



Nitzavim/Vayelech – Breaking Through the Shell

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

In one of his final addresses to the Jewish people, Moshe says:

For this commandment which I command you this day, is not concealed from you, nor is it far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us and fetch it for us, to tell [it] to us, so that we can fulfill it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us and fetch it for us, to tell [it] to us, so that we can fulfill it?" Rather, [this] thing is very close to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can fulfill it (Devarim 30:11-14)."

The commentaries are bothered by one simple question: which commandment is Moshe referring to? Some explain that Moshe is actually referring to the Torah in its entirety. The Ramban (Nachmanidies, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270) explains that Moshe Rabbeinu is referring to the *mitzvah* (commandment) of *Teshuva* (repentance, return). Moshe is telling the people that the ability to return and reconnect with God is not beyond us. We do not require an intermediary, expert, or someone more spiritually skilled to help re-forge and reinvigorate the bond with our Father Above. *Ki Karov Elecha HaDavar Miod, B'ficha, U'bilivavcha, this thing is very close to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart."*

Rav Avraham Tzukerman zt'l (Rosh Yeshiva Kfar HaRoeh) explains, *"Ki mikora shel nishmas ha'adam hu mi'limala V'ha'adam sho'eyftamid lashuv l'mikoro, the source of man's soul is above (in the celestial sphere) and he yearns perpetually to return to his source."* The desire to return is innate. The desire to have a close connection and passionate relationship with God is woven into the very fabric of our spiritual DNA. Although the body was fashioned from the earth, the soul comes from above and yearns to reconnect.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook zt'l (1865-1935) offers a beautiful parable. When a chick is ready to hatch, it begins to slowly peck at the shell. When it makes the first hole, it then begins to peck harder, ultimately thrusting its head through the small opening. How does the chick know that there is a whole world waiting on the outside? How does the chick know that what is on the other side of the shell is better than its current circumstances? *Elah zohi techushato ha'tiviit, ha'locheshet lo sod zeh, rather, this is its internal intuition and nature which whispers this secret...."* Just as the chick instinctively knows what to do to get to a better place, the soul knows what to do to reconnect with God.

We often find ourselves encased by the shell of our reality. For some of us the shell is a result of decisions we made or did not make. For others, the shell is a result of circumstances beyond one's control. This life shell makes us feel removed and so distant from the Heavens above. Rosh Hashanah is the time to peck away at that which confines and limits us. Rosh Hashanah is a time to think beyond our shell and realize that there is a beautiful world with so much opportunity that awaits us. Rosh Hashanah is a time to realize that we can have a meaningful and passionate relationship with God. It is within reach. It is innate. It is possible. *It is very close to you.* Let us each find the strength to open our heart and allow our soul to go where it knows it needs to go.