is He, does not despise the prayers of the *tzibbur*.”

Thus, the Zohar explains that when a *yachid* davens, his *tefillah* will enter in front of Hashem only if it is offered with “strong force.” First, Hashem will examine the *tefillah*, as well as the righteousness of the one who offered it. When a *tzibbur* davens, however, the *tefillah* always enters in front of Hashem, without attention to the sins of those who offered it. Even if a person does not deserve to have his prayers answered, if he davens along with the *tzibbur*, the *zechus hatzibbur* will enable his prayers to be answered.

The Gemara in Berachos (32b) quotes a statement of Rebbi Chamma b’Rebbi Chanina, that if a person sees that he has davened but has not been answered, he should go back and daven again. This is derived from the *passuk*, “Hope to Hashem, strengthen yourself and He will give you courage, and hope to Hashem”. Rashi explains that the *passuk* implies that one should repeat his *tefillah* over again and hope to Hashem that it will be accepted.

Accordingly, Rav Soloveitchik suggested that the *chizuk* referred to in the Gemara connotes the element of repetition, the constant renewal of one’s efforts in these areas. It seems that this is why, when we conclude a *masechta*, we reinforce our *limmud haTorah* by immediately beginning the next *masechta*.

Similarly, after we finish Sefer Bereishis on Shabbos morning, we *lein* from Sefer Shemos at Mincha, and on Simchas Torah, we immediately follow the completion of one cycle of *kri’as haTorah* with the beginning of the next cycle.

The notion of providing *chizuk* for *tefillah* is relevant to the recitation of the *piyyut* Adon Olam. The *minhag* in many communities is to begin Shacharis with Adon Olam. Some explain that this practice is related to the *halachah* cited by the Mechaber that when one recites a *berachah* and mentions Hashem’s Name, he should have in mind both the pronunciation of the Name, אדני - that Hashem is the Master of All - in addition to its written form, יקוק - which connotes Hashem as הוה ויהיה, that He was, is, and will always be in existence.

In Adon Olam, we elaborate on these concepts, describing Hashem as the אדון הכל and as possessing the quality of הוה ויהיה. In this way, the *piyyut* serves as a declaration, in advance, that whenever we mention Hashem’s Name throughout the davening, it is with the understanding that we include *kavanah* for both of these themes, even if we do not have this express intention at the time.

The Rav suggested that the source of the common *minhag* to conclude the *davening* on Shabbos and Yom Tov with Adon Olam is the idea that *tefillah* requires *chizuk*. *Shacharis* begins with Adon Olam, and after we finish the *davening*, we recite Adon Olam again as if to demonstrate that we are prepared to repeat the *davening* from the beginning another time. This may similarly explain our practice of concluding *Shacharis* with U’Va LeTziyon, which includes *Kedushah D’Sidra*, and the *minhag* of Nusach Sefard to conclude Ma’ariv with Barchu.

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha II.

Becoming Everlasting Physical and Spiritual Jews



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

As we continue to approach the *Yamim Noraim* and the *Yom HaDin*, I would like to share a message not just to take with us for this Shabbos but hopefully through the month of Tishrei and into the new year. Rashi explains the first *pasuk* of *Nitzavim* to be a continuation of the *klalos* (curses) that were taught last week. He explains that after hearing such terrible things the natural response for *Am Yisrael* was to be full of fear and question who could possibly withstand such difficult punishments and hardships? Therefore the response from Moshe Rabbeinu in this week's *parsha* is "*Atem Nitzavim Hayom*" – despite all this you still stand here today, despite all that you have done until now in the *Midbar*, HaKadosh Baruch Hu has spared you.

The question that must be asked on Moshe must be how was this any sort of comfort for *Am Yisrael*? Much of the experience of the *Midbar* was both physically and emotionally dreadful not to mention an entire generation of Jews had been wiped out before they arrived at this point, at the foot of *Eretz Yisrael*, and he is telling them that they have been kept from being harmed?

Rav Dessler ZT"l in his *Michtav M'Eliyahu* (Chelek Beis – Page #33) teaches us that when there come certain points in life where man is given a special *אתערותא דלעיילא* – a spark of inspiration that allows him to succeed more in what he is doing. Sometimes we can finish *davening* and feel that this time it was filled with extra excitement, or be learning and feel that there is an extra drive pushing us through a *daf* of Gemara. Most of the time this is

not something that we can feel in order to get a good feeling out of that which we are doing is totally dependent on the work we put in. The rule Rav Dessler says is that despite this divine spark giving us the *koach* needed to carry on without any particular difficulty or lack of motivation, when it comes from a natural effort that we put, that is when the feeling becomes permanent. The easier the passion and inspiration comes to us, the easier it is to lose that spark. The struggle to be successful is what allows us to constantly be on that higher level where we constantly succeed with our own abilities.

The *Mechilta* in *Shir HaShirim* says that when all of *Am Yisrael* crossed through the *Yam Suf* when leaving *Mitzrayim*, they all had prophecies that were greater than those of *Yechezkel HaNavi*. Why is it then that they did not all become as great and famous of a *Navi* as he was? Because this brief period of elevated vision was a gift from Hashem, not something that permanently was part of them. The proof that in *Yechezkel's* case, this was not just a temporary status given to him was his ability to still have such *Nevuos* even during the time of the *Churban*, he made it part of who he was.

We see this also with the *Luchos* given at *Har Sinai*. The first set was given to us as a gift, with nothing added from our side. This was only very temporary as after the *Cheit HaEgel*, Moshe Rabbeinu then had to chisel the stone himself in order to create the second *Luchos*. This work done by Moshe, because it was not just given to us from Hashem, is what allowed this set to be permanent.

How does this explain the *nechama* (comfort) that was brought to *Am Yisrael* in our *parsha*? The first generation to leave *Mitzrayim* did not necessarily work and create for themselves a reality in which they were completely worthy of being taken out of *Mitzrayim*, rather the *Zechus Avos* (Merit of our Patriarchs) played a role in allowing them to merit being freed. This is what the *Dor HaMidbar* was – a generation that had been given the opportunity of freedom by Hashem "for free". As the theme has gone, this elevated status given does not last forever and eventually caused them to suffer and die while still in the desert. The *Dor* that was born in the *Midbar* and would later come into *Eretz Yisrael* lived through a period in which their families were suffering and dying yet the fact they still made it through is a clear sign that they had a permanence within them, not a short lived higher level experience as those that came before them did. What was this comfort? Moshe shared with them all the curses that may come upon them and yet they are still standing, they have made something out of themselves and created a level of permanence within the nation as they were never raised higher than what they really were, rather they made this level for themselves.

This is the message to take as well for the *Yamim Noraim*. We all have our own struggles both in a physical and spiritual sense. What we must recognize is that the people we are is a result of this which makes a permanent level of ourselves that will not change.

● Edited by Zac Winkler.

You are What You Do



Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

This powerful message emerges for us from the beginning of Parshat Nitzavim which is always read close to Rosh Hashana.

Hashem declares '*Atem Nitzavim hayom kulachem lifnei Hashem Elokeichem*' – 'all of you are standing here this day, before the Lord your G-d' and some categories of people are given: *sosheichem, shifteichem, zikneichem v'shotreichem* – your leaders, your tribes, your elders, your officers. And then other examples follow: your children, the women, the strangers, from the hewers of wood to the drawers of water but there is one word which does not fit into this context, it's the term '*shifteichem*' – 'your tribes' – because all the others refer to specific categories of people. Elders, officers, but what do we mean by tribes? Rashi explains that very simply, *rosheichem shifteichem* should be read as *rosheichem l'shivteichem* – which would mean the leaders of your tribes. But the trouble is, that is not what the Torah actually says!

Some of our other *mefarshim* (commentators) explain that actually, *shevet* doesn't

only mean tribe – it also means staff, the item that the leader carries and therefore it describes the leader.

It's like "the crown" which is a term used to describe a monarch because the monarch wears a crown. Similarly, "First Violin" refers to the most significant person in the orchestra because they play the first violin. So, too, with *shivteichem* which can mean your staff and it refers to the people who carry that staff – those who are leaders, parents, educators, etc. If you are a leader you are a *shevet* because, you carry the staff in your hand, so to speak. And in English, we refer to the staff as being those who are the 'doers' in a particular capacity.

Hashem wants to convey to us that the essence of what we are is not a title, it's not how people describe us, but rather it's what we do that matters.

We find this expressed in the Shema, the essence of course, is a statement of the depth of our faith in the Almighty. But the Shema altogether has 248 words, as a symbol of the 248 positive commandments

and the 248 limbs of the body – showing that the expression of our belief must be found in our actions.

In *Anim Zemirot*, which we all love to sing or to hear, we have a beautiful line: '*dimo otcha v'lo kfi yeshcha*'. This is the way of the Almighty and the same applies to people. '*Dimu otcha*' – when we imagine you and evaluate you, '*v'lo kfi yeshcha*' – it is not according to your essence or your title, '*vayeshavucha*' the value we attach to you, '*lfi ma'asecha*' according to what you do. Hashem is great because of his actions, what he does for us. And we can only attain greatness, not through titles or positions, but rather through our deeds.

As we approach the High Holy Days, let's take advantage of these Days of Awe to change ourselves and, in that way, change the world around us. The way to do it is through action.

From Parshat Nitzavim we learn that it is the actions that count – you are what you do.

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Avoid Complacency



Rabbi Shalom Rosner
Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

During this time of year, we focus on *teshuva*. The Torah tells us: כִּי־קָרוֹב אֵלַיךְ הַדָּבָר מָאֹד Rather, [this] thing (many interpret to mean *teshuva*) is very close to you. (Devarim 30:14). If *teshuva* is so close to us, meaning, it is within our reach, then why is it so difficult to grasp? Why are we so challenged when it comes to correcting our conduct?

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz in *Sichat Mussar* explains that what prevents us from doing *teshuva* is *hergel* – habit. We are creatures of habit and it is difficult for us to change. Imagine a person who is not aware of death and suddenly experiences the loss of a friend. That would be a life-changing experience. Being shocked by the fact that man is immortal, he would not want to waste his days on this earth. Yet, since we know life is limited, we are used to the experience, and it has less of an impact on us.

We have to avoid the feeling of complacency. Getting used to a situation and

justifying it. “I am good – I am happy with where I am.” As we have said many times, life is like going up a downward escalator – if one is not constantly climbing, he will descend.

In *Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Rav Dessler brings an amazing *meshal* to underscore this point. Imagine that you gaze out your kitchen window and suddenly see a hand pop up from the earth. Then a leg, and another arm and a face. You would be astonished and be certain that you were witnessing *t'chiyat ha'meitim*. Seeing such a supernatural event would clearly shake us up and lead us to strengthen our commitment to Torah and *mitzvot*.

Yet, when we look out our windows and see grass sprout, and a flower blossom from the earth – we are not stunned. We simply state that it is nature (*teva*). What we forget is that mother nature is like a father! Vegetation sprouting from the ground is no less a miracle than bodies rising from the dead. The only difference

is that we got used to seeing grass grow. *Hergel!*

As Yom Kippur approaches, we should introspect and consider how we can improve ourselves. To not fear change and to avoid being locked on a certain behavior.

In this week's *parsha* Moshe is again told to appoint Yehoshua to take his place. Yehoshua is referred to elsewhere as a נֶעַר (*lad*). At the time he was at least in his fifties or sixties, since he was one of the initial *meraglim* (spies) and survived the 40 year journey in the desert. Yet, he is referred to as a *na'ar* – because he had the **attitude** of a youth. He did not have the attitude of “this is the way we have been doing it for years.” He learned from Moshe and changed his ways when necessary to ensure that he acted properly.

May we have that youthful attitude and avoid complacency so that we can indeed become the best human beings and true *ovdei Hashem*.

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Repentance and Return



Michal Horowitz
Judaic Studies Teacher

For this mitzvah that I command you today, it is not hidden from you and it is not distant; It is not in the heavens for you to say, Who will ascend to the heavens for us and take it for us... Nor is it across the sea, to say, Who can cross to the other side of the sea for us and take it for us... so that we can perform it? For the matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it (Devarim 30:11-14).

According to the Ramban, ‘for this mitzvah’ refers to the mitzvah of teshuva. Teshuva is close to us, possible for all of us, and very, very near to us. If we but want it, Hashem will help us along the path of return.

As part of the teshuva process, and coming closer to Hashem as a result, chapter 27 of Tehillim is recited twice a day, beginning on Rosh Chodesh Elul and continuing through the yomim tovim of Tishrei. The kapitel begins with the famous and stirring words of Dovid ha’Melech. Tehillim 27:1 *The L-rd is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The L-rd is the stronghold of my life; from whom shall I be frightened?*

Further in the chapter, the pasuk says what seems to be a perplexing statement: *For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but Hashem gathers me in* (v.10). Do a father and mother ever abandon a child? And yet, King David reminds us that with closeness to G-d, one is never forsaken, nor abandoned. Even if, in this world, man feels utterly alone, deserted even by those closest to him, Hashem is always with him.

When man is beset by affliction and travail, when suffering overtakes man, this is often when he feels the most abandoned and the most lonely. And it is specifically then, in his pain and sorrow, that man finds G-d.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, zt’l, the Rav, powerfully teaches, “The shock of suffering opens up man to another dimension: loneliness... The trauma caused by the surprise of being singled out... The pointing out of one of the crowd is a traumatic experience.

“The same is true of the man of sorrow. When the blow strikes, the first question which pops up upon the lips of the sufferer is: Why me? Why should I be different from others? Why was I selected to explore the valley of sorrow? A feeling of envy fills out the heart of the afflicted. He envies everybody, pauper and prince, young and old. They were spared, while I was picked out.

“... Gradually this feeling of loneliness pervades one’s whole being with ever increasing predominance; the whole self becomes immersed in solitude and the awareness of being taken away from the community. The man who is bound to others by countless invisible threads is torn loose from his social bearings. He makes his exit from the community and retreats into himself because he was singled out... The elected retreats even from his closest friends and beloved ones, not excluding wife and children.

“The night before my operation, when my family said goodbye to me, I understood the words of the psalmist, כִּי-אָבִי וְאִמִּי עָזְבוּנִי הוֹ אֲסַפְּנִי (Ps.27:10). I had never understood this verse. Did ever a parent abandon his child? Of course not! Yet in certain situations, one is cut off even from his parents or his beloved wife and children. Community life, togetherness, is always imbued with the spirit of co-operation, of mutual help and protection. Suddenly one realizes that there is no help which his loved ones are able to

extend to him. They are onlookers who watch a drama unfolding itself with unalterable speed. They are not involved in it. This realization brings to an abrupt end the feeling of togetherness. *I stand before G-d; no one else is beside me.* A lonely being meeting the loneliest. Being in utter seclusion is a traumatic but also a great experience. These two experiences, that of non-being and that of loneliness, must not be forgotten” (Out of the Whirlwind, p.132-134).

On Rosh Hashanah, each individual – every single lonely solitary being who inhabits the face of the earth – stands before G-d. Alone. Before G-d. At that moment of judgement, when all of humanity passes before Him like sheep before a shepherd, all mortal support and assistance falls away. Nothing and no one stands with man when he is summoned before G-d on this awesome day. It is as if, on the Yom Ha’Din, even one’s mother and father have abandoned him, and man casts his lot with G-d alone.

While this is a time of pachad, awe and fear, it is also an exalted and elevated time. “*Being in utter seclusion is a traumatic but also a great experience.*” While we fear the judgement when the Book of the Living and the Book of the Dead are open before Him, we also trust in His all-encompassing Mercy and Eternal Kindness.

“*Elokim ascends in the teruah, Hashem in the sound of the shofar*” (Ps. 47:6, recited 7x immediately prior to tekias Shofar on R”H). As the shofar is blown, the Rav teaches, **Elokim** (G-d of Judgement) moves from the throne of Justice to that of the throne of Mercy (**Hashem**). It is here, in the Mercy of Judgement, standing alone before G-d, that man finds salvation and redemption.

Between Gan Eden and Eretz Yisrael



Rabbi Menachem Leibtag
Tanach Study Center | Yeshivat Har Etzion

“See, I set before you today CHAYIM (life) and TOV (prosperity), MAVET (death) and RA (adversity). For I command you today to LOVE G-d and walk in His ways and to keep His CHUKIM u’MISHPATIM that you may thrive and increase and that G-d will bless you in the Land that you are about to conquer... Should you turn your heart (not listen)... I declare today that you shall certainly perish and not endure on the Land... that you are to conquer.” (Devarim 30:15-18)

Clearly, Moshe refers once again to the two sections of the main speech. However, these verses may relate as well to a fundamental theme in Sefer Breishit, as suggested by several key phrases in this section.

Recall the usage of the terms ‘CHAYIM and TOV’ and ‘MAVET and RA’ in Bereishit 30:15. Let’s identify the precise definition of these expressions in the final two psukim: “I call Heavens and Earth to testify that I am presenting you the CHOICE of CHAYIM or MAVET – the “bracha” or “klalla” – and you should choose CHAYIM in order that you live... on this Land that I promised to your ancestors...”

In this beautiful finale, the Torah equates the concept of BRACHA & KLALLA, as detailed by the “tochacha”, with CHAYIM & MAVET: BRACHA = CHAYIM (life); KLALLA = MAVET (death).

Recall however, that the concepts of CHAYIM & MAVET as well as TOV & RA were first introduced in the story of Gan Eden: “And G-d brought forth from the ground every tree... and the ETZ HA’CHAYIM in the middle of the garden, and the: ETZ Ha’DAAT TOV V’RA and from the ETZ HA’DAAT TOV v’RA do not eat, for on the day you eat from it - MOT

TA’MUT – you will surely die!” (Breishit 2:8-9, 2:15-17)

This textual parallel is strengthened by yet another resemblance to the story of Creation. Note that the Heavens and Earth – SHAMAYIM v’ARETZ – are called upon as witnesses to this covenant.

This textual parallel suggests a conceptual relationship between life according to the Torah’s ideals in the Land of Israel and existence in Gan Eden. In fact, the spiritual environment of Gan Eden strongly resembles the spiritual environment that Sefer Devarim wishes to create in the Land of Israel.

Recall how the Gan Eden narrative described a special environment between man and G-d, with an emphasis on “s’char v’onesh” [reward and retribution]. G-d promises Man a prosperous physical existence [CHAYIM] should he OBEY, while threatening death [MAVET] should Man DISOBEY. In a very similar manner, the “tochacha” describes a parallel reality in the land of Israel: Should Bnei Yisrael keep the mitzvot, G-d will reward them with prosperity; if they sin, G-d will punish them severely.

Furthermore, EXILE emerges in both settings as the most severe punishment. Adam is banished from the Garden as a consequence of his sin. Similarly, the “tochacha” threatens that should Am Yisrael continue to sin they will be driven from the land by their enemies and remain in Exile until they perform proper Teshuva.

This parallel takes on additional meaning when we consider the location of these two sources: at the BEGINNING of Chumash and towards the very END of Chumash.

One could suggest that in this manner Chumash underscores the basic nature of man’s relationship with G-d. First, we are told of G-d’s creation of Man and his placement in Gan Eden – the ideal spiritual environment. As punishment for his sin, G-d expels man from Gan Eden, appointing the “keruvim” to guard against any attempt to return.

Nonetheless, the presence of the “keruvim” who guard the ‘way to the Tree of Life’ does not necessarily indicate the permanent closure of this path. To the contrary, it becomes man’s duty to STRIVE to return. The “keruvim” do not restrict entry; rather they protect the Garden from the intrusion of those undeserving of return. But once man proves himself worthy, the DERECH ETZ HA’CHAYIM – the PATH to the Tree of Life – no matter how formidable it may at first appear, suddenly opens and invites man inside.

Correspondingly, Sefer Devarim describes Eretz Yisrael as both a physical and spiritual environment where Am Yisrael can rebuild this spiritual connection with G-d.

But perhaps the most meaningful parallel between Gan Eden and Eretz Yisrael arises in the CHUKIM & MISHPATIM section. Parshiyot Re’ay, Shoftim, and Ki-tavo present numerous mitzvot relating to HA’MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM, the Bet Ha’Mikdash, which will be built on the site chosen by G-d. Sefer Devarim demands that every Jew frequent that site regularly, be it for “aliyah le’regel” on the holidays, to offer korbanot or bikurim, to eat “ma’aser sheni,” to appear in court, etc.

Situated at the focal point of that site is the KODESH KEDOSHIM, the permanent location of the ARON, covered by the KAPORET and protected by

Continued on page 18

The First Step to Teshuva



Rabbi Eli Mansour

Edmond J Safra Synagogue, Brooklyn

I know a number of individuals who, unfortunately, struggled with alcohol addiction, and were helped by joining Alcoholics Anonymous, where addicts come together to receive help and give each other encouragement. Alcoholics Anonymous follows what is known as the “12-step program,” whereby recovery occurs gradually, over a series of 12 incremental stages.

The first step is when the addict stands up in front of the group and announces, “My name is So-and-So, and I’m an alcoholic.”

This might sound simple and unnecessary, but the truth is that this is the most difficult, and most important, of the twelve steps.

Some people who join these groups stand up and say things like, “My wife made me come.” Or, “I only have a few drinks here and there, it’s not a big deal.” It is only those who are truly committed to recovery who can stand up in front of the room and say the words, “I am an alcoholic.”

But this is the first necessary step to change – to take responsibility, to accept guilt, to acknowledge that one has acted improperly and wishes to improve. Without this first step, change will not happen.

When G-d confronted Adam about eating from the forbidden tree, he said, “The woman whom you placed beside me – she gave me from the fruit and I ate it” (Bereshit 3:12). He did not accept responsibility. He blamed his wife, and he blamed Hashem who gave him his wife.

When G-d confronted Kayin after he murdered his brother, Kayin said, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Bereshit 4:9). The Midrash explains that Kayin turned to G-d and said, “You’re His keeper – You should have watched over him and protected him.” Kayin refused to accept responsibility. He blamed G-d for not protecting Hebel.

Each weekday throughout the year, and during the special *Selichot* prayers which we recite in Elul, we declare *Vidui* – confession. In this prayer, we pronounce, “*Abal Anahnu Hatanu*,” which is commonly translated as, “but we have sinned.”

It is true that the word “*Abal*” is normally used to mean “but.” However, in this context, it seems that a more precise translation would be “indeed.” We say to G-d, “Indeed, we have sinned.”

This phrase brings to mind the confession made by Yosef’s brothers. They had felt confident that they had done the right

thing by selling him as a slave, as they had determined that he posed a grave threat to the family and needed to be sent away. But when they came to Egypt to purchase grain, and they found themselves beset by crisis, they realized that they were being punished for what they had done to Yosef. And they announced, “*Abal Ashemim Anahnu*” – “Indeed, we are guilty” (Bereshit 42:21). Targum Onkelos translates the word “*Abal*” in this verse to mean “*Be’kushta*” – “in truth,” or “the truth is.”

This translation gives us insight into the essence of *Vidui*. It is about acknowledging the truth. It is a declaration that we are no longer making excuses for our wrongdoing. We are no longer blaming other people or external factors for our mistakes. We are accepting the truth, as painful as it is – that we have acted wrongly.

This is a very difficult first step, but this is what we need to do if we hope to change. Elul is the time to acknowledge the painful truth, to stop making excuses for our behavior, to accept responsibility, and to believe in ourselves that we are capable of being better – realizing that G-d gave us this month because He believes that we are capable of being better.

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KERUVIM, both on the KAPORET and on the PAROCHET!

Given that the concept of KERUVIM arises nowhere else in Chumash outside of these two contexts – the Mishkan/Bet Hamikdash and Gan Eden – a thematic connection between the two is implied. Just as the KERUVIM of Gan Eden protect the path to the ETZ HA’CHAYIM, so do the KERUVIM of the Mikdash guard the path to true CHAYIM: i.e. they protect the ARON

which contains the LUCHOT HA’EIDUT – the symbol of the TORAH and our covenant with G-d at Har Sinai.

By placing the LUCHOT – a powerful symbol of MATAN TORAH – at the focal point of our lives in Eretz Yisrael, Sefer Devarim urges us to strive to return to the environment of Gan Eden by observing the laws of the TORAH.

Thus, Chumash ‘ends’ with a theme which is quite parallel to the theme of its

opening narrative. G-d’s original intention may have been for man to enjoy a close relationship with Him in Gan Eden. Even though that goal seems to have ‘failed’ in Sefer Bereishit, Sefer Devarim concludes with the possibility that the Nation of Israel can indeed return to such an existence, in the Land of Israel.

Connecting the Great Shofar with the Small Shofar



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger
Congregation Aish Kodesh, Woodmere

In *Nitzavim* (*Devarim* 29:11), the *pasuk* says that Moshe, on the last day of his life, brought the entire Jewish people together “that you may enter into the covenant and oath...” Why was this necessary? In last week’s *parsha*, *Ki Savo*, Moshe had already gathered everyone together to induct them into a covenant (*ibid.* 28:69): “These are the words of the covenant...” What is the purpose of these two covenants?

Separately, how are these two covenants related to Rosh Hashanah? *Parshas Nitzavim* is always read before Rosh Hashanah. The Gemara (*Megillah* 31b) explains why the blessings and curses of *parshas Ki Savo* are read before Rosh Hashanah – to ensure that one year’s curses are finished before beginning a new year. But it does not explain why *parshas Nitzavim*, which comes after *Ki Savo*, is also read before Rosh Hashanah. Rabbeinu Nissim Gaon, *zt”l*, and others therefore ask why Chazal instituted that *Nitzavim* is read before Rosh Hashanah. How does it help us prepare for Rosh Hashanah.

Rav Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik explains that there are two levels to the holiness of the Jewish people: the sanctity of the individual and the sanctity of the nation. *Parshas Ki Savo*, with all of its particular blessings and curses, contains the covenant between Hashem and the individual Jew. But *Nitzavim* contains Hashem’s covenant with the Jewish people as a nation – “in order to establish you today to Him as a nation...” (*Devarim* 29:12).

Rashi explains Moshe’s words of consolation following the curses of last week’s *parsha*: “Because Hashem has spoken to you and sworn to your fathers not to exchange their children for another nation, He therefore binds you with these oaths...” To strengthen this irreplaceable

connection with the Jewish people, Moshe gathered everyone together, even the babies. The Ramban (*on ibid.* 10) explains this: “And he mentions even the babies... to bring them into the covenant because the covenant was even being entered into with the future generations...” Because the covenant of *parshas Nitzavim* was with the entire nation, not simply all of the individual Jews of the time, it was possible to bind even generations which had not yet been born.

We can now understand the nature of Moshe’s comfort of the Jewish people based on Rashi’s explanation (*on ibid.* 12): “When the Jewish people heard the [ninety-eight] curses [in *parshas Ki Savo*]... their faces turned white and they said, ‘Who can possibly endure these?’ Moshe [therefore] began to appease them.” But how did he comfort them? He did not remove those serious and difficult curses. But based on what we have said, we now understand that he was comforting them as a people, as a nation. He was telling them that with all of the individual suffering that Jews might endure, Hashem’s covenant with the Jewish people as a nation would be eternal. He said, according to Rashi (*ibid.*), “You have angered the Omnipresent many times, but He did not destroy you, and indeed, you still stand before Him... Just as the day exists [even though] it becomes dark, it shines again. So too, G-d has made light for you and He will make light for you again in the future.”

Based on this, we can also understand the beginning of *parshas Vayelech* (*Devarim* 31:1): “And Moshe went and spoke all of these words to the entire Jewish people.” All of the commentaries ask: Where did Moshe go? What was the purpose of going to the Jewish people on that occasion? According to the *Seforno*, “He was inspired

to comfort the Jewish people over his [impending] death.” How did he comfort them? He was telling them: In a short time, I will die. Everything I prayed for was to enter Eretz Yisroel. But Hashem did not answer my prayers. I am the head of the nation, its leader – ostensibly, I might be considered the greatest Jew. But even I make mistakes, suffer setbacks, and endure suffering. Even I am punished for my sins. But I know that “the Eternity of the Jewish people will not die” (*Shmuel* I 15:29). An individual Jew may have his failings, but the Jewish people as a nation will make it to the end. They are eternal.

That is why these *parshios* are read before Rosh Hashanah. When we are filled with a fear of “Who will live and who will die” and everyone is consumed with his own circumstances and personal suffering, Hashem comforts us by causing us to hear *parshas Nitzavim*, in which we are reminded that Hashem made an eternal covenant with us as a nation. We no longer look to our own personal salvation as our sole source of hope. Rather, we look to and live for our national vision, our people’s wondrous future. The covenant of *parshas Nitzavim* between the Master of the World and His beloved, between Hashem and the Congregation of Israel, will never be abrogated.

In life, there is the “great *shofar*” mentioned in *Shemonah Esreh*, “Sound the great *shofar* of our liberation,” and there is the “small *shofar*.” Indeed, if there is a great *shofar*, it implies that there must also be a small *shofar*. Rav Kook explains (*Igros Haraya* II p. 326), “[During] the [*shofar*] blasts... one must contemplate the fact that the primary strength of the holiness of the Jewish people lies in the eternal world. The root of their holiness is there... This is the simple [*shofar* blast – *tekiyah*] before

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“Get Out of the Box”



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Vayelech relates the dramatic events that transpired during Moses' last day on earth. Among the many things he did on that fateful day was committing the entire Pentateuch to writing. The Torah scrolls we use today are copies of copies of copies of the original Torah scroll written by Moses on the day of his passing.

After completing the writing of the full Torah, Moses commanded the Levites, “Take this Torah scroll and place it at the side of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your G-d, and it shall be there as a witness for you.” The Tabernacle in the desert and later the Temple in Jerusalem housed a Holy Ark containing Two Tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments and the newly completed Torah scroll needed to be placed at the side of this Ark. The exact location of the Torah scroll on the side of the Ark inspired a debate between the Talmudic Sages. Rabbi Meir held that the Torah scroll needed to be placed inside the Ark, at the side of the Two Tablets. Rabbi Judah was of the opinion that a shelf protruded from the outside of the Ark and the Torah scroll was placed on that shelf.

The logic behind their argument lay in the proper interpretation of Moses' above-quoted words, “Take this Torah scroll, and place it at the side of the Ark.” According to Rabbi Judah, “at the side of the Ark” is to be understood literally—that the Torah scroll ought to be placed not inside but outside the Ark. Rabbi Meir, on the other hand, believes that the words “at the side of the Ark” are merely coming to tell us that the Torah scroll should be placed not between the two Tablets, but rather at the side of the Tablets, next to the interior wall of the Ark.

Three questions come to mind.

Firstly, why did Rabbi Meir feel compelled to impose an apparently twisted interpretation on the words “at the side of the Ark?” Why did Rabbi Meir not embrace Rabbi Judah's simple and straightforward explanation that when Moses instructed the Torah scroll to be placed “at the side of the Ark” he meant it literally, outside the Ark?

Second, why was there a need altogether to have the Torah scroll situated in such close proximity to the Ark?

Finally, we discussed numerous times that the Torah and all of its commandments and episodes were transcribed to serve as a Divine Blueprint for living, as a road map for life's challenging journeys. How can a 21st-century human being glean wisdom and inspiration from an ancient commandment to place a Torah scroll at the side of an Ark, at a time when we have no Ark and no Tablets? What type of relevance can Moses' instruction to the Levites carry for our lives today?

Our Sages have said that the Ten Commandments presented at Sinai and inscribed on the Two Tablets of the Covenant embodied the quintessence of the entire Torah, all Five Books. All perspectives, themes, ideas, laws, ethics, and stories of Torah are encapsulated in the brief 620 letters of the Ten Commandments. The Five Books of Moses, then, serve essentially as a commentary to the Ten Commandments, elaborating and explaining the background, meaning, and significance of these ten pillars of the Jewish faith.

The Tablets constitute the source, the epicenter, the nucleus of Judaism; the Five Books are the elaboration, the explanation, the outgrowth.

The debate between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Judah on the kinship between the Torah

scroll and the Tablets is not merely a technical argument concerning the proximity of two physical entities; but rather a profound disagreement on the fundamental methodologies of the development and communication of Judaism.

How close do we need to uphold the connection between the core of Torah and its expansion? Are we capable of “leaving the box” containing the Tablets without losing the “real thing?”

This is by no means an abstract dilemma. How does one communicate ancient truths to a young generation molded in a secular weltanschauung? How does one present a Torah which is over 3,000 years old to a modern 21st-century iPhone-addict? How do we pass on the gift of “In the beginning, G-d created heaven and earth” to Stanford and Yale graduates for whom Charles Darwin holds more sway than Moses?

Are we to present Judaism in its original form and composition, without employing modern-day terminology, techniques, and structures of thought? Or must we take Judaism “out of the box” and re-package it in contemporary language?

The argument rages to this very day. Some teachers and presenters of Judaism are accused of lacking the ability to communicate to a “new generation” of Jews, while other teachers are accused of “liberalizing” Judaism, of diluting its pristine ideas in order to accommodate the modern Jew or non-Jew.

The Talmud says something profoundly moving about Rabbi Meir: “It is known to the creator of the world that Rabbi Meir surpassed his entire generation and he had no equal. Why then did they not establish the law according to his opinion? Because the Sages could not comprehend the depth of his wisdom.” Rabbi Meir was

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Selichos: Whistle While You Work



Rabbi Judah Mischel

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The Holy Ba'al Shem Tov once praised a man who would smile, sing joyously and clap while reciting the serious *Viduy* prayer. The local townsfolk were fed up with this man's bizarre behavior, and asked the Ba'al Shem Tov to convince him to stop. When the tzadik approached the man and inquired into the reason for his strange custom, the simple Jew explained:

"I am a servant of the King, and I have been charged with a *tafkid*, a job. On Yom Kippur, my orders are to clean the filth from the gutters of the royal palace and scrape away the layers of dirt from the King's courtyard. While usually such work is unpleasant, working in the royal palace is the greatest privilege. How fortunate I am to be in the service of the King! I'm so excited to do His Will, whatever He wants of me. What a blessing it is just to serve the King!"

After meeting this special Jew, the Ba'al Shem Tov related that the man's *kavanos*, intentions, were indeed lofty and praiseworthy.



In the context of preparing for Yom Kippur and entering the *avodah* of *teshuvah*, Rambam frames our act of *vidui* as "the height of forgiveness" (*Hilchos Teshuvah*, 2:7). We are charged with the joyous *avodah* of *teshuvah*, and the privilege to be cleansed before Hashem. However, it may not always seem joyous. "Cleaning the gutters", and getting down into the nitty-gritty of the details of our wrongdoings in order to confess them, verbalizing our mistakes line by line (or even singing them) may seem strange and uncomfortable. It may be unpleasant to suggest that we may have committed the full spectrum of shortcomings in our

Divine service and relationships with those whom we love: "We have robbed... we have falsely accused...we have misled others..."

Often we carry the heavy burden of our mistakes and can feel weighed down by the pain of guilt, remorse and regret for our wrongdoings and failures. We might at times feel oppressed by the possibility that we have not been forgiven, that *vidui* didn't produce the "heights of forgiveness" for us. It may even appear as if the negative terminology of *vidui* presents a challenge or an obstacle to *teshuvah*.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook, *zy'a*, addresses this kind of collateral damage that can result, especially when one who has developed spiritual sensitivity, *yiras Shamayim* and a fear of wrongdoing, recognizes that he or she may have done something to disappoint their Creator. Knowing that we are infinitely indebted to Hashem, and constantly responsible before Him, makes the awareness of a shortcoming terribly painful. As HaRav Kook writes, in this case we shouldn't just passively wait for Hashem to remove the pain and impose upon us a sense of being forgiven:

האדם הכואב תמיד על עוונותיו ועוונות העולם, צריך הוא תמיד למחול ולסלוח לעצמו ולעולם כולו, ובוזה הוא ממשיך סליחה ואור חסד על ההויה כולה, ומשמח את המקום ומשמח את הבריות. ובתחילה צריך למחול לעצמו, ואחר כך הוא ממשיך מחילה כללית על הכל, וכל הקרוב קרוב קודם, על ענפי שרשיו, מצד הנשמה, ועל משפחתו, אוהביו, דורו, אומתו, עולמו, וכל העולמים. ובוזה הוא יסוד עולם בדורגא עילאה...ומתגלה כל הטוב הגנוז בכל...

One who grieves constantly for his sins and the sins of the world *must constantly forgive and absolve himself and the whole world*. In doing so, he draws forgiveness and a light of loving-kindness onto all of

being, and brings joy to God and to His creatures.

He must first forgive himself, and afterward cast a broad forgiveness over all, the nearest to him first, on the branches of the roots of the soul, and on his family, his loved ones, his generation, and his world, and all worlds...and thus is revealed all the good that is hidden away in everything... (Shemonah Kevatzim, II:150)

Forgiving ourselves and letting go of immobilizing guilt might sound like a difficult maneuver, as well. However if we meditate on the words of the *Vidui* text, we will see deeper meaning in the repeated phrase, *על חטא שחטאנו לפניך*, "(Forgive us) for the sin that we committed *lefanecha*, 'in front of You...'"

Lefanecha can also mean 'in Your Presence', as we sing on Friday Nights, "*Pnei Shabbos*, the Shabbos presence, let us receive..." If we recognize that we are always in the compassionate, royal Presence of Hashem even when we violate His will and command, something in us can shift. If in moments of shame and failure we are nonetheless *lefanecha*, it means we still have the *zechus* of working in the Royal Palace, in the service of the King. Then, despite our mistakes, we will appreciate *Selichos* not only as an *avoda* of seriousness, but as one of *simchah*, as well. We can see this *avodah* as a gift, an opportunity to be cleansed and uplifted by Hashem, and to improve our service to the King.

May we be blessed to taste the heights of purity and joy in complete *teshuvah*, and may we merit to fulfill the will of the *Ribono shel Olam* with love and with song!

Rectification of the Recalcitrant

Mrs. Shira Smiles

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Our Sages say that Elul is the acronym of, “*Ani ledodi vedodi li* – I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me.” The verse in Shir Hashirim continues, “...*haroeh bashoshanim* – the shepherd among the roses.” The month of Elul is a time of favor when we reinstate our love and closeness to Hashem. Just as there is an inborn affection between a father and child, there is an innate love between Hashem and the Jewish people. It is only our sins that have distanced us from Hashem. Why did Hashem give us the month of Elul before Rosh Hashana? The Sfas Emes says that every time we sin we bind ourselves to negativity. It is as if we attain a different master and there is no room to make Hashem our king. Therefore our goal in Elul should be to move away from the temptation and externalities that distance us from Hashem. Once we have released the knots of sin, we can then fully accept the kingship of heaven. In essence, proper preparation in Elul involves removing the negative and embracing the positive.

The Midrash Shocher Tov explains the verse in Tehilim, “*Lamnatzeach al shoshanim livnei Korach*,” with a parable. A king once came to visit his people. They desired to give him a crown of gold adorned with stones. The king’s entourage said to the townspeople, “The king does not want a golden crown. Are there roses?” The townspeople happily gave him roses. Similarly, Hashem says he does not want gifts of gold or incense. All he desires are

roses. The sons of Korach said, “We are the roses.”

We see from this Midrash that there is a correlation between roses and repentance. Vibrant, flowering roses are a symbol of love. The Sifsei Tzadik writes that roses represent softness. Gold and silver are rough and hard. Hashem does not want a stiff heart. He desires a crown of roses signifying love, gentleness, and beauty. Hashem says, when you have this quality of the rose, then I can be “The shepherd among the roses,” I can lead you to repentance.

What does it mean to be a rose? Rav Pinkus quotes a verse from the prophet Yeshaya, “Listen you distant ones and know you close ones my strengths.” Rashi says that the distant ones are those who believed in Hashem from their youth. The close ones are the *baalei teshuva* who came to Hashem later in life. Rashi is teaching us that the “close ones” are those who constantly work on their relationship with Hashem. The challenge of those who were born observant is to constantly be a *baal teshuva*. We need to fan the flames of passion and enthusiasm in our *avodat Hashem*.

The Saba of Kelm asked why we do not get excited over the great miracles of the Creation of the World, Divine Providence, and the Splitting of the Sea. He explained that we study these concepts when we are five years old and we get frozen in that five year old state of mind. We need to look at the world and observe the Torah with freshness and newness.

Rav Hutner explained that this fulfills the commandment of emulating the ways of the Almighty. Hashem renews the world every day. Therefore if we seek to emulate Him, we have to be a source of renewal in the little world that we control. This is the challenge of being a rose, maintaining that enthusiasm and vibrancy in our *avodat Hashem*.

According to the Michtav M’Eliyahu, we can break the habit of rote by studying and understanding the meaning behind *mitzvot*. If you learn the laws and concepts of a *mitzva*, fulfilling it becomes a different experience. A good plan for Elul is to pick a *mitzva* and study it in depth. This will reawaken passion and enthusiasm for the *mitzva*. If we approach a *mitzva* this way, then it becomes a rose.

The Chofetz Chaim said that bringing Hashem into our lives can be accomplished by learning to speak to Him throughout the day. Women were gifted with an affinity to the emotional aspect of serving Hashem. They naturally pray to Hashem for whatever they need and they sense His presence in their lives. If we can get used to talking to Hashem then even our *shemone esrai* will be different. We won’t be talking to a stranger but rather to a loving father who is an integral part of our life. If you develop this kind of relationship with Hashem, then your whole life becomes a vehicle for performing the will of Hashem.

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[the broken-sounding *shevarim* and *teruah* blasts]. But this power [of the nation’s holiness] must manifest itself in the character traits and in one’s actions [the *shevarim-teruah* of life]. From the root [the *tekiyah*], the personality traits and actions [the *shevarim-teruah* blasts] are rejuvenated.” The great *shofar* is our national existence. And

the small *shofar* is each Jew’s individual existence. Rav Kook is teaching us that the former must illuminate the latter. We must have both in order to be whole.

The time has come to join together the covenants of *Ki Savo* with *Nitzavim*, the welfare of the individual with the welfare of the nation, the great *shofar* with the small

shofar, and the sanctity of the part with the sanctity of the whole. May we merit to make this connection and thereby see the actualization here on earth of that which we say in *Shemonah Esreh* during Minchah on Shabbos, “You are one, and Your name is one, and who is like Your nation Israel, one nation in the land.”

And G-d Returned



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

The world was created on the 25th of Elul, and it seems to me that there is not a mother who has not been asked by a clever boy or girl, “And what was before that?” The answer (in Hebrew, “*teshuva*”) is, well, the “*teshuva*”. “Before the mountains came into being, before You brought forth the earth and the world, You decreed, “you mortals!” Before the creation of the heavens and the earth, the Almighty created the *teshuva*. And what was before that? Obviously... the mistake.

Even before the creation of man and the world, G-d created the possibility of error: people will make mistakes, so He created the possibility of correction – the *teshuva*.

Why think about mistakes at the beginning of a relationship? I used to feel this way when I was a lawyer, and happy couples would sign a financial agreement before they even got married, just in case... Why was the possibility of making a mistake created?

Rabbi Nachman wrote in one of his bolder teachings, “And we see that His mercy is blessed in what He decreed for us on Rosh

Hashanah, the Day of Judgment on the first day of the month, for it is a great kindness. For how could we turn away our faces to ask for atonement from Him who is blessed? Therefore, He has done us a favor and placed Rosh Hashanah on the first day of the month, in which it is as if He Himself is blessed and asks for atonement, in the sense of “Bring atonement for Me because I made the moon small,” which is said on Rosh Chodesh, and therefore we have no shame in asking for atonement on the Day of Judgment, since He Himself is blessed and then asks for atonement...” (Likoti Moharan Tanyina)

Wow.

When G-d tells His daughter to go and save herself, He is right. But when a parent is most right, he can also be most wrong, because the relationship with his child can loosen. In a relationship, G-d says, in the family, at work and in general with the people of Israel, don't always be 100% right, because when one side is only right and the other is only wrong, you will never meet.

The expression chosen by the Sages to embody this idea is the wonderful verse in our *parashah*: “It is not in the heavens!” Rabbi Eliezer is obviously right in the dispute over the furnace of Aknai, and heaven and earth will prove it. The judgment of the other sages was obviously a mistake. But they know that only the possibility of making a mistake establishes a *teshuva*, a *yeshiva* of sages who will continue to wrestle with problems and rule, here in Israel.

Apparently, we were all wrong this year too, all parties, because we were right. And in the place where people are right, carob trees will never grow. They will be pushed out of their place, G-d forbid. (Inspired by Yehuda Amichai, from the place where we are right.)

You have to know how to make a mistake in order to return. To return and make sure that the world is recreated this year. In the beginning was heaven, but it is not in the heavens. It is in our mouths and hearts to do it.

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misunderstood by his own colleagues; his ideas were too advanced for his times.

“Meir” in Hebrew means “the Illuminator.” The light that emanated from Rabbi Meir's mind and heart were too profound for his colleagues and students. Why? Because Rabbi Meir was of the opinion that all interpretation and development of Torah-thought must remain intimately bound with its source. The commentary and exposition may never be removed from the space of their progenitor. The Torah must be placed right near the Tablets. To dilute the light in order to

accommodate the vessels will do an injustice to the integrity of the message.

According to Rabbi Judah, however, the word of G-d needs to leave the perimeters of the sacred Ark, and be brought outward.

Judah, Yehudah in Hebrew, means surrender or submission. One has to surrender his or her own elevated state of consciousness in order to reach out and present the Torah to the student who would not be able to absorb the intense light dwelling “inside the box.” Judaism, Rabbi Judah

argued, needed to be presented in a manner that would make it accessible, relevant, and pertinent to people trained in a different mindset and even those educated in the schools of Athens.

For according to Rabbi Judah this is not a cop-out, but rather a great noble act of self-surrender (Yehudah). It is easier to just repeat the old phrases and sayings, to remain secure in the ancient pathways, but you need to transcend your comfort zone in order to bring the light and truth of Torah to those outside.

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SWEDEN

The Jewish Community of Stockholm
Kehilat Adat Yeshurun
Kehiliat Adat Yisrael

SWITZERLAND

BERN

Jüdische Gemeinde Bern

ZURICH

HaKehila HaYehudit Zurich
HaKehila HaYehudit Lausanne
Mizrachi
Wollishofen

TANZANIA

ARUSHA

Bayit Kneset Shalem Al Shabazi

UNITED KINGDOM

Mizrachi UK

UNITED STATES

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Kol Hatorah Kulah
National Council of Young Israel
RZA-Mizrachi USA

CALIFORNIA

Beth Jacob Congregation
Harkham Hillel Hebrew Academy
West Coast Torah Center
Young Israel of North Beverly Hills
YULA High School
Young Israel of Century City

COLORADO

DAT Minyan
East Denver Orthodox Synagogue
The Denver Kehillah

CONNECTICUT

Beth David Synagogue
Congregation Agudath Sholom
Young Israel of West Hartford

FLORIDA

Beth Israel Congregation
Hebrew Academy RASG
PlayHard PrayHard
Congregation Torah Ohr
Sha'arei Bina Torah Academy for Girls
Young Israel of Hollywood-Ft. Lauderdale

GEORGIA

Congregation Beth Jacob
Congregation Ohr HaTorah

HAWAII

Kehilat Olam Ejad Ganim

ILLINOIS

Mizrachi-Religious Zionists of Chicago

MARYLAND

Kemp Mill Synagogue
Pikesville Jewish Congregation

Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion Congregation

MASSACHUSETTS

Congregation Beth El Atereth Israel
Congregation Kadimah-Toras Moshe
Congregation Shaarei Tefillah
Young Israel of Brookline

MICHIGAN

Young Israel of Oak Park
Young Israel of Southfield
Congregation Kadimah-Toras Moshe

MINNESOTA

Congregation Darchei Noam

MISSOURI

Yeshivat Kadimah High School Nusach
Hari B'nai Zion Congregation
Young Israel of St. Louis

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Hillel at Dartmouth

NEW JERSEY

Ahavas Achim
Volunteer Chaplain Middlesex County
Congregation AABJ&D
Congregation Adath Israel of the JEC
National Council of Young Israel
Congregation Ahavat Achim
Congregation Ahavath Torah
Congregation Brothers of Israel
Congregation Darchei Noam of Fair Lawn
Congregation Etz Chaim of Livingston
Congregation Israel of Springfield
Congregation Ohr Torah
Congregation Sons of Israel of Cherry Hill
Kehilat Keshet
Ma Tov Day Camp
Ohav Emeth
Pal Foundation
Shomrei Torah of Fair Lawn
Synagogue of the Suburban Torah Center
Yavneh Academy
National Council of Young Israel
Young Israel of Teaneck

NEW YORK

Beis Community
Congregation Anshei Shalom
Congregation B'nai Tzedek
Congregation Bais Tefilah of Woodmere
Congregation Beth Sholom
Ramaz
Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls
MTA – Yeshiva University High School for Boys
Young Israel of Merrick
Congregation Beth Torah
Congregation Etz Chaim of Kew Gardens Hills
Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun
Congregation Ohav Zedek
Great Neck Synagogue
Iranian Jewish Center/Beth Hadassah Synagogue
Irving Place Minyan

Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach

Kehilath Jershurun
Kingsway Jewish Center
Lincoln Square Synagogue
Merkaz Yisrael of Marine Park
North Shore Hebrew Academy
Young Israel of Merrick
NYC Department of Correction
OU-JLIC at Binghamton University
OU-JLIC at Cornell University
Queens Jewish Center
Stars of Israel Academy
The Jewish Center
The Riverdale Minyan
Vaad of Chevra Kadisha
West Side Institutional Synagogue
Yeshiva University High School for Girls
Young Israel of Hillcrest
Young Israel of Jamaica Estates
Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst
Young Israel of New Rochelle
Young Israel of North Woodmere
Young Israel of Oceanside
Young Israel of Scarsdale
Young Israel of Woodmere

OHIO

Beachwood Kehilla
Congregation Sha'arei Torah
Congregation Torat Emet
Green Road Synagogue
Fuchs Mizrachi School
Heights Jewish Center

PENNSYLVANIA

Shaare Torah Congregation

SOUTH CAROLINA

Brith Sholom Beth Israel
Congregation Dor Tikvah

TENNESSEE

Baron Hirsch Congregation

TEXAS

Mayerland Minyan Synagogue
Robert M. Beren Academy
United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston

VIRGINIA

Keneseth Beth Israel

WASHINGTON

Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath
Northwest Yeshiva High School
Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation

URUGUAY

Comunidad Yavne Uruguay

VENEZUELA

CARACAS
Ashkenazi Kehilla
Mizrachi Venezuela



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