

בס"ד



**Parshas 'Nitzavim-
vayelech**

מתוך "ליקוטי שמואל"

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Parshas Netzavim – No Excuse Not To “Do Teshuvah”

Parshas [Netzavim](#)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

According to the standard order of the weekly *parshios*, Parshas Nitzavim is always read before Rosh HaShana. Despite the fact that our current order of reading the *parshiyos* is not necessarily the way that it was always practiced, there could be no more appropriate parsha to read at precisely this time of year. Nitzavim contains the following series of *pesukim* (verses):

“For this mitzvah that I am prescribing to you today is not too wondrous for you, it is not too distant. It is not in Heaven that you should say ‘Who shall go up to Heaven and bring it to us so that we can hear it and keep it?’ It is not over the sea so that you should say ‘Who will cross the sea and get it for us, so that we will be able to hear it and keep it?’ It is something that is very close to you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can keep it.” (Devarim 30:11-14)

There is a difference of opinion among the early commentators as to which *mitzvah* the Torah is referring. According to the Ramban (1194-1270) and others who follow his opinion, the Torah is referring to the mitzvah of Teshuvah (Repentance, Return to G-d). Teshuvah is this *mitzvah* that is “within our capacity and within our reach to fulfill.”

The Sforno (1470-1550) writes as follows concerning this *pasuk*: “It is not too wondrous for you” – that you would require *Nevi'im* (prophets). “It is not too distant” – that you would require distant wise men of the generation to explain to you that

which is necessary to accomplish it, even while you are still in exile."

A person should not think, "In these times, I am incapable of doing Teshuvah. Had I lived in the times of the *Nevi'im* who could have directly told me exactly what I was doing wrong – then I could have repented properly. Unfortunately, I live in a period of history when there are no *Nevi'im*." To counteract such thoughts, the Torah assures us "It is not in Heaven" – implying that we do not need prophetic words from heaven to allow us to do Teshuva. This is no excuse.

Likewise, we cannot argue, "If I had a real *maggid mussar* (expounder of homiletic lessons of chastisement) then I might be inspired to repent. If the Chofetz Chaim or the Vilna Gaon were here and would tell me to do Teshuvah, I would do it!" To counteract such thoughts, the Torah informs us, "It is not across the Sea." This, too, is no excuse.

"For the matter is very near. It is within your mouth and your heart to do it." We do not need *Nevi'im* or wise men. It is all up to us.

This *pasuk* is a double-edged sword. Teshuvah is easy. It is accessible. But, on the other hand, it is completely up to us. We cannot fall back on external excuses.

Perhaps this is hinted at in the famous Gemara (Avodah Zarah 17a) regarding Eleazar ben Durdaya. When the woman of ill repute told Eleazar ben Durdaya that he would never be able to repent, he pleaded "Heaven and Earth request mercy for me." They responded that they could not help him. He invoked the aid of the stars and of the sea and was given the same answer.

The Gemara says that he put his head between his knees and he expired on the spot as a result of intense remorse and repentance. What is the symbolism of placing his head between his knees? This

was the ultimate acknowledgment that his repentance was dependent upon himself alone.

We cannot wait for others to do Teshuvah for us, and we cannot blame others for our failure to do Teshuvah. It is not because our parents raised us poorly. It is not because our environment was bad. There are no excuses! The ability to do Teshuvah is within our own mouths and hearts.

Grabbing The Conductor's Hand

Parshas [Netzavim Vayeilech](#)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Getting Used To Obscenity

In Parshas Nitzavim, the Torah says, "For you know how you lived in the Land of Egypt and how you traversed the nations whose countries you have passed through. You have seen their abominations and their detestable idols (es shikutzeihem v'es giluleihem) of wood and stone, of silver and gold that were with them." [Devarim 29:15-16] The Torah refers to the pagan idols of the nations in a most derogatory fashion. The word "sheketz" means disgusting. The root of the word "giluleihem" is "galal," the word describing human excrement.

The Brisker Rav points out that the above-cited pasukim [verses] first refer to the idols of the nations in the most disrespectful terms – es shikutzeihem v'es giluleihem – but then describe them in terms of raw materials – wood and stone (etz v'even), silver and gold (kesef v'zahav). Etz v'even does not sound so bad. Kesef v'zahav even sound attractive. Which is it? Are the idols sheketz and galal or are they kesef and zahav?

The Brisker Rav explained that this pasuk [verse] teaches that when a person first sees something disgusting, his immediate and

natural reaction is revulsion. "This is nothing short of disgusting." But human tendency is that after a person sees it for a while and gets used to it, it does not seem as disgusting anymore. It is then perceived in quite neutral terms – like wood and stone. Ultimately, if a person continues to see it and becomes even more accustomed to it, that which the person originally considered revolting and abominable will be considered like silver and gold. This addresses one of the most basic of human traits that is both the bane of mankind and at the same time is also the salvation of mankind: We can become accustomed to anything. If we could not get accustomed to anything, we would not be able to survive. Sometimes, we see people who went through the concentration camps, where the conditions were unspeakable. How did they do it? The answer is that to some extent, they got used to it. That ability can be very useful. But on the other hand, this same ability can be very destructive. UNFORTUNATELY, we can become accustomed to anything. That which was once disgusting can become the norm.

This is indeed what the Gemara means when it says "This is the way of the evil inclination: Today it advises – do thus. Tomorrow, it advises – do thus. Until eventually it advises – go worship idols." [Shabbos 105b] The slippery slope proceeds. At each step, a person rationalizes that which had originally been "unthinkable". It doesn't bother us anymore and in fact becomes the next plateau from which a person sinks lower and lower until the person eventually goes on to worship idolatry.

If a person had been away from this country for ten years and returned today and listened just to the radio — to family-oriented programming — the person would be startled at the language used and the type of topics being discussed. One merely has to pick up a copy of the daily New York Times to be shocked by things

that would have been considered obscene 10 years ago. What happened?

We become spiritually deadened by what we see on billboards, by what we see as advertisements on buses or subways, and by what we hear on radio stations. It is mind-boggling!

Ten years ago, this was “shikutzeihem v’giluleihem”. It was disgusting! Then it became “etz v’even”. We became accustomed to it. Now it is even like “kesef v’zahav asher imahem”. We already expect it and look forward to hearing and reading it.

Grabbing The Conductor’s Hand

I heard the following story from Rabbi Ephraim Waxman. I don’t want the same thing that happened to him to happen to me, so I am relating this story at this time:

Rabbi Waxman once davened for the Amud on Yom Kippur in a certain Yeshiva. Before Neilah, he was asked to speak to the congregation to give them spiritual arousal before the final prayers of Yom Kippur. He related the following parable.

There was once a person who had to travel by train between two cities. He inquired as to the price and was told that there was a sliding scale. A regular seat in “Coach” was a certain amount. First class was quite a bit more. However, if he would arrive at the train station 4 hours before departure, he could purchase a first class ticket for the same price as coach. The fellow was not keen on spending four hours at the train station waiting for his train, so he decided to forgo the first-class ticket.

He was then told that if he would arrive 2 hours before departure, he would be guaranteed his choice of coach seats. After that, it would be first come, first served. But again, he said to himself “Why do I have to go there 2 hours early, waste my time, and sit around? So, I won’t get my choice of coach seats!”

He was then told that if he arrives a half hour before departure, all the seats will have been sold. The train will have standing room only available. "But," our passenger figures, "it is a short trip. What do I care if I need to stand? I'll come a half hour early and will buy a standing room only ticket."

As things have it, he does not come 4 hours early. He does not come 2 hours early. He does not even come a half hour early. He comes at the last minute. He comes down to the platform and the train is leaving. He starts running and running after the train, and he sees that the conductor on the caboose is holding out his hand. If he can just latch onto the conductor's hand, the conductor will pull him onto the train. He runs and runs and tries to grab that hand.

Rabbi Waxman then quoted the sentence from our liturgy "You send forth your hand to sinners" (Ata nosen yad l'poshim). Rabbi Waxman explained that Neilah represents the idea of Ata nosen yad l'poshim. One who waits until Neilah to do Teshuva is like the passenger running after the train to try to grab the conductor's hand.

Rosh Chodesh Elul is like 4 hours before the train leaves. That is when a person can get first class for the price of coach. Rosh HaShanna is like 2 hours before departure time – when a person can still get his selection of coach seats. The Ten Days of Repentance is first come first served. The earlier prayers on Yom Kippur are like "standing room only." However, Neilah is already "Ata nosen yad l'poshim".

Rabbi Waxman then said to the Yeshiva students "My friends, now is the time for "You stretch forth Your hand to the sinners." He proceeded to daven Neilah from the Amud and felt that the atmosphere throughout the room was highly charged with spiritual emotion.

A young student came to him after Neilah and said, "Rebbe, why did you not tell us this story on Rosh Chodesh Elul?" I do not want anyone to blame me for not telling such a story earlier, so I tell it now.

What Should We Worry About Most On Yom Kippur?

"You give a hand to the sinners and Your right hand is stretched out to accept those who repent." The prayers of Selichos, of Rosh HaShannah, of Yom Kippur are all quite repetitive. The same expressions are repeated over and over. The Shmoneh Esrays are the same throughout each day. However, the Amidah of Neilah is unique. There is nowhere else in the entire High Holiday period where we come across the expression "You give a hand to the sinners and Your right hand is stretched out to accept those who repent."

This is unique to Neilah. Neilah represents our last chance. "And you have taught us, Hashem our G-d, to confess over all of our sins, so that we cease from the oppression that comes from our hands (L'maan nechdal m'oshek yadeinu)."

Suppose someone would want to distill the entire two-week period from the start of Selichos recitation through the end of Yom Kippur to four words. What is it all about? What would those four words be? I maintain it is the words "L'maan nechdal m'oshek yadeinu – so that we cease from the oppression that comes from our hands." According to what the Machzor states explicitly, this is what we have to worry about most.

Oshek Yadeinu means theft (Gezeilah). A person should not say (with a sigh of relief) "I do not have to be worried about Gezeilah. I am not a thief." The Chofetz Chaim and other works of mussar teach that Gezeilah includes much more than just shoplifting. According to the Chofetz Chaim, not paying our debts is Oshek –

Gezeilah. So is not paying off bills. So is not paying workers. This is what it comes down to. This is the bottom line on Yom Kippur.

The Otzar HaTefillos writes: “The earlier works have already elaborated on the seriousness of this grave sin. Appreciate the seriousness of this sin: The Men of the Great Assembly singled it out in the Neilah liturgy. After all the “Ashamnus” (We are guilty confessions...), after all the enumerations of “Al Chet”, the only sin that is singled out in the final minutes of Yom Kippur is “L’maan nechdal m’oshek yadeinu.” In Neilah, all other sins are spoken of in a global reference (forgive us for ALL our sins), but not this sin of Oshek – Gezel. In fact, the sin of the Generation of the Flood was only sealed because of their crimes involving thievery.

If we want to be able to sincerely recite this solemn prayer at the end of Yom Kippur, we all need to look into our checkbooks and look into our financial records and look into our bills and make sure that we can finally say “L’maan nechdal m’oshek yadeinu.” We want to be able to say that we are clean, not only from the crime of actual thievery but from any form of oshek, of withholding wages, not paying bills, being negligent when it comes to our financial obligations or tuition payments. We want to be clear from all things that we owe.

A person can have a bushel full of sins; but Gezel mekatreg b’rosh — the sin of gezel is the first to prosecute. [Yalkut Shimoni Vayikra 25:660]

Changing from singular to plural?????

Written by d fine

you look carefully at our sedra, Moshe constantly switches between referring to Bnei Yisrael in the singular (lecha) and plural (lachim). What's the meaning here?

I first thought that an answer could be that every time we are referred to in the plural it is in the context of something bad, and in the singular it's re something good. This is certainly true in the final Perek of our sedra. Therefore, the message would be that when we are together (singular), like one person with one body, we'll get bracha, and if we are plural, separate, and not unified, we get bad things. But though the message is correct, the theory doesn't work out for the beginning of the Sedra's switching between sing-plural. So, we need a new answer?!?!

Maybe we can answer via the Vilna Gaon. He says elsewhere that even though the brachos (and curses) are given to klal yisrael as a whole, any individual can tap into them themselves even if klal yisrael don't all deserve them. That means that even if klal yisrael are not serving HaShem properly, if you are properly then you can get the wonderful brachos in parshas Bechukosai and Ki Savo yourself. Therefore, the message behind the switching between singular and plural is to tell us that the blessings and curses can happen to us as individuals (singular) or to us as one nation (plural).
GOOD SHABBES

Caring for the community

Written by d fine

What would you do if you knew you were about to die? I'm sure everyone has their own ideas and answers, some more religious than others. Well, let's see a great example in Moshe Rabeinu.

In Vayelech, we see that some of the last things he does all relate to caring for the future of klal yisrael. He continues his instruction to bnei yisrael as to their proper behavior, as well as personally instructing Yehoshua, the next leader of Bnei Yisrael. And he relates the mitzvah of hakhel; to gather the Jews once in 7 years to hear the Torah reading together by the Beis Hamikdash. And it is

not surprising that here at the end of Moshe's life he worries about the klal, for that was how he started his life too. The first time we meet Moshe is when he goes out of Pharaoh's palace and cares for the Jews being beaten. And so too does the Sforno note that the name Moshe means to affect others. Let's learn the lesson too and start caring for the wider community.

The Torah is a Song!

Written by Anonymous

The final mitzvah in the Torah is in our sedra, and it is the mitzvah of writing a sefer torah. Actually, you fulfill a branch of this mitzvah by buying Jewish serafim too! Anyway, the pasuk that tells us this is 'now write for this song and teach it to the Bnei Yisrael...' (31;19) [sefer hachinuch]. You will notice that the Torah is called a 'song' (shirah) here. What is the meaning of this name? Perhaps one idea is the following: I used to walk to yeshiva, and often I would listen to music through my headphones as I walked. I noticed that I might see two people arguing with each other in the street or any other stressful sight like a major traffic jam, but because of the relaxing music in my ears, it would all seem different, relaxing, and much less stressful. And the same is true now when I often listen to music on the bus; the music puts you in a different world, and you look at things differently. (I am talking about relaxing Jewish music, of course, not the heavy metal dustbin-banging modern noise that inexcusably passes for music nowadays!) This is an answer to our above question. The Torah is described as a 'song' because it gives us a completely new perspective on life. It teaches us that HaShem controls the world and everything is there for a reason. And so, troubles are not really troubles; they are tests, and all is planned from Above. It is like looking at an argument whilst listening to music – it does not affect you at all, for you are in a different world. This is Torah. HaShem should help us that we should appreciate His Torah and Live by it to the max!

Humor

Q: What do you call a bee that goes to synagogue on Rosh Hashanah?

A: A shofarmer!

1. How do you make a Rosh Hashanah fish laugh? Tell it a whale of a joke!

2.

3. What did the Jewish cat say on Rosh Hashanah? "Shanah Meow-va!"

Rachel and David Rubin had already retired for the night when Rachel thought she heard a noise downstairs.

Rachel nudged David, "David, wake up, wake up!"

"What's the matter?" David asked.

"There are burglars in the kitchen. I think they're eating the Shabbos leftovers."

"That'll teach them!" David replied.