

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 23 Elul 5780. We do not bensch Rosh Chodesh Tishrei which will be next Shabbat because it is Rosh HaShanah. We begin saying Selichot tonight. Rosh HaShanah is next Shabbat and Sunday.

TORAH DIALOGUE

(p. 878 Hz) (p. 1138 S) (p. 786 Hi) (p. 1086 AS)

NETZAVIM-VAYEILECH

נצבים-ויילך Deuteronomy 29:9

[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis (RED),
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1. “You are standing today... before Hashem, your God.” (29:9). Hayom refers to a special day. Some say it is the day that Moshe dies. Others interpret today as Rosh HaShanah, when we all stand before Hashem in judgement. On Rosh HaShanah all of us have a personal and private conference with the Almighty to decide our future. Our past and future come in to play, but nothing is as important as our present, for today we coronate the Almighty as the King of the World. It was Moshe’s day, but more importantly it was His day, Hashem’s day. The Shofar blasts reflect this double meaning. The Tekiah is the strong, steady blast of coronation. We place the crown upon the Lord, so to speak. The Terumah (and Shevarim) reflect our tears as we are required during the coronation to submit ourselves to His judgement. The first stage of business is to thank Hashem for the past year; but upon analysis the last six months have not been so good for us. We, who did survive the COVID pandemic, can hardly feel joy in our current state, but we can look forward to better days. Hayom is an important word for the Parshah and for the Jewish calendar. (RED)

2. In verse 29:28 “The hidden things are for Hashem our God, but the revealed things are for us and our children, to carry out all the words of the Torah,” there are dots in the Torah above the words “and for our children.” The Chofetz Chaim comments that Hashem was teaching Moshe (and us) a message: that in building our future, it is all about the child. Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (19th century Poland, Galicia) wrote that the Cherubim atop the Aron/Holy Ark in the Beit HaMikdash were gold, child-like figures. Rav Kluger emphasized that these children were gold: meaning, don’t hold back in the education of our children. Educating Jewish children today in America is a fortune. It taxes each family, and (half joking), is the most effective means of birth control in the Modern Orthodox world. [I applaud our Shul’s efforts in the JEF program, raising money to financially assist the Jewish schools that are educating our children. It is a bold statement to financially support our schools demonstrating that this is not only a parent issue; it is a community effort!] (RED)

3. “This Mitzvah... is not hidden from you... It is not in heaven” (30:11). But the Torah does not mention specifically which Mitzvah it is. The Ramban says that since the topic of Teshuvah is mentioned earlier, the Torah is referring to the Mitzvah of repenting. The Talmud though (Eruvim 55a) says that the Torah is talking about the Mitzvah of Learning Torah. Actually these two Mitzvot are really connected to each other. A critical aspect of returning to the ways of Torah is to learn

Torah. There is a well known Midrash (Talmud Niddah 29b) that states that a baby in utero is taught the entire Torah by an angel, and the angel touches the baby upon his upper lip before his birth that causes him to forget all that he has learned. Rabbi Hershel Schachter (in Nefesh HaRav, p. 72) quotes Rav Soloveitchik’s interpretation of this Midrash. The Midrash is telling us that each Jewish person is born with a natural love for the Torah. Therefore each Jew has an instinct for the desire for the Torah. Although the Rav’s interpretation is appealing, I personally do not see it in real life. I have seen too many self-hating, anti-Semitic Jews in my time to cloud the Rav’s image of the Jewish innate psyche. (RED)

4 & 5. Knowledge of Torah is extremely important in our circles. Rav. Chaim of Volozhin pointed out something very interesting. He wrote that his brother Rav Zemele knew the prayer Ashrei by heart, but his Rebbe, the Vilna Gaon, knew the prayer Ashrei by heart, forwards and backwards. The point that Rav Chaim was making was there is another level of Torah knowledge that few are blessed with. My Rebbe, Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, had the mind of a Torah giant, and his grasp of Torah was unparalleled. He would explain a Mitzvah on the simplest level and then build a pyramid upon this Mitzvah that would enlarge our vision. Truly remarkable. For example, our Sages grasped this idea and once (and rarely) did they engage us in this investigation.

The Mitzvah of Milah, circumcision, is one of the few Mitzvot of the Torah which has two Berachot attached to it. Before cutting the foreskin, the Mohel utters the Berachah “Al HaMilah,” describing the physical action of the surgical cut that is the Mitzvah. Immediately the father utters a second Berachah “to enter him (the baby) into the Covenant of Avraham our forefather.” This gives us a higher dimension to the simple Mitzvah of an act of surgery. The second Berachah elevates the Mitzvah and treats us to the desired definition of the medical procedure. (The Rav)

Dr. Louis Feldman, olav HaShalom, was a classics professor at Yeshiva University. (He died in 2017, at the age of 90.) He was the first Scholar in Residence that we ever had at our Shul almost 40 years ago. I was acquainted with him from my days at Y.U., but I had a certain fear in inviting him. He knew Josephus by heart, frontwards and backwards, in Greek. I saw the way he was demanding of his students (which were very few), and my fear was how he would relate to my congregants, who were not Greek scholars, to say the least. He was marvelous! He was patient with the audience. He related Josephus to the Talmud, for the Talmudic Rabbis gave Josephus a “free pass.” He was frum and related his knowledge in both Judaism and the classics in a way that gave us all a treat to hear him. Developing knowledge and wisdom is a wonderful gift to have.

[Winston Churchill once explained the difference between knowledge and wisdom in a clever way: knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit and not a vegetable. Wisdom is knowing not to put tomatoes in your fruit salad!] (RED)

6. Finally the time is approaching; Hashem said to Moshe “Behold your days are drawing near to die...” (31:4). In my career I have found that a sick patient has a pretty strong idea of what is ahead for him. Once I visited a cancer patient at home. He sent his wife to the kitchen for something and

quickly said to me, "I know what is happening to me ..." Another cancer patient said to me once when we were alone in her room at home, "I am comforted by knowing that I will soon be with my father." Another time I was summoned to the hospital by the family. I came, and the family gave me private time with their father. He said in a whisper, "I am not dying just yet. I have a property in Orlando that I have to sell." Two days later he checked himself out of the hospital, sold the property in Orlando and died two months later. The Torah tells us that Moshe was still fit and vibrant at 120 years of age. So it makes sense that Hashem HAD to tell Moshe that he was at death's door. Hashem gives Moshe time to write a Sefer Torah and gather the people for his final two addresses, and then he died.

7. Before giving his final two addresses (Ha'azinu and V'Zot HaBerachah) Moshe sounded like a doomsday prophet when he says: "For I know that after my death, you will surely act corruptly, and you will stray from the path... and evil will befall you at the end of days..." (31:29). Rashi is quick to state that the people obeyed Hashem all the days of Joshua. Rashi: "This shows that a teacher loves his student like himself, so that Moshe felt that he was still alive as long as Joshua lived." Moshe was the only prophet who was called "servant of Hashem" and Joshua was referred to as "Moshe's attendant." (See Joshua 1:1, the Haftorah for Simchat Torah). Similar statements were made regarding presidents of the United States. When Thomas Jefferson was president, he orchestrated his next two successors. He told James Madison to be his Secretary of State and James Monroe to be Governor of Virginia. Then Madison took over from Jefferson and made Monroe his Secretary of State and then his successor. Thomas Jefferson orchestrated 24 years of the American presidency. Quite an accomplishment. It gave America consistency in its leadership. (RED)

HAFTORAH

(p. 883 Hz) (p. 1145 S) (p. 919 Hi) (p. 1202 AS)

ISAIAH יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ

The prophet Isaiah compares the salvation of Israel to the earth that gives forth its plants, the seeds of which disintegrate in the soil and then sprout, renewed and better than they were originally; for the new is generally better than the old. Moreover, from one seed emanate many kernels. So is it with Israel. They have been in exile for thousands of years; they have been persecuted; and many have perished. Yet when the redemption arrives, they will multiply to many times their former number and increase in greatness and in glory. Isaiah then compares them to a garden in which various seeds are sown, each one maturing in another season. So will Israel experience many benefits, one following the other. These miracles will take place before all the nations. The nations will witness them and recognize that God's benefits to Israel are greater than any benefits in the world. When all this occurs, Jerusalem will rejoice with Hashem and so will all its people (Radak).

3. How old was Moshe when he died?
4. Before he died, Moshe wrote a Sefer Torah. To whom did he give it? (31:9)
5. What are the last two Mitzvot of the Torah? (31:10-13 and 31:19)
- II. From Rashi
6. Moshe gathered everyone, even the woodchoppers. Who were the woodchoppers? (29:10)
7. At what point did all Jews become co-responsible one to the other? (29:28)
8. What did the Torah mean when Moshe said that he could "no longer go out and come in"? (31:2) [The Torah later stated that Moshe was fit and vibrant. 34:7]
9. In what year of the Shemittah cycle was the Mitzvah of Hakhel? (31:10)
10. Why were the young children brought for the Mitzvah of Hakhel? (31:12)
- III. From the Rabbis
11. For Moshe's final oration, why did Moshe have all the small children present? (Ramban, Seforno 29:10)
12. How was the Covenant binding upon us who were not there? (Rabbeinu Bachya, Gur Aryeh 29:14)
13. Why should a non-Jew living in Israel gather for the event of Hakhel? (Ibn Ezra 31:10)
- IV. Haftorah. Isaiah
14. As long as there are Jews in Exile, what cannot exist in the world?
- V. Relationships
- a) Moshe – Itamar
- b) Aharon - Rechavia
- c) Adah – Naphtali
- d) Avraham - Midian
- e) Cham – Mitzrayim

ANSWERS FOR PARSHIYOT NITZAVIM-VAYEILECH 5780

1. The seventh of Adar, the day that Moshe died.
 2. Hashem will increase the Jewish population and begin the ingathering of the exiled back to Eretz Yisrael.
 3. 120 years old.
 4. He gave it to the Kohanim and to the elders of Israel.
 5. The Mitzvah of Hakhel (gathering all the Jewish people to Yerushalayim once in seven years) and the Mitzvah of Writing a Sefer Torah.
 6. Canaanites came to Moshe pretending to be members of a distant nation and wanted to convert. Moshe did not allow them, but allowed them to become woodchoppers and water drawers.
 7. When they crossed the Jordan and accepted the oath at Mts. Gerizim and Eival.
 8. He could not go out because Hashem had forbidden him to accompany the people across the Jordan River.
 9. The first year of the new cycle.
 10. To give a reward to those who brought them.
 11. Ramban: Hashem wanted them to witness this great event. Seforno: To tell the elders that they were responsible to see these children raised as Jews.
 12. Rabbeinu Bachya: All souls were there at Sinai, but their bodies were not born yet. Gur Aryeh: Just as no later inferior court can overrule a previous greater court, so the rulings of Moshe and his court are binding upon us.
 13. Perhaps he will convert to Judaism.
 14. No tranquility or peace in the world.
- Relationships
- a) Uncle Moshe
 - b) Great Uncle Aharon (Rechavia was a grandson of Moshe)
 - c) Aunt Adah
 - d) Father Avraham
 - e) Grandfather Cham

QUESTIONS FOR PARSHIYOT NITZAVIM-VAYEILECH 5780

by Rabbi Edward Davis

I. From the Text

1. "You are standing today..." (29:9). Which day was it?
2. What will happen to Bnei Yisrael when they will repent when in Exile? (30:35)