



Ashreinu | אשרינו

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IT'S ALL UP TO YOU!

RABBI AVI HOCHMAN

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GABI ENGLANDER ('18)

JONAH TRIPP ('18)

SARA MERKIN ('17)

ELI LITWIN ('18)

Timing is everything. Sometimes it's when that shot goes in right before the buzzer, sometimes it's when we figure out the answer to a question on a test right before time is up, and other times it's when you need

medical assistance and there is a doctor standing right next to you.

It is not a coincidence that our parsha falls out right before Rosh Hashana. The Torah tells us:

**כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוך היום לא
נפלאה היא ממך ולא רחוקה היא**

"Because this mitzvah which I command you today, it is not hidden from you and it is not distant." (Devarim 30:11)

What is this mitzvah that the Torah speaks of? The Ramban explains that this pasuk is discussing the mitzvah of teshuva, which is something that we can with certainty attain.

The Torah continues and says that the mitzvah of teshuva is not only attainable, but it's "בפִּי בלבבך" — "In your mouth and in your heart to do" (30:14). Aren't those two ideas essentially the same? Once the Torah conveys to us that teshuva isn't distant but is, in fact, very near, isn't it redundant to say that it is also "in your mouth and in your heart"?

Rav Meyer Twersky explains that it is the nature of one who sins to shift the blame upon others. "I cannot daven well because of the massive assignment I am working on," or, "they need my help so I do not have time to bentch," or, "my friends are not the type to perform those acts of chesed." We tend to shift the blame towards others instead of owning up to it ourselves. Just like Adam HaRishon said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (Bereishit 3:13-14).

Unfortunately, when we make mistakes, we claim that “our upbringing is responsible” or “society is to blame,” when in reality the only ones to blame are ourselves. Therefore, the Torah encourages us that teshuva is “in your mouth...to do.” The teshuva process begins “in your mouth,” by confessing and thereby accepting responsibility for your sins.

Anyone can have a bad day, but no one can *make* you have a bad day but yourself. The choices we make and our ability to learn and grow from them are a real testament to our acceptance of personal responsibility for our actions—an essential element of the teshuva process.

כתיבה וחתימה טובה!

MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

GABI ENGLANDER ('18)

IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, PARSHAT NITZAVIM, Hashem offers a rather peculiar choice. He tells the Jewish people that he has offered them both life and death, and they should “choose life so you should live” (Devarim 30:19).

What does this phrase really mean? For the most part, isn't it obvious that most mentally healthy individuals will choose to live rather than to die?

In reality, when Hashem offers the choice between life and death, it is not intended to be interpreted literally. Rather than a choice between physical life and death, the decision is between spiritually living or dying. We make thousands of decisions throughout the day, choosing to spiritually “live or die.” We have the opportunity to seize the day, grow as a person, and fill our lives with spirituality, purpose, and meaning, or we can choose to waste our time away, living an incomplete and unfulfilling life filled with meaningless actions.

Each time we choose to grow, to do good, to enrich our lives and the lives of others, we are choosing life, living up to our expectations and choosing

what God intended us to choose. On the contrary, each time we choose to sin, fall short of our potential, and avoid spirituality, we are choosing death, killing our souls one action at a time.

Hashem is putting the responsibility in our hands. He is giving us a tremendous and important choice in deciding what we are going to make of our spiritual lives. He does not force us to act or serve or even believe a certain way, allowing our decisions to be solely based on our desires.

This is especially important to realize as we near Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Hashem is giving us a choice, and it's ours to make what we want of it. We need to strive to make more positive decisions and choose spirituality, choose meaning, and choose life. Hopefully this will enrich and elongate our physical lives as well.

GOD KNOWS BEST

SARA MERKIN ('17)

IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, MOSHE WARNS THE PEOPLE AGAINST DOING IDOLATRY and turning away from God. Moshe's speech ends with him telling the people that “God has set before them life and death,” life as a blessing and death as a curse. He demands that the nation choose life so that the people and their offspring will live. This closing statement begs the questionf God promises us free will, then how can He command us to choose life?

Rashi comments on this pasuk saying that God's claim resembles that of a father helping his son choose a portion of his estate to inherit. The father does not want to impose upon his son's choice, but he also knows which portion is the best option. Therefore, the father directs his son to the best portion and tells him to choose that specific one. So too, God directs us to the best “portion,” which is life and blessings. God knows that it will be more beneficial for us to follow his mitzvot and receive blessings, so He pushes us in that direction.

This is one of the final lessons the Torah imparts to us before Rosh Hashanah. God gave us the month of Elul and the Aseret Yemei Teshuva to reflect upon our actions, wake up, and repent. These gifts from God possess the same effect as His direction for us to choose life; it is what is best for us and our future. We need to take these allotted days and use them to our benefit so that when we reach Yom Kippur, God will put us down in the book of life, which is what He truly wants for us.

THE GRAVITY OF TESHUVA

JONAH TRIPP ('18)

Adapted from a Shiur given by Rav Zvi Sobolofsky

IN PARSHAT NITZAVIM (DEVARIM 30:15) WE ARE PRESENTED WITH two options. We can choose to act positively and thereby live or we can act negatively which will bring death. The options delineated in Parshat Nitzavim resemble the choices provided in Parshat Re'eh (Devarim 11: 26-28), but they differ in one regard. Though both parshiyot present the choice between good and bad, the ramifications of our actions in each case are different. In Parshat Re'eh, the path of good is described as a blessing, whereas the path of evil is a curse. In Parshat Nitzavim, good is synonymous with life itself, whereas evil does not bring a mere curse, but rather death.

Why are the consequences of one's choices so much more severe in Parshat Nitzavim than in Parshat Re'eh?

Immediately prior to the choices outlined in Parshat Nitzavim, the mitzvah of teshuva is given. Although teshuva is an amazing gift, it carries with it an immense responsibility. One who fails to take advantage of the opportunity to do teshuva commits a terrible sin by not appreciating the significance of this gift from Hashem. Prior to the introduction of teshuva, a life devoid of Torah was simply a cursed existence. Now that teshuva can be performed, if one still refuses to do so, actions are not only cursed but are tantamount to death.

It is this wonderful responsibility that accompanies teshuva that explains a difficult statement of the Rambam in Hilchot Teshuva. On Rosh Hashanah it is determined whether a person is righteous, wicked, or in the middle. A person is considered righteous if he has even one more merit than sin to his credit, and wicked if his sins exceed the number of his merits. Those whose merits and sins are equal are given that opportunity to repent between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Rambam writes that one who does not repent at this time is automatically determined to be wicked. **Why should the lack of repentance necessarily lock a person's fate?** Perhaps he performed other mitzvot between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that could tip the balance in his favor? Apparently the Rambam understands that the sin of not doing teshuva is of such magnitude, particularly at a time such as the Aseret Yemei Teshuva when teshuva is presented as a gift, that no merit can offset the consequences.

As we approach the period of time dedicated to teshuva, let us remember that teshuva is not only a gift but a responsibility. May we merit to appreciate this magnificent opportunity that is presented to us.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

ELI LITWIN ('18)

"Today you are all standing before the Lord your God." (Deuteronomy 29:9)

AFTER THE 98 CURSES THAT THE B'NEI YISROEL heard at the conclusion of Parshat Ki Tavo, they were devastated and questioned whether they could possibly withstand such horrific punishments. Moshe encouraged them with the opening words of this week's parsha: "Today you are all standing." Although you have sinned numerous times, all of you still stand today before God.

Was Moshe trying to minimize the severity of the Divine reproof, or imply that it was only a threat

that would not be carried out? Furthermore, how could Moshe say that all were alive and well despite their sins, when in fact tens of thousands had perished in the desert?

Rather, Moshe's intention was to assure B'nei Yisroel that the purpose of the curses was not to serve as retribution for their sins, but to ensure their survival as a nation. And, therefore he told them collectively - *kulchem* - you still stand today. After all the sins and all the punishments, the community is eternal. The concept of death does not exist with respect to the community. Those who perished died not as individuals, but as a part of the Jewish community, which is eternal, and therefore they still survive.

Conversely, one who separates himself from the community and says, "I will do as I see fit," will not be forgiven and will be utterly destroyed.

Our relationship to Hashem is only through the community. The Torah was not given to individuals; nor were the covenants made with individuals. Our relationship to Hashem is as members of the Jewish community. Rambam (Teshuva 3:24) classifies a heretic as one who keeps all the mitzvot but separates himself from the Jewish people. Without a link to the community, there can be no link to Hashem and Torah.

This issue is sponsored by Sharona and Avi Litwin and family in honor of their dear son Eli and his Ashreinu staff. May the New Year bring them continued hatzlacha and nachat from the many weekly inspirational messages and insights of Ashreinu which enhances the shabbat for their readers.



We would like to wish you and your family a Chativa V'chatima Tova. It should be a year filled with bracha, simcha, meaning, purpose, parnasa and love. May we continue to grow in our learning and strive to excel in our pursuit of Torah and mitzvot. Shana Tova!

Yours truly,
The Ashreinu Team



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