

Candle Lighting

7:11

S”Z Kriat Shema

10:10

Sunset

7:28

Motzei
Shabbat

8:03



Parshat HaShavuah

נצבים

NITZAVIM

כ"ח אלול תשע"ה

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Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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YOU SAID I WOULD DO WHAT!?

RABBI DANNY KROLL

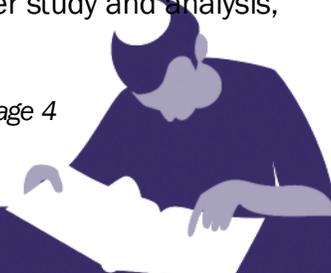
Prior to ceding control to his disciple Yehoshua, Moshe renewed the covenant sealed at Sinai with the next generation, the generation born in the desert, the generation that never experienced the suffering of Egyptian slavery. If this was all Moshe had done, it would not be surprising; the Jewish people were about to go through a series of transformative events -- fulfilling the promise

made to Avraham 500 years earlier, saying goodbye to the prophet leader who had taken them from slavery to freedom and given them the Torah, and becoming independent as they would no longer be the beneficiaries of the heavenly *mun*. Moshe simply needed to reinforce and renew the covenant with this new generation, but he actually went one step further. He told those assembled before him, "It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before the Lord our God, and with whoever is not here with us today" (29:13-14).

The Abarbanel, along with so many other Jewish thinkers and commentators, wonders, "Who gave the generation whose feet stood at Har Sinai the authority to obligate subsequent generations in the covenant with God!?" In other words, why should anyone other than the people who said *נעשה ונשמע* at the foot of Har Sinai be bound by the laws of the Torah and the consequences for violating these statutes?

This question is the underlying basis for the famous words of Chazal, cited in the gemara (Shavuot 39a), that all Jewish souls, even the ones belonging to those not-yet born, were present for the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai. If that is indeed the case, all Jewish people for all generations accepted the Torah and are bound by it. While this midrash is fascinating and worthy of further study and analysis, those seeking a more rational answer will not be satisfied.

Continued page 4





LEARNING TO ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY

Yael Attias ('16)

"For this commandment which I command you this day is not concealed from you, nor is it far away...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 Ramban comments that the commandment Hashem is talking about in these pesukim is teshuva – repentance. As the pasuk says, this is a mitzvah that is within our grasp and is easy to fulfill if we put effort into it.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asks: if this mitzvah is so easily attainable, why are only very few people successful in doing teshuva properly?

The reason almost everyone fails to do teshuva properly is because they fail to recognize and take responsibility for their actions. Most people are aware of their sins, but they fail to acknowledge their culpability and therefore cannot complete the process of repentance. This inability to take responsibility is first seen with Adam and Chava during creation. Instead of punishing Adam right away for eating from the forbidden tree, Hashem confronts Adam in the hopes that Adam will take responsibility for his actions and repent. However, Adam is quick to blame Eve, who does the same and holds the snake accountable. Only after they fail to recognize their sole responsibility for eating from the tree does Hashem punish them. Had they taken responsibility for their actions, the outcome would have been different. As Rabbi Gefen comments on this topic: "Indeed we all err at some point; it is whether we can stand up and admit the truth for our actions that is the true judge of our spiritual level."

On the opposite side of the scale is Yehuda, who, years later, rectified Adam's sin. Yehuda accepted his accountability before Tamar could be burned at the stake for her alleged act of adultery. Due to this defining moment in history, Yehuda merited the kingship as well as the ancestry of the mashiach.

There is a story in the Talmud about an immoral man named Elazar ben Durdaya, who suddenly came to realize his sinful ways. He first sat between a mountain and a hill and asked them to request mercy for him, but they refused. He then asked the heavens and the earth to do the same, but they also refused. Finally, he turned to the sun and the moon, but they refused to help him as well.

Rav Yissocher Frand suggests a rhetorical explanation of this gemara and explains that this man was trying to place responsibility on these different influences in his life. The mountain and hill represent his parents, whom he blamed for the troubled childhood that contributed to his sinful ways, but they refused to take the blame. The heavens and earth represent his environment, which he also blamed for his actions, but they too refused to take responsibility for his actions. Finally, he blamed the sun and moon, which stand for his natural inclinations, because he was unable to avoid sinning due to his nature. Once everyone refused to accept responsibility, this man finally acknowledged that the only entity responsible for his sins was himself. He then did complete teshuva, and the Talmud describes a heavenly voice that proclaimed, "Rebbi Elazar ben Durdaya has a place in the next world." The reason he is called "Rebbi" is because he is our teacher about how to do teshuva. From him we learn that the only way to do complete teshuva is to take full responsibility for our actions.

Rosh Hashana is coming soon, so it is important to learn from this story and take full responsibility for our actions, so that we may correctly fulfill the mitzvah of teshuva and be forgiven.





A LIFE OF PURPOSE

CHAYA COHEN ('16)

In this week's parsha, Moshe presents the ultimate choice to Bnei Israel: "See, I have given before you today the life and the good, and the death and the evil" (30:15). It seems like Moshe is offering the Jews a choice to either follow the mitzvot and merit life or to ignore them and bring death upon themselves. However, several pesukim later, Moshe states, "And you shall choose life" (30:19). Forcing one of the options on Bnei Yisrael does not seem like a real choice. Why doesn't Moshe allow us to choose? Rashi answers this question by saying that "and you shall choose life" is not a command, but friendly advice to choose correctly. Rav Saadya Gaon supports Rashi and says that "*u'vacharta*" does not translate to, "you shall choose" but to, "I advise you to choose." But still, is it not obvious that one should choose life over death? We know the Torah never wastes any words, so why would it need to tell us this seemingly obvious fact?

The answer to this question is found in the next pasuk, which states, "For He is your life and the length of your days" (30:20). This pasuk is trying to demonstrate to us that the only life that is really *chayim* is when one follows the word of Hashem. There are some people whose entire existence is dedicated to performing mundane actions to simply continue their existence. They are stuck in an endless cycle devoid of meaning. They believe that life is about pursuing pleasure and acquiring materialistic items. To contradict this misconception, the Torah has to tell us to choose *chayim*. Instead of wasting our lives on meaningless pursuits, we must aim for a life of Torah and mitzvot, which is a real purpose.

With Rosh Hashana quickly approaching, it is imperative to evaluate the spiritual quality of our lives. Our physical lives hang on the balance of our spiritual ones. Therefore, we have to ask ourselves the question: am I entirely devoting myself to physical, materialistic goals, or does my life have a deeper meaning? This self-analysis will hopefully inspire us to direct our lives to a more purposeful *chayim*.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND... THE HAPPINESS?

KYLE ALOOF ('17)

In this week's parsha, Moshe instructs the Jews in regards to following Hashem and repenting for their sins, "והיה כי יבאו עליך כל הדברים האלה הברכה והקללה אשר נתתי לפניך" – "It will be that when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse that I have presented before you..." (Devarim 30:1).

There seems to be a contradiction within this pasuk. The word "והיה" (it will be) generally indicates joy and delight. But if so, how does the positivity of the word "והיה" correspond with the negative and somewhat threatening phrase, "והקללה אשר נתתי לפניך" (and the curse that I have presented before you)?

The Ohr Hachaim references Gemara Berachot 54a to teach a lesson about how we should serve Hashem and the gratitude we should always have towards Him. The gemara says that just as one blesses Hashem when something good happens, he should also bless Hashem when something bad happens. Therefore, just as one accepts good news with happiness, he should also accept bad news with happiness.

Thus, the term, "והיה" which indicates happiness, is suitable in this pasuk when we take into consideration that we must accept all that Hashem gives us, including curses, with happiness. In other words, we can reconcile the two conflicting moods of the pasuk if we understand that "אשר נתתי לפניך" can actually be translated to mean, "I – Hashem – am the one who has presented it before you." Because it is from Hashem, we must receive it with happiness.

Rosh Hashana is approaching; we should all take this lesson to heart, and thank Hashem for both the good and bad events in this past year of our lives. May we also all resolve to accept what Hashem gives us in the coming year with happiness and gratitude.

Rabbi Kroll continued

In both his book, *A Letter in the Scroll*, and his commentary on the parsha (Covenant and Conversation 5772, 5775), Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks presents a novel approach to the age-old question. Rabbi Sacks writes, "Not every obligation that binds us is one to which we have freely given our assent. There are obligations that come with birth. The classic example is a crown prince. To be the heir to a throne involves a set of duties and a life of service to others. It is possible to neglect these duties. In extreme circumstances it is possible for even a king to abdicate. But no one chooses to be royal. That is a fate, a destiny, that comes with birth...It is a peculiar post-Enlightenment delusion to think that the only significant things about us are those we choose." We did not choose to be born, nor were we able to choose the time period in which we were born, yet they still greatly affect all that we do.

So too, we were born Jewish, bound to a covenant entered into by our ancestors; instead of asking the question, "why am I bound by this?", which cynically implies an inescapable fate, we should view the covenant as a privilege, that we were chosen and destined to be part of a covenant between a nation and God, which is alive and well over 3,000 years since it was sealed in the shadow of Har Sinai.

CHOOSE LIFE! TSIPPY KILSTEIN ('17)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Nitzavim, the Torah states, "And you shall choose life, so that you will live, you and your offspring" (Devarim:30:19).

The Torah stresses that choosing life not only benefits the person making the choice, but also benefits his children so that they will live. How does your decision to want life help your children? Don't they have to want to choose life as well?

A person can learn Torah and do mitzvot and yet still not have a positive effect on his children. If one does mitzvot because he believes in God and knows that he has to do them, but does so half-heartedly or with the attitude that mitzvot are a heavy burden, his children may choose not to follow his path of Torah and mitzvot. For example, if someone spends a large sum of money on an etrog, he might complain that being Jewish is so difficult. Naturally, his children will be reluctant to follow the Torah. They'll reason, "Our father is following Torah because he has to. But it seems too difficult; we aren't strong enough to do it."

One should follow Torah with joy and excitement to prove to his children that Torah brings so much meaning to life, so that they will want to experience the same enjoyment in life that their parents experienced. That's why the Torah tells us, "You shall choose life in a way that will inspire your children to choose it and live."

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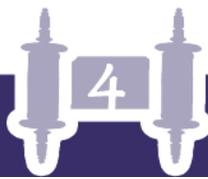
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