

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI HOWARD WOLK

National Council of Young Israel

The Torah portion of Nitzavim is invariably read on the last Shabbat of the year. "Atem Nitzavim hayom kulchem... - You are standing, before your G-d...Every man of Israel...To enter into the covenant of your G-d and His vow, which your G-d has sealed with you today." (Devarim 29:9-11).

What innovation was there in this covenant in the Plains of Moav? B'nai Yisrael had already sworn to a Brit at Sinai 40 years earlier. The Ramban explains, "The first covenant, at the time of receiving the Torah, did not include a curse."

It appears from the words of our sages that the new covenant was indeed a momentous event, in that it added a new element of mutual responsibility. From this time on, the actions of an individual were no longer his concern, a matter for private accounting with G-d, but were related to the nation as a whole. This was the beginning of the concept, "All of Israel are responsible for one another." (Gemara Shavuot 39a). This is true not only for violation of prohibitions, as is written, "Each man will stumble over his brother (Vayikra 26:37), implying that each person will be held responsible for his brother's sins (ibid), but also for positive commandments. As was taught by Ahava, the son of Rabbi Zeira, "One who has already recited any of the blessings can recite it again for others" (Gemara Rosh Hashanah 29a).

Rashi explains, "all of Israel are responsible for one another in performance of mitzvot." I am responsible not only to fulfill mitzvot myself, but also to see to it that other Jews obey mitzvot, too. If I recited Kiddush already, I may still recite it for another person and another (no limit) - to enable others to fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush.

If I already heard the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, I can blow the Shofar for others to enable others to fulfill this mitzvah.

What a beautiful concept - Kol Yisrael areivin zeh b'zeh. It is not just a nationalistic nicety - but it has Halachic and ethical teeth to it.

Areivin, from the word Ahrev, means not only responsible for, but also "a guarantee," a "surety." As Judah assured Jacob when he offered his son as a

guarantee for Joseph's safe return (Ahrev et ha-naar). We must help guarantee the religious and physical well being of other Jews.

Rav Yisrael Salanter compared the Jewish people to the human body. When a person suffers a migraine headache or a broken limb, the pain is not localized. It is not only the head or arm that aches, but the person's entire body. So, too, when a Jew anywhere suffers physical pain or mental anguish, we all must feel the pain.

In the Torah portion, why did our mutual responsibility begin right before we entered Israel and not at Mt. Sinai? Perhaps this level of responsibility was waiting until the completion of the Torah forty years later. Or, maybe it is dependent on Eretz Yisrael herself. The covenant did not take effect until the people crossed the Jordan River. This is the explanation given for the verse, "The secrets are for G-d and the revealed matters are for us and for our children forever" (Devarim 29:28). The Gemara in Sanhedrin (43b) comments: "This teaches us that nobody was punished for hidden sins until they crossed the Jordan, according to Rabbi Yehudah. But Rabbi Nehemiah asked him: When can one be punished for hidden sins? ...What it means is that just as G-d does not punish for hidden sins, so was there no punishment for even revealed sins until B'nai Yisrael crossed the Jordan."

The Maharal explains: "Eretz Yisrael is uniquely tied to the nation and therefore all of Israel who live there can be considered as a single individual. That is why when they entered the Land of Israel they became responsible for one another." Before entering the land, the people could be considered as separate entities; even if there was a unifying force, they were still separate. It was only in the land itself that the separate tribes were transformed into a nation, into a single body. This is what transformed mutual responsibility from a theoretical concept to a real physical obligation.

This is being written just a few days after the hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and large areas of Louisiana and Mississippi. Our tefilot go out to our fellow citizens whose lives have been so uprooted. We each can also help in concrete ways, too by donating funds for all their necessities. Seeing the terribly painful videos of people being rescued from their rooftops and of the flooded homes underscores the realization of how precarious life can be. It demonstrates that as much as we want to believe that

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we are in control of our lives, much of what occurs to us is beyond our control.

We vividly see the enormous chesed performed by HaShem in the desert in providing us with all our needs and protecting us from all harm.

Upon entry into Israel, the Manna was to stop. Instead of being given all of their needs, the people were now required to conquer the land, defend themselves and produce all that was necessary to sustain material and spiritual life. With those obligations starting, the responsibilities to one another also commence. The people were now forged into a single unit.

In a similar way, the entire world can be considered as a single unit. As was taught by Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon: "Since the world is judged according to the majority and the individual is also judged according to the majority, when one performs a single mitzvah he should be happy that he has brought a benefit to himself and to the whole world." (Kiddushin 40b). One single act can effect not only the person's neshama but also the entire world. © 2005 by National Council of Young Israel

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

It is very appropriate that on the Shabbos before Rosh Hashanah we read Parashas Nitzavim, as one of its primary themes is teshuvah, repentance. "And you will return to Hashem your G-d and you will heed his voice [keeping] all that I have commanded you today - you and your sons - with all of your heart and with all of your soul" (Devarim 30:2). But doesn't the requirement to do teshuvah apply to both the parents and the children equally? If the statement that "you" will do teshuvah encompasses both, why are the "sons" mentioned separately?

When a similar thought is expressed just a few verses later (30:6), it is the "descendants" ("zarecha") whose hearts will be "circumcised" with their fathers, rather than the "sons" ("banecha"). Why does the Torah use two different terms for progeny?

If you look at that whole paragraph, there seems to be much repetition. We do teshuvah with all our heart and soul (30:2), love G-d with all our heart and soul after the heart has been circumcised (30:6), do

teshuvah again (30:8), and then do it third time - with all of our heart and soul (30:10). We know teshuvah is a great thing, but why are we supposed to do it three times? And why mention that the return will be "with all your heart and with all your soul" three times?

Inevitably, the answer is tied to the fact that teshuvah is a process. Some commentators mention that a commitment must be made first, and then followed through by keeping it. Others refer to the different types and levels of teshuvah; out of fear of the consequences of sin or out of love of G-d. This certainly explains the multiple repentances, but not how they could all be complete repentances, with all of our being ("heart and soul").

When we perform mitzvos, we can do them because we are obligated to (which can correlate to "yirah," fear, but does not necessarily need to be) or because we really want to (whether out of a love for G-d or a love for the benefit of following His will). It seems rather obvious that a mitzvah will have more meaning if there is an intense desire to perform it than if one would prefer not to, but does it anyway because he or she has to. However, both are important, because it is extremely rare for anyone to always be that excited about every single mitzvah opportunity. Besides, if we only do mitzvos when we are moved to do so, then we are not doing it because G-d commanded us to, but because we feel like doing them. First we must do them, even if we don't understand them fully, and even when we do not feel the spiritual fire and energy latent in them. Yes, we must commit to keeping the Torah, but that commitment includes doing them no matter what.

The first verse that discusses repentance may be referring to the commitment to keep the Torah, as well as keeping it even if the emotional energy isn't there. We know that doing something (or not doing something) is the right thing to do, so we do it. We're not yet at the highest level of observance, even if the mechanics are the same as if we were. We're building the vessel even though, as of yet, there is no fire.

Because this is, at this point in the teshuvah process, the best we can do, it truly is "with all of our heart and all of our soul." Granted our hearts and souls are pretty small, so it took less to use "all" of them, but we have given it all we have.

This makes an impression not only on ourselves, but on our children as well. They see our commitment, and that we don't only do things when we feel like doing them. They will learn that they too shouldn't only do things when the spirit moves them, but all the time, every time.

Because we have given it all we have, G-d takes the next step, and "circumcises our hearts." The barriers that prevented us from doing even more, and from doing them in a more complete way, have been removed. Why did G-d give us this greater capacity? "In order to be able to love Hashem your G-d with all of your heart and all of your soul" (30:6). This verse is not

referring to our repentance, or to our loving G-d, but to our new *ability* to love G-d, with all of our (bigger and better) heart and soul. Yes, we did all we could have given the previous circumstances, but now we have been given the opportunity to do even more, in an even better way. And if we take advantage of the opportunity, it will have a positive effect not only on our children (who see our passion for fulfilling G-d's word) but on future generations ("descendants") as well. Our children will do more than just keep the mitzvos because they have to, but because they want to, thereby passing it on to their children.

Several weeks ago, I discussed why we had to keep the mitzvos in order to receive the blessings promised to our forefathers. (www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/eikev.pdf) After all, if they were already promised, how could they not be fulfilled? And if we kept the mitzvos, and therefore deserved the blessings on our own, why is the promise to our forefathers relevant? I explained how we would not have received the blessings on our own merits, as we did not reach the levels attained by our forefathers. On the other hand, the promises were not made to all of their descendants, only those continuing the mission they started (i.e. keeping the Torah). We become connected to Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov (and Sarah, Rivkah, Leah and Rachel) by following in their footsteps, and therefore can receive the blessings promised to them.

After we have received the greater capacity to serve G-d more completely (via G-d's "circumcising our hearts"), we are told that if we follow through by actually serving Him "with all of our hearts and souls" G-d will "rejoice over us as He rejoiced over our forefathers," i.e. we will be deserving of the blessings in our own rights, not just because we are connected to our forefathers. We have gone beyond following in their footsteps by keeping the mitzvos of the Torah (which was the first step in the teshuvah process) to being worthy of blessing based on the high level of our own service of G-d.

The flow of our verses can now be understood without having any repetition. After telling us that we will take the first step of fully keeping the mitzvos, and that we will then become able to keep them even more fully (with passion, desire and love), the Torah tells us that we will in fact take advantage of the opportunity, thereby causing G-d to rejoice over us the same way He rejoiced over our forefathers. How can we have reached that level of attachment? Because we returned to G-d completely, with all of our hearts and all of our souls.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Parshat Netzavim is replete with the message of teshuvah (repentance). Teshuvah is most often

associated with our return to G-d. This portion also speaks of a different form of teshuvah-the return of G-d.

Note the sentence "V'shav Hashem...et shevutk'hah" which is often translated "then the Lord your G-d will bring back your captivity." (Deuteronomy 30:3) The term used here is not "ve-heishiv" which means G-d will "bring back" your captivity, rather it is "ve-shav" which literally means that G-d "will return with" your captivity. The message according to the Midrash is clear. When we are in captivity G-d is in exile with us. (Rashi, Deuteronomy 30:3) Thus, when we return, G-d returns with us as He, too, has been exiled.

Similarly, G-d first appears to Moshe in a burning bush telling him to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt. (Exodus 3:2) The Midrash points out that G-d purposely appears in the lowly bush to teach that He felt the pain of the Jewish people enslaved in Egypt. As we were lowly, so did G-d feel that lowliness. G-d is one in our suffering, empathizing with our despair. (Rashi, Exodus 3:2)

This idea teaches an important message. G-d is a G-d of love who cares deeply for His people. Hence, when we are cast aside, G-d suffers with us and is cast aside as well.

This concept finds expression in the mourning process. When leaving someone sitting shiva, we recite the formula of "ha-Makom yenehem etkhem - may G-d comfort you." But suppose there is only one mourner? Should we use the word etkhem (you, plural) rather than ot'kha or otakh (you, singular).

Many rabbis insist that we still use the plural form. According to this view, it can be suggested that even when one mourns alone, one is not alone. G-d feels our loss to the extent that He is sitting shiva with us, hence etkhem. From this perspective, G-d is the comforter and the comforted. And so we recite, may G-d comfort you-with the you including G-d.

No wonder then, when reciting kaddish, we begin with "Yitgadel, ve-yitkadesh" which means "may G-d become great, and may G-d become holy." With the death of a human being, with a family in bereavement, G-d, as it were, is not fully great and holy as He suffers with us. Thus, these words are in the future tense. Indeed, the kaddish may be interpreted as our words of comfort to G-d Himself.

As we participate in the teshuvah process on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur this idea teaches that G-d is one with us, caring, leading and carrying us from step to step, higher and higher. As we return to G-d, G-d returns to us. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

There is a cynical but unfortunately accurate statement rife in the ranks of diplomats that treaties are made to be broken. We here in Israel

have plenty of experience with that viewpoint and assessment of international life. However, in this week's parsha we are told that the Jewish people under the leadership of Moshe and just before his death entered into a treaty - a covenant with G-d that was never meant to be broken or unenforced. This covenantal treaty was not limited to its generation or its place and time. It binds those "who are here with us present today and those who are not present with us here today." It combines the past, present and future of Jewry and its destiny into one unified whole and it makes clear that there really is no escape for any Jew individually and certainly not for the Jewish people as an entity from the terms of that covenant. The past century bears harsh witness to the unsuccessful and tragically inept attempt by many Jews and Jewish organizations and movements to sever their ties with Jewish tradition, the Jewish people or the Jewish future. Hitler, Stalin, Arafat and their ilk took the terms of the covenant with G-d more seriously than did many of the Jews themselves. Too our sad learning experience, we have been taught that the old covenant of Moshe is still operative over three millennia later. The comfort that we may derive from this realization is that all of the other terms of that covenant - the great and good future that it guarantees to us and all humankind - are also still binding and actual.

The word "nitzavim" that gives this week's parsha its name means to be present and accounted for, to stand erect, to appear. There can be no better description of the duty of a Jew than this word "nitzavim." Every Jew is responsible to be present and accounted for. Every Jew must be a proud Jew, standing erect and strong in one's loyalty to tradition and Jewish values. The Torah specifically warns against any attempts to shirk one's duty, to be absent without leave, so to speak. It is tantamount to desertion on the field of battle, the most severe crime in warfare. Only if we view ourselves in the light of having to report "nitzavim" for holy duty can we truly appreciate the import of the covenant and its binding quality upon us. "Nitzavim" is not history alone - it is a never-ending always-renewing challenge to the Jewish people as a whole and to each and every Jew individually. It is a call and challenge that cannot be ignored.

The parsha of Nitzavim always immediately precedes Rosh Hashana. It sets the tone for the days of mercy and forgiveness, for the heavenly judgments that mark the Days of Awe. On Rosh Hashana we pass before G-d, according to one opinion in the Talmud as "soldiers in King David's army." On Rosh Hashana, whether we wish so or not, we are all "nitzavim" before the heavenly court. If the rest of the year we are also to be counted as "nitzavim" than we can stand with pride and confidence before that court and pray for receiving its benign and merciful verdict.

B'virkat ketiva v'chatima tova - a good and happy year to all. © 2005 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish

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DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

This week's parsha brings us to the near final words of Moses to the People on the day of his death. He gives them a final warning and an opening for hope-the blessing of Teshuva (Repentance). We will look at one of the verses which speaks of Israel's wayward search for delusive divinities.

There is more to knowing than meets the eye.

"And they went and served other G-ds and bowed down before them-G-ds whom they knew not and who were not apportioned to them." (Deuteronomy 29:25)

"Whom they knew not"-RASHI: "With whom they had never experienced any divine power."

What would you ask on this comment? A Question: Why does Rashi not accept the more obvious meaning of these words-G-ds whom they did not know, foreign G-ds? What is wrong with such an interpretation?

An Answer: The verse condemns worshipping "G-ds they had not known." But if they worshipped them, in what sense can we say they didn't know them? They knew them enough to worship them! So these words cannot be taken at face value.

How does Rashi's comment deal with this?

An Answer: According to Rashi "known" does not mean "being aware of." As we might say "I know who he is." Here it means "knowing these G-ds to be G-ds," that is, to be powers that have manifested their might to the benefit of their worshippers. But these G-ds do not have such power and the people could not have "known" them in such a G-d-like capacity. © 2005 Dr. Avigdor Bonchek & aish.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Torah portion of Nitzavim generally precedes the two-day Festival of Rosh HaShanah, and this is hardly an accident of happenstance. I believe that the true significance of Rosh HaShanah is explained by the special covenant we find in Nitzavim.

In order to properly understand the nature of this covenant, it is important to analyze a number of textual problems in the beginning of our portion. Firstly, the very opening verse, "You are standing this day, all of you, before the Lord your G-d, the leaders of your tribes, your elders and your officers, every person of Israel" (Deut 29:9). Which covenant is the Bible speaking about? Abraham entered into the Covenant of the Pieces with G-d which was a national covenant,

promising the Patriarch progeny and a land; Moses and his Israelites entered into the Covenant at Sinai with G-d, granting and obligating the nation to a religious set of laws, both moral and ritual. What possible addition could emanate from this third covenant, after Israel had already been established as a nation and a religion?!

And how are we to understand the strange inclusion of this covenant of "those who are standing here with us today before the Lord our G-d and with those who are not here with us today" (Deut 29:13,14). If this refers to the past generations, then how can they not be considered as "standing before G-d"? They are probably closer to G-d than those who are alive! And if this refers to the future generations, the Bible is constantly renewing the covenant in subsequent periods of Jewish history: after the conquest of the land of Israel in the period of Joshua (Joshua 24), after the return from Babylonian exile (Nehemiah 8) and every seven years in the dramatic event of Hakhel (Maimonides, Laws of Hagiga 3), when all the Israelites were commanded to gather together and re-confirm their special Biblical relationship with G-d. So who are those "not standing before G-d this day" who are now being included? Now, clearly this is the covenant which is first mentioned in Chapter II of the Book of Deuteronomy (Re'eh), the blessings and the curses on Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eval to which the Israelites were bound right before their entry into the land of Israel. They are instructed to erect large stones after they cross the Jordan on their way to Shekhem (their entrance point to Israel) upon which the words of this Torah (apparently this particular covenant) are to be written, "ba'er heitev", very well explained-according to our Sages, to be translated into all seventy languages. And the content of these stones appear to be a kind of second Decalogue, because an altar is there to be erected to be made of whole stones which are not to be touched by implements of iron, just as in the case of the first Decalogue (Deut 27:1-8).

The subject of these blessings and curses are twelve of the most significant of the moral and ethical laws of the Bible: cursed are those who disobey and blessed are those who uphold the strictures against idolatry, cursing one's parents, moving one's neighbors' boundary markers (stealing, trespassing, invading one's privacy), misdirecting the blind (literally and figuratively), perverting justice for the stranger, orphan and widow, striking one's neighbor, taking a bribe and violating the various sexual crimes of adultery, incest and sodomy (Deut 27:15-27). These are all universal laws of ethics and morality which ought apply to every human being in the world.

Hence I would submit that this third covenant is the necessary rules and regulations which the Almighty imposes upon humanity, our mission to the world. After all, part of the charge which we received together with the first Decalogue at Sinai was that we were to be a "kingdom of priest-teachers", a nation of teachers to the

other nations of the world. All of the prophets (for example, Isaiah 2, Mica 4, Zecharia 7,8) envisage a time at the end of the days when all the nations will come to learn from us the message of ethical monotheism: "nation shall not lift up sword against nation and humanity shall not learn war anymore". And Maimonides teaches that just as the Bible of Moses is to teach the Jews the 613 commandments, so is the bible to enforce throughout the world the 7 fundamental rules of humanity, moral and ethical teachings of thou shalt not murder and thou shalt not commit adultery.

Therefore our Bible teaches that when the Israelites will enter the land of Israel, upon crossing the Jordan River and entrance into Shekhem, they are to write in stone the twelve ethical commandments to the world in every one of the seventy languages; this is a lesson for every visiting dignitary as well a clear message to every entering Israelite. This third covenant is for the Jews to communicate to those who are "not with them before G-d" at this time of their entry into Israel, and indeed our future as well as the future of the world depends upon our success in fulfilling our mission.

Our Talmud teaches that Ezra ordained that we read of this third covenant for the advent of Rosh Hashanah every year. The primary meaning of Rosh Hashanah is our acceptance of G-d's kingship throughout the world; the primary challenge of Rosh Hashanah is for us to achieve the fulfillment of that mission. The cry of the Shofar (truah) reflects our sadness at a world not yet perfected; the exulting, exalting and triumphant sound of the Shofar (tekiyah) reflects our faith that we shall ultimately succeed. May we begin to taste the fruits of that success in the year 5766. © 2005 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

THE SALANT FOUNDATION

Parsha Insights

by Rabbi Zvi Miller

Once, Rav Yerucham HaLevi was visiting Radin, the city where the Chofetz Chaim resided.

Rabenu Yerucham had a certain rare book with him. The Chofetz Chaim, who was the greatest Rabbi of his times, came to the lodging place of Rav Yerucham in order to borrow the book. Rav Yerucham asked the Chofetz Chaim why he didn't send a messenger to get the book. The Chofetz Chaim replied, "The Torah is not in Heaven (Devarim 30:12). And even if it was in Heaven, I would be obligated to pursue it!"

The Chofetz Chaim was imparting a profound lesson: When Moshe Rabenu ascended to the Heavens to receive the Torah, he literally removed the Torah from the Heavenly realm and placed here in the earthy dimension. Hence, Torah-the most precious Heavenly treasure-is readily available to us. We, who are alive here on earth, have the most stunning opportunity.

Therefore, shouldn't we pursue Torah-the Holy words of HaShem-with passion and enthusiasm!

And He gave us the Torah and implanted eternity within us (Mishlei 23:5). The Vilna Gaon explains that HaShem not only gave us the Torah, even more, he implanted the wisdom of Torah within our hearts. Whereas, prior to the revelation at Sinai, we did not have an innate understanding of Torah. Pre-Sinai, only our holy Avos, and no others, merited to receive Torah wisdom.

After Sinai, however, every Jew has an inner resource of Torah wisdom. Today we see throughout the world, that every Jew, who desires, is able to fathom the depths of Torah. This phenomenon is engendered by the reality that Moshe Rabenu brought the Torah down to earth from the celestial heights.

We live in a dimension in which the Torah is implanted in our very souls. May this awareness of our closeness to Torah, inspire us to pursue the Torah with enthusiasm and joy.

Implement: Visualize the light of Torah emanates from your heart-and fills your soul with wisdom. *[Based on the commentary of Da'as Torah, of Rav Yerucham HaLevi] © 2005 Rabbi Z. Miller & The Salant Foundation*

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Torah Weekly

Parshat Nitzavim discusses the covenant between all "standing" (29:9) Jews and G-d, and lists all those that the covenant applies to. The list includes leaders, elders, law enforcers, men, women, children, converts and "from woodcutters to water carriers" (29:11). Rashi explains that the woodcutters and water carriers were those people that converted to Judaism out of fear, and were given specific tasks to segregate them. Why does it list all Jews as "standing"? Also, the Torah uses language that makes it seem as though woodcutters and water carriers were on opposite sides of some spectrum (i.e. from woodcutters ALL the way to water carriers)? What range could possibly start with woodcutters and end with water carriers?

Answering these questions requires an understanding of our responsibility as Jews, and as people. Jews are all about improving and growing through personal effort. But in order to "go" anywhere, you must first be figuratively standing, or ready to move. Once we've prepared to change, improve and "go" somewhere, the Torah teaches us an important lesson about our active roles as Jews. Woodcutters cut wood that gets burned in fires, that heats or cooks things that we then enjoy or consume. The woodcutter's efforts may seem indirect when looking at the final product. Water carriers, on the other hand, see instant usage of their labors, since we drink the water itself, or use it to cook food directly. Regardless of our roles in this world, we all stand before

G-d, ready to do something for others, ourselves, and G-d. After this week's events, it's critical that we stand as people, and not to belittle the acts we do, regardless of how minimal we think they are, because our actions are just as meaningful in the eyes of G-d. Giving a pint of blood, showing up at a rally, writing letters to politicians or grieving families, or calling someone to check on their well being may not seem like much to us, but it's an effort that can save lives. We have a chance to turn any evil deed into multiple acts of love and kindness! © 2001 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

In this week's short Torah portion, Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael that the Torah is not beyond the abilities of man. "For this mitzva which I command you today (1) is not beyond you (2) and it is not far away" [Devarim 30:11]. (This follows Rashi's interpretation and not that of the Ramban, who feels that the mitzva referred to is the act of repentance mentioned before this verse.) Moshe then notes two examples that are the opposite of normal circumstances and that illustrate the two points that he made in the verse. As opposed to somebody who might say that the Torah is beyond the abilities of man, he declares, "It is not in heaven, so that it would be possible to say, who can rise up to heaven and bring it to us, so that we will listen to it and perform it" [30:12]. Similarly, as opposed to the possibility that it is far away, Moshe says, "And it is not across the sea, so it would be possible to say, who will cross the ocean and bring it to us, so that we will listen to it and perform it" [30:13].

After this introduction, we might have expected Moshe to explain that in contrast to these possibilities the Torah has already been given to Bnei Yisrael, so that there is no longer any need to bring it down from heaven. (This is in fact what has happened, as is written, "And G-d said to Moshe, this is what you should say to Bnei Yisrael: You have seen that I spoke to you from the heavens" [Shemot 20:19].) However, what Moshe does in fact say is, "This matter is very close to you, you can accomplish it with your mouth and with your heart" [Devarim 30:14]. This appears to be a reference to the difficulty of performing the mitzvot, and Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael that doing the mitzvot depends solely on mankind and how determined they are. But if this is indeed the message, it would have been more logical to note that the Torah does not make any demands that are beyond man's capabilities. The way the passage is written, there is a lack of symmetry. From Moshe's examples it would seem that the main issue is the availability of the Torah, while the summary implies that the main problems are the practical difficulties in observing the mitzvot. What is the meaning of this seeming paradox?

Evidently the main lesson that Moshe wanted to teach was just this apparent paradox. By its very essence, the Torah is a way of life. If the Torah would exist only across the ocean, it might very well be that its demands are beyond human capability. On the other hand, the fact that the Torah is readily available, within the grasp of Bnei Yisrael, can be seen as a proof-by definition-that it can be achieved by all the people. Thus, Moshe declares that the very fact that the Torah is not in heaven or across the sea shows that what is needed to observe the mitzvot depends only on the will of mankind-"you can accomplish it with your mouth and with your heart."

After he has given this message to the nation, Moshe can tell the people his message in a decisive way. "Look, I have presented you today with life and good, with death and bad. I command you today to love your G-d, to follow in His way, and to observe His mitzvot, chukot, and mishpatim. And you shall live and multiply, and you will bless your G-d in the good land, where you will go to possess it." [30:15-16]. As noted, by definition the Torah itself is the essence of life and good.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftarah

This week's haftarah marks the climax of a seven week series of reflection on Jewish redemption. In this final presentation Hashem announces His personal return to the Jewish people. Now that every other dimension of redemption is in place the time has finally arrived for Hashem to rest His Divine Presence amongst His people. Eretz Yisroel has been revived, Yerushalayim has been rebuilt, the exiles have returned en masse, but the ultimate objective has yet to be seen. In response to this, the prophet Yeshaya quotes the Jewish people saying, "I will be gladdened by Hashem, My soul will rejoice over My G-d." (61,10) Chazal in Yalkut Shimoni (505) view the Jewish people's response to be specifically related to the return of Hashem to Yerushalayim. The Jewish people respond to all the magnificent prophecies of their glorious future and proclaim that their true source of happiness is but one, the return of Hashem to His beloved people. They sorely long for the privilege of sensing the presence of Hashem amongst them and feeling the closeness and love He has for His people. They resolve that they will be gladdened and happy only through His return to them.

The prophet continues and describes the proportions of this return and the extent of Hashem's cherished relationship. "No longer will you be referred to as forsaken because about you it shall be proclaimed, 'My desire is in you'." (62, 4) Hashem pledges to fully identify with His people and to display His true desire in them. His relationship with them will be so encompassing and evident that a newly gained identity

will be conveyed upon the Jewish people, "Hashem's desirable one". But a worry crosses the minds of the Jewish nation concerning the nature of their forthcoming relationship. After all, weren't they previously associated with Hashem in similar proportions before being rejected by Him? If so, they reason that although Hashem will truly return to them it will only feel to them like a remarriage. Their long awaited association will have a nostalgic air to it and won't bring them the true happiness they seek.

The prophet responds and reveals to them the indescribable proportions of their new relationship. Yeshaya says, "Hashem will rejoice over you like a groom over His bride." (62, 5) The Radak explains that Hashem's return to the Jewish people will possess all the freshness and novelty of a groom to his bride. Their relationship represents the epitome of happiness and appreciation as they begin forging their eternal bond with love and respect. In this same manner Hashem's newly founded relationship with His people will possess similar qualities. It will be so complete and perfect that it won't leave room for reflections upon their past. The happiness and fulfillment that they will experience will be so encompassing that it will feel like a fresh start, a relationship never experienced before. The Radak adds an indescribable dimension to this relationship and explains that this sense of newness will actually continue forever. Instead of becoming stale and stagnant their relationship with Hashem will always be one of growth and development and will constantly bring them to greater heights. Each newly gained level of closeness will be so precious and dear to them that it will be regarded as a completely new relationship replete with all of its sensation and appreciation.

But the most impressive factor of all is that the above description is not only our feelings towards Hashem but is, in truth, Hashem's feelings towards us. The prophet says that Hashem Himself will forever rejoice over us with the sensation of a groom over His newly acquired bride. From this we discover that Hashem's feelings towards His people are literally boundless. Even after all the straying we have done, Hashem still desires to unite with us in the proportions described above. He desires to erase the past and establish a perfectly new relationship, so perfect and new, that it will continuously produce the heightened emotions of a bride and groom for eternity.

These emotions are, in truth the hidden message behind the tefillin which we don each day. As we wrap the tefillin strap around our finger we recite special passages expressing our betrothal to Hashem. This experience represents our placing the wedding ring of Hashem on our finger, portraying our perfect relationship with Him. But our Chazal (see Brochos 6a) inform us that Hashem also wears tefillin. In proof of this they cite a passage in this week's haftarah which states, "Hashem swears by His right and by the strength of His arm." (62, 8) Chazal explain that the words, "the

strength of His arm" refer to the tefillin worn on the left arm. The Maharsha expounds upon this concept and explains that Hashem actually binds Himself to the Jewish people. Hashem's tefillin, like ours, represent devotion and commitment, His commitment to His beloved people. Hashem cherishes His relationship with us and as an expression of His commitment to us, He also wears a betrothal band. Eventually our boundless love for Hashem will find its expression together with Hashem's boundless love for us and together we will enjoy this indescribable relationship forever and forever.

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RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

On Rosh Hashanah three books are opened. The totally righteous are written and sealed immediately into the Book of Life. The totally wicked are recorded and sealed in the Book of Death! The In-between people are left hanging and standing until Yom Kippur! (Tractate Rosh Hashanah)

How can we understand that the righteous are written immediately into the book of life? Didn't (tm) the Rabbi Moshe Feinstein pass away nineteen years ago? Was he then written into the book of death? Conversely, the wicked Hitler lived Rosh Hashanah after Rosh Hashanah during all the war years. Was he written into the book of life? How does one both stand and hang?

Man is made of two ingredients, like Jacob's (tm) ladder, from opposite ends of the spiritual spectrum. Into the dust of the earth was installed, through the nostrils of man, the breath of life, which comes incredibly from the very inwards of The Almighty Himself. Rosh Hashanah is that day which coincides with this original amazing event. We therefore celebrate this gift of free choice by blowing again that breath of life. Man can be compared to something like giant helium balloon with a big old basket. How so?

On Rosh Hashanah, when the Shofar blows good Jews, the world over, are filled with aspirations lighter than the stuff of this world. The righteous, less encumbered by undesirable habits of thought, speech, and action are able to be take-off immediately and their baskets begin to climb. The Talmud tells us that the righteous, even while they are dead, are considered alive. Therefore, even when they end life here they continue to climb on an infinite curve that leads them ever closer to HASHEM based on their spiritual inertia created here.

The wicked, by definition remain unaffected by the sounds of the Shofar. Their ears are jammed with nonsense. They go on a horizontal plane as a snake that slithers through the tall grass. The Talmud tells us that the wicked are called dead even while they are alive.

Himmler had said about Hitler, that in the early 1930's he was a mentch. In the late 1930's he was an uber-mentch- a super man. By the 1940's he was ois-mentch- not even a man. With the extension of years he went from being famous to infamous; the poster child of evil. The wicked although granted a worldly extension become more and more nasty, brutish, addicted, and destructive as they pass through time.

The intermediates feel that surge for excellence when the Shofar blast is heard. Like a candle flickering to return to its source in the sun the balloon hopes for wings and gains them. As the balloon begins to climb for the ideal it is suddenly face to face with the real. The basket is anchored with stakes and many sand bags. These are the weighty accumulation of bad habits of thought, speech and action that hold the average man down. On the one hand, the balloon is tugging to rise higher. On the other, he is stuck in the mire. He is effectively standing and hanging. He is caught in a power-struggle between the *ais* and the *œought*.

There are only two choices. 1- Shoot a hole in the balloon. Allow the inspiration of the Yom Tov to escape with foolish jokes and various forms of escapism. 2- Begin, during the next ten days to focus with a magnifying glass of intense truth on one of those ropes deemed reachable and burn through some of those threads that bind. Perhaps one unwanted habit will be released.

A fisherman hauling his load from river was asked by an annoying onlooker how he could honestly guarantee that he was selling fresh fish, as his sign promised. After all, dead fish float on the river and maybe his harvest included some dead ones. The fisherman answered confidently, *œMy fish are certainly fresh because I sweep my net down stream and the fish I catch are swimming upstream and if a fish is moving upstream then he is alive.* Even if that basket only inches in the right direction then that slight improvement demonstrates a desire for *œlife* and so it is written. © 2005 Rabbi L. Lam & torah.org

