

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Nitzavim 5772

In My Opinion :: SELICHOT :: Rabbi Berel Wein

This is the week that selichot – the penitential prayers that are added to the weekday morning prayer service – are recited in the synagogue according to Ashkenazic custom. Sephardic Jews have been reciting selichot in their morning prayer services since the start of the month of Elul. There are different customs even within these two main groupings of Jews as to which particular penitential prayer is recited on which of the days preceding Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

I have always been intrigued by the fact that most of the selichot prayers deal with the national angst and exile of the Jewish people rather than concentrating exclusively on the personal penitential aspect of the individual Jew who is actually doing the praying. Of course there are many personal prayers included in the selichot liturgy but there is strong concentration and emotion expressed regarding the plight of the Jewish people on a national and global scale.

This is understandable since most of the selichot prayers were composed during the Middle Ages when the Jewish people, especially in Europe, found itself in very desperate and abusive straits. Nevertheless the emphasis on national troubles instead of concentration solely on personal failing carries with it a strong message about the reality of being Jewish.

One's individual fate and even the judgment of Heaven upon that person on Rosh Hashana are inextricably bound to the general fate and welfare of the Jewish people as a whole. That is in reality the message of the book of Yonah that we read on Yom Kippur afternoon. Yonah knows that the storm that strikes the ship is because of him. So he answers his fellow passengers and crew on the ship who ask him to explain why these events are occurring he simply states: "I am a Jew!" He sought to escape that reality but the Lord, by means of the storm on the sea, has returned him to it.

Thus the concept of selichot is, of necessity, national as well as personal. One cannot expect to survive spiritually and morally as a Jew by separating one's self from the Jewish people and its destiny. In effect, all those that deny their Jewishness, who substitute foreign ideologies and current political correctness for true Jewish Torah values, who are the first to raise their voices against the Jewish people and its state, who deny their Jewishness by assimilation and intermarriage, doom themselves eventually not to be heard and accounted for in the continually unfolding Jewish story on a personal level as well.

Someone who does not wish to share in the burden of the Jewish nation as a whole unfortunately cuts the cord of Jewishness that grants one identity, self-worth and an overall purpose in life. The selichot prayers are so constructed as to be a retelling of the Jewish story and a declaration of fealty to Jewish destiny. In that context the selichot prayer services connect us to our Creator but also to the Jewish people in all of its generations both past and future.

There are many emotions that accompany the advent of the selichot season. Memories of past High Holy Day seasons, of generations that have passed on, of previous synagogue services and other venues of prayer, of childhood wonderment and of more mature seriousness and awe, all these flood our minds and hearts when the prayers of selichot are recited and the melodies of holiness are heard and sung. The special quality of this time of the year, of anticipation and tension, of hopeful confidence combined with trepidation, reflects itself in our attention to the immortal words of the prayer services.

Every possible human hope and emotion is to be found in those words. I always have felt that the preparation for Rosh Hashana should include a review of the texts of the prayer services beforehand so that one can savor the majesty and genius that lies embedded in the legacy of our prayer services. The selichot prayers come to us from Babylonia and North Africa, the Land of Israel and Spain, France and Germany, and Central and Eastern Europe. They cover centuries of Jewish life and creativity, piety and scholarship.

They also record for us dark days of persecutions and massacres, of trial and testing, and of hope and resilience. Their prose/poetic style may oftentimes be difficult to understand and decipher but their soul and message of genius is revealed and obvious to all those who recite their words with seriousness and intent. May the selichot season usher in to our beings and those of all of Israel as well, a renewed sense of holy purpose in our lives and may we all be blessed with a good and happy, healthy new year.

Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: NITZAVIM :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The title of this week's parsha says everything that needs to be said about the Jewish story, nation and people. After forty years of war, rebellion, strife, great accomplishment, Divine revelation, miracles, defeats, Torah study, and personal and national tragedies and heartbreak, Moshe remarks, almost incredulously, that *atem nitzavim* – you are erect and still standing proud and mighty.

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban), in his famous thirteenth century debate with the apostate Jew Pablo Christiani, told King James of Aragon that the greatest proof of Jewish uniqueness is that the Jews have survived as a people and a faith over all of these many centuries in spite of its being "a sole and small lamb amongst seventy wolves."

I had a neighbor of mine in the United States who was a Holocaust survivor. She spoke to me often and told me that she wished to return to her hometown in Poland to revisit her house and the surroundings of her shattered youth. She finally did so and when she returned I inquired of her as to how the trip and visit played out. She told me that she was able to find her house, still intact and even familiar to her. Her former Polish neighbor, a girl that she knew and played with when they were both children, now inhabited the house. She said that the Polish woman immediately recognized her even though more than four decades had passed since they last saw each other. The Polish neighbor exclaimed: "Bella, you are still alive!?"

Much of the world then wanted to be rid of the "Jewish problem" once and for all. There are many malevolent nations and people around today that still want to solve the "Jewish problem." But somehow Bella is still alive.

All of the predictions regarding the long story of the Jewish people that are recorded for us here in the book of Dvarim have come to pass in all of their grandeur and in all of their horror. Tradition has it that Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer, the Gaon of Vilna, stated that all of Jewish history, past, present and future is recorded for us in this book of Dvarim.

Certainly the Holocaust fits eerily and almost perfectly in the descriptions of Jewish pain and suffering recorded in last week's parsha of Ki Tavo. The search for God, for meaning in one's life, for transcendent values and ideals that will somehow give justification to one's efforts and life's toils, is really the hallmark of our world today, especially the Western world.

This angst and soul-searching, the chaos and loneliness of human existence, the inscrutability of God's guiding hand, so to speak, in human affairs, are all poignantly recorded for us in this week's parsha. Humans search for certainty in a very uncertain world. Many Jews, buffeted by ignorance, amnesia and false ideals, still somehow seek their identity and heritage and the road to spiritual fulfillment. We are a generation that wrestles with our own angels, the good ones and the better ones. But we are all still present here to do so. And that is the greatest wonder of all.

Shabat shalom

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Netzavim
For the week ending 15 September 2012 / 27 Elul 5772
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights

Journey To Beyond

“...to love the L-rd, your G-d, to listen to His voice and to cleave to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days...”(30:20)

It seems that for once, curiosity has not “killed the cat”.

In a mind-boggling feat of near-science-fiction, the United States has managed to send a remote exploration vehicle called "Curiosity" weighing nearly a tonne, the biggest capsule Nasa has ever used, bigger even than the Apollo Command Module, to explore the surface of our nearest planetary neighbor in space – the planet Mars.

Let's consider this journey: Eight and half months after leaving Earth, a distance of 250 million kilometers, it found its "entry keyhole" in the sky just a few kilometers across. Had it not done this, it would have had no chance of arriving at its target. The capsule entered the outer limits of Mars' atmosphere traveling at 20,000km/hr. All that speed had to be reduced to a mere stroll, for when the rover's wheels touch the ground a mere six-to-eight minutes later it was moving at no more than half a meter a second.

As the capsule raced downwards, it ejected ballast blocks to move its center of gravity and tilt its angle of approach. This gave the vehicle lift. And with the aid of thrusters and some dead-reckoning, the entry capsule flew a path through the upper atmosphere, the underside of the capsule heating up to over 2,000 degrees Celsius.

Then more ballast blocks were ejected to straighten the vehicle before, at 11km altitude and with the descent velocity now reduced to 1,400km/h, the capsule deployed a supersonic parachute. This immense canopy opened instantaneously and absorbed an impulse of almost 30 tonnes.

The parachute further slowed the fall to about 450km/h, and at that point, at an altitude of about 1.5km, we saw what flight system manager Mike Wallace called the "crazy" stuff.

A "sky crane" holding the rover dropped away from the parachute and using thruster rockets to further slow its descent, it headed down towards the surface of the planet.

At just 20m above the ground, the sky crane hovered and lowered the rover down to the surface on three nylon cords. The wheels made contact, the cords were cut, and the crane flew away to crash at a safe distance.

Quite a journey!

But this journey pales in comparison to another journey.

It says in the Book of Ecclesiastes, "...and the day of death is better than the day of birth. It's better to go to a house of mourning than to a wedding feast." (Kohelet 7:1-2)

The best advice comes from someone who is about to leave this world, someone who can look back over his life with the objectivity of someone who is leaving it.

And the best advice comes from the best teacher, and no teacher was better than Moshe Rabbeinu.

And what was Moshe's advice to his beloved people on the last day of his life as he looked back over his journey through this world?

"...to love the L-rd, your G-d, to listen to His voice and to cleave to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days..."

When we are born we face a journey that dwarfs the journey of "Curiosity." From the moment we leave the "launch pad" of birth, our days are filled with difficult and sometimes seemingly insurmountable obstacles. At every turn we can make mistakes, sometimes fatal for our spiritual well-being.

Only when we touch down on the surface of the World-to-Come can we finally relax. The whoop of exaltation in the control room of the JPL in Pasadena when Curiosity landed is nothing compared to the whoop of the soul when it finally touches down in the World-to-Come to be satiated with its just reward for having traversed a universe of trials and challenges.

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Nitzavim

You are all standing before Hashem, your G-d. (29:9)

Much has been written today concerning the meaning of the above pasuk. What is the significance of the nation's "standing" before Hashem? Also, why enumerate them according to class: leaders, elders, men, women, children? Horav Karlinstein quotes the halachah that during those parts of the davening one must stand; he must stand freely. This means that if he leans against something, such as a shtender, lectern, to the point that, if it were to be removed, he would fall over, it is not considered standing. This is considered leaning.

Rav Karlinstein derives an important lesson concerning parenting and education from this halachah. It is important that we impart to our children the lessons of life and give them the skills and tools to maneuver past the challenges and vicissitudes which they will confront throughout their lives. We want them to rely on us, but not to the point that if we - the support system - is removed, they will fall on their faces. The goal of a parent and a mechanech, educator, should be to place the child/student firmly on the ground, with the ability to address and deal with the various situations that arise. This is the underlying meaning of nitzavim, standing. We should aspire to build a nation whereby each individual person - regardless of class - fathers, sons, mothers, daughters, young and old, scholar and simple Jew - all stand independently before Hashem. Every Jew is blessed with his own unique talents, personality, skills and emotions. We should use them to the best of our ability to serve Hashem.

You are all standing today. (29:9)

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, posits that nitzavim, standing, has a deeper meaning, beyond describing the vertical position of Klal Yisrael as Moshe Rabbeinu delivered his last homily to the nation he had shepherded for the last forty years. While nitzavim does mean standing, it has a much more powerful connotation. The word nitzavim is derived from - or closely related to - matzeivah, a pillar, a monument. In his last oration to the people, Moshe tells them, "You are the matzeivah, the foundation, the pillar, the force, the very future and the eternal carriers of the flame of Torah. You perpetuate the banner of Hashem. I will pass on and move into the annals of history. Likewise, you will have great leaders throughout every generation, leaders who will be the back bone of the Jewish people, but, they, too, will move on and meet the same end that is destined for all mortals.

Moshe was intimating that, while strong leadership is the guiding force of the Jewish people, the rise and fall of our nation rests on the shoulders of those present and their children. In order that the nation continue thriving, it is necessary for the hamon am, ordinary Jew, to continue as a torch bearer. It is in him that the people of Hashem finds its greatest strength.

One has only to peruse history to note the veracity of this statement. At the early part of the twentieth-century, the east coast of America was dotted with small towns and cities which were host to distinguished Torah scholars who led their communities. They were real rabbanim of European origin who had emigrated to America, the land of opportunity. They spoke every Shabbos, gave shiurim, lectures and classes, officiated at family milestones both joyous and sad, and maintained a warm relationship with their congregants. They did not, however, build schools. Thus, in the next generation, the children had no opportunity to expand their Jewish horizons. Therefore, their Yiddishkeit died. The rabbanim passed on to their eternal reward, followed by their devoted congregants. The children were left holding the bag, but the bag was empty. The Yiddishkeit which they sorely needed in order to go on had not been inculcated in them. Their matzeivah had crumbled. If we do not educate the next generation, the only monument we will have will, regrettably, be at the cemetery.

You are standing today, all of you... for you to pass into a covenant of Hashem, your G-d, and into His oath, that Hashem, your G-d, forges with you today. (29:9,11)

Chazal teach that when Klal Yisrael accepted the oath at Har Gerizim and Har Eival - naasu areivim zeh lazeh, "They became guarantors one for another." The principle, Kol Yisrael areivim zeh lazeh, "All Jews are guarantors for one another," is the foundation for many halachos, laws, which relate to Torah observance for the individual and the community. We must care for one another, because we are responsible for each other. This is the novel idea that was declared at Arvos Moav, the Plains of

Moav. We wonder what is so novel about this idea that had not previously been indicated by the mitzvah of Hocheach tocheach es amisecha, "You shall reprove your fellow" (Vayikra 19:17). Indeed, the mitzvah of rebuke was given at Har Sinai, while the oath at Arvos Moav was later. What was supplemented by the oath that had not been included in their original acceptance of the Torah?

The Or HaChaim HaKadosh writes that Arvos Moav added a new dimension to our collective responsibility for all Jews: we must make sure to see to it that no Jew fall into a situation from which he cannot extricate himself. We have to circumvent a Jew from falling prey to sin. Anyone who can prevent his brother from sinning and does not, transgresses the oath taken at Arvos Moav. Kulchem, "all of you," each and every Jew, according to his ability, must see to it that the other Jew does not sin. Obviously, the heads of the Tribes, the spiritual leaders of each generation, those whose power extends beyond their grasp, have a much greater responsibility. Like everything else in life: it goes with the territory.

In Parashas Ki Savo (Devarim 27:26) the Torah writes: "Accursed is one who will not uphold the words of the Torah, 'to perform them.'" The members of Klal Yisrael accepted upon themselves - with a curse and with an oath - to uphold the entire Torah. The Netziv, zl, comments that this was primarily the acceptance of the Covenant at Arvos Moav. He adds that the words: Asher lo yakim, "Who does not uphold," refers to anyone who does not endeavor to uphold the Torah through others. In other words, if I do not make sure that my friend keeps the Torah, it is a stain on my observance. Regardless of what I must do - I have to try to make my brother observe the Torah. It is not enough for me to be frum, observant. I must, likewise, concern myself with the religious plateau of other Jews. I may not lock my door, close my eyes, stuff my ears, and act like the proverbial "three monkeys" - as if everything is fine. In fact, it is not fine, and I am part of the problem.

At the conclusion of the Covenant at Arvos Moav, the Torah gives us a reason for the initiative: "In order to establish you today as a people to Him and that He be a G-d to you" (Ibid. 29:12). The Or HaChaim explains that this pasuk serves as the rationale for the Covenant at Arvos Moav. A Jew might question carrying the weight of responsibility for his brother. One would think that the average Jew carries enough of a load just seeing to it that he himself remains observant and committed. To worry about everyone else might be asking a bit much. To this query, the Torah responds, L'maan hakim oscha hayom I'am, "In order to establish you today as a people." Unless Jews care about one another's spiritual welfare, the nation will eventually disintegrate. One day, it will be a simple slip in obedience; the next day, it will be a slight aveirah, sin. If this slippage is not immediately addressed, the entire nation can fall apart. The future of Klal Yisrael is based upon the spiritual solidarity of its people. If we allow our spiritually deficient brother to falter, the nation will splinter and eventually lose its singularity and distinction. Whatever Hashem does for us - or demands of us - is for our own good, so that the nation will prosper. We must remember that Klal Yisrael is one large collective body of Jews. When one member sins, it harms the entire body. Every transgression that is committed causes the Shechinah, Divine Presence, to distance itself from us. If we will not be responsible for our brothers - who will?

And He cast them to another land. (29:27)

It is obvious that the "neck" of the lamed of va'yashlicheim, "And He cast them," is elongated. Nothing is happenstance in the Torah. Every letter, spelling, nuance, is the foundation for many halachos and Torah lessons. Clearly, a lesson can be derived from the shape of the lamed. The Ridvaz, zl, quotes the Tur in his commentary to the Shulchan Aruch, who says that if someone were to throw his wallet into the reshut ha'rabim, public domain, it becomes hefker, ownerless. Whoever finds it is free to take it. If a string is attached to it, however, then regardless of the distance between the owner and the object, it is considered to still be in his possession. The rope serves as an unbreakable bond connecting the owner with his object.

When the Torah writes that Hashem threw us to another land, it would seem that we would thereby become hefker, ownerless. After all, our G-d has rejected us, and, therefore, the nations can do with us what they please. Our status of strength continues unabated as long as we embrace Hashem,

maintaining an unseverable bond with Him. When we begin to make cracks in the connection, it would seem that Hashem would allow us to become hefker. He would revoke His ownership. This will never happen. The Torah teaches us in Parashas Ha'azinu (Devarim 32:9), Yaakov chevel nachalaso, the word chevel means rope. The Torah is suggesting that whatever happens, Hashem will always maintain an attachment with His People. Even if we are cast away in His anger, we are connected by a long rope. It is almost like a bungee cord. Regardless of the length of the rope, or the distance that He casts us away, the connection has not been severed. This is symbolized by the elongated lamed. Although Hashem will throw us into the public domain, He still retains possession over us by means of His holding on to our rope. This rope is signified by the long lamed.

The hidden (sins) are for Hashem, our G-d, but the revealed (sins) are for us. (29:28)

If ever there has been a pasuk that addresses the ills of contemporary society, it is this one. On all levels of exegesis, it speaks to us and the issues which plague many of us. Simply, the Torah is addressing those who contend that they cannot be held responsible for those Jews who sin covertly, who conceal their miscreancy, often under a façade of righteousness. Not only are they not sinners - they are righteous! How dare anyone impugn their spiritual integrity? Hashem's response is quite forward: Do not worry about them. The hidden sin are in My domain. I will address the sinners. They think they can pull the wool over the eyes of their contemporaries. Perhaps they can, but they cannot fool Hashem. For the apathetic Jew who seeks refuge behind the words, "I am not observant," or "I am no longer Orthodox; it is my teacher's fault," all of these are sham excuses. They are pretexts to cover up the truth about one's nefarious activities.

We have fallen under the influence of contemporary society. Public opinion plays a dominant role in our lives. We dress to conform with the styles that are in vogue. We speak the language of the street. We have adopted the values of society. Indeed, our total demeanor reflects contemporary society. Our role models, the ones who we want most to emulate, sadly represent moral hypocrisy. Hashem tells us that we should not worry about the "hidden sinners."

Ramban adds that the pasuk addresses the sinner whose sins are so concealed that even he does not know what they are! This is probably the result of unfamiliarity with the law. Hashem tells us that we have to worry about the niglos, those sins that are readily detected. He will deal with the others.

Last, this pasuk applies to those Jews who are so assimilated that their Jewish origins have been completely forgotten. Hashem tells us that they are not our concern. At the appropriate time, He will reunite them with the remainder of the Jewish nation.

We have before us three forms of nistaros: the one who conceals his sins; the one whose sins are so "concealed" that even he himself is unaware of them; and the hidden Jew whose sins have taken him over the spiritual deep end to the point that he no longer knows that he is Jewish.

Let us address each of these nistaros. The first nistar is the hypocrite who sins covertly. On the one hand, we may be melameid z'chus, find justifiable merit, for his evil: at least he still has a sense of shame. He is not ready to flaunt his flagrant desecration of the Torah. Even in this area of concealed transgression, we find "creative" approaches to miscreancy. There is, of course, the blatant sinner who simply commits his iniquity in private. While he has never claimed to be righteous, he is not prepared to publicly sever his relationship with the Torah.

Another attitude reeks of sham piety and duplicity. This is the approach of the individual who presents himself as a saint, but, in reality, is a sinner. Indeed, it is specifically in the area for which he demands tzaddik, righteous recognition, that his insidious behavior is concealed. We refer to the individual who affixes kala ilan, blue dye, to his Tallis and calls it techeiles, wool dyed with the blood of a chalazon, fish, whose known identity is disputed. The Talmud in Bava Metzia 61b teaches us about this character, but, first, a few words of introduction.

The Torah requires us to wear Tzitzis, fringes, made of wool on our four-cornered garments. One of the four threads which are doubled over into

eight should be colored techeiles, which is something like sky-blue. This blue dye is supposed to be derived from the blood of the chalazon, which, as previously mentioned, is problematic due to a rabbinic dispute concerning its identity. Therefore, the majority of Jews do not wear techeiles.

In the Talmud Bava Metzia 61b, Chazal quote Hashem as saying, "I will punish one who dyes one of his Tzitzis with a blue dye, kala ilan, and claims it to be techeiles." Is the man doing anything wrong to anyone? Is he hurting his fellow man? No. He is simply being a phony, a moral hypocrite. Most people do not wear techeiles anyway. Who is he harming? Chazal are issuing a protest against deceitfulness and hypocrisy. This man's unctuousness covers up an individual who is very insecure. Anyone who presents himself as self-righteous and decent in an attempt to deceive others is actually a very sick person. He may fool many people, but he cannot fool Hashem, Who will exact punishment from him. A man who will prevaricate in his mitzvah performance will lie in his business dealings with his fellow man. Such a person is an insult to the Jewish community. Since his deception harms no one other than himself, we cannot do a thing to him, but Hashem will.

I recently saw a quotation from Horav Avraham Chen, zl, a Rav in Russia and later in Eretz Yisrael. He writes in his Sefer B'malchus Ha'Yahadus that the reverse is also true. This refers to one who possesses techeiles, yet refuses to wear it because he is afraid of what people might say. He is concerned lest he is suspected of being a frumi, strictly observant, one who is meticulous in carrying out mitzvos. This is the fellow who always plays down his religious observance, fearing it would make him less popular. He tells everyone that what he is wearing is kala ilan, when, in fact, it is techeiles. He gives excuses for his Yarmulke, his Shemiras Shabbos, keeping kosher, and so many other mitzvos. It is not good for business to be too frum - or so he claims. He is a moral coward who refuses to stand up for his convictions. One who does not take pride in his Jewishness has a more serious problem than he realizes. Hanistaros l'Hashem Elokeinu, The Almighty will address the bad which such actions generate. A person who is a moral cripple, who does not have the strength to support his convictions, is a danger to society.

According to Ramban, the next nistar, hidden sin, is the result of am ha'aratzus, illiteracy and an unfamiliarity with the law. The cure for this problem is learning. By studying Torah and quenching one's thirst for knowledge, one learns how to perform mitzvos properly, and how to distance himself from sin. One who has the opportunity to learn but does not do so can hardly claim that he did not know that this activity was prohibited. Had he learned, he would be knowledgeable. He just did not care enough.

The last nistar is not a sin, but an individual who has long forgotten that he is Jewish. Assimilation has taken its toll on him. Our concern concerning him is the concern of a brother for a brother. To observe so many of our brethren, individuals who are decent, ethically and morally upright, be washed away by the waves of assimilation, hurts. To see Jews by birth who have no clue concerning what this means, leaves one feeling empty. It is like watching someone die. Many of them never had a chance, as they themselves are the product of generations of assimilation. Hashem assures us that He will deal with these "hidden Jews." Every time we come across such a Jew and the opportunity for reaching out to him avails itself, we should remember that this is probably part of Hashem's plan to bring back the nistaros. To ignore the opportunity - or worse - to eschew it - is to disregard Hashem's plan. We are part of His Divine plan. By turning a blind eye to what we see and turning a deaf ear to what we hear is to declare to the Almighty, "I want no part of this." Perhaps, this might be something to consider the next time the opportunity arises.

It will be when all these things come upon you - the blessing and the curse... Then you will take it to your heart. (30:1)

While no one can actually pinpoint the corollary that exists between our rebellious behavior and the curses which follow, a definite pattern in history demonstrates the idea that allegiance to Hashem is followed by blessing and sinful behavior precedes punishment. There are those who vehemently deny this verity, but they have chosen to bury their heads in

the proverbial sand and ignore what is plain to see, by continuing to remain indifferent to what even a simpleton can deduce.

Hashem has been very upfront with us. In Parashas Ki Savo, the Torah outlines the wonderful blessings that will be showered upon us for compliance with the Torah. There is also a litany of ninety-eight curses which are Hashem's punishing rod for exacting retribution. The choice is up to us: Do we want to earn blessing, or are we on the road to curse? In his commentary Pnei David, the Chida, zl, observes that there are 676 words in the text of the k'lalos which Moshe Rabbeinu said to the nation. The number 676 is likewise the numerical equivalent of the word raos, bad/evil.

This is what the Psalmist means when he writes (Tehillim 34:20), Rabos raos tzaddik, u'mi kulam yatzileinu Hashem, "Many are the mishaps of the righteous, but from all of them Hashem rescues him." The Chida explains this homiletically: The tzaddik, Moshe, enumerated the k'lalos, curses, which (in number of words) equals the word raos, 676, but all of these k'lalos can each and every one be turned around to blessings by Hashem. As long as we include Hashem in our lives, we will be spared. The Almighty will transform k'lalah into brachah.

How does this radical change occur? The Chida explains that Hashem's name is mentioned 26 times in the k'lalos. The name yud, kay, vov, kay equals 26. Thus, 26 times 26 equals 676. Hashem converts curse into blessing. By including Hashem Echad, the Almighty is one, we add one to 676 increasing the total to 677. Therefore, by incorporating Hashem into our lives, we are able to transform raos = 676 to ezras, salvation, which equals 677. Let us make Hashem a part of our lives. The difference spells salvation.

And you will return unto Hashem, your G-d, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you today. (30:2)

Ideal repentance is not motivated by fear, but by love, preceded by an intellectual appreciation of what a Torah way of life revolving around a profound belief in Hashem can do for a person. Unquestionably, teshuvah, return/repentance, is a major step for anyone to undertake. This is, of course, especially true when one returns from a life of total assimilation and alienation. A word of warning, however, is in order: Teshuvah is much more than a step. It is a lifelong process that must continually grow as one's commitment becomes stronger and more concrete. All too often, people begin the process with great sincerity and, for some reason, become bogged down, never achieving total success. For the remainder of their lives, they are in a state of flux, questioning, postulating, wondering, "What if?" The baal teshuvah, penitent, must put his mind to rest and continue to move forward and upward. The alternative is very sad.

Horav Yisrael Meir Lau, Shlita, relates the story of a middle-aged fellow who appeared one day in the bais ha'medrash of Ponevez, where the then seventeen-year-old future Chief Rabbi was a student. It was the middle of second seder, and Rav Lau went to the back of the bais ha'medrash to search for a sefer pertaining to the topic of the Talmud that he was studying. Standing there in a sense of awe and puzzlement was a fortyish man wearing a light blue kippah, that appeared "strange" on his head. Clearly, this fellow was not a "regular" in the yeshivah environment. The man just stared at the 350 young men who were fervently engaged in their Torah study. The dialogues and debates among the various chavrusos, study partners, and chaburos, groups, can be overwhelming and awe-inspiring to a first-time visitor to the exalted halls of Torah study.

"Can I help you? Are you looking for someone?" Rav Lau asked the man. "I am looking for a Jewish teacher, someone who can teach Judaism," the man responded, somewhat "removed."

It was not unusual for people to visit the yeshivah occasionally in search of a tutor, bar-mitzvah teacher, part-time rebbe. "How old is the child?" Rav Lau asked the man.

The fellow chuckled as he answered, "Forty-two years old."

When Rav Lau heard this reply, he understood that there was more to this man than what appeared superficially. He engaged him in conversation, asking him his background and from where he hailed.

"I am a forty-two year old carpenter from Ramat Gan. I have a wonderful wife and two loving children. I have a nice apartment and, by Israeli

standards, make a decent living. My life is fine. The truth is, this is what is troubling me: Everything is fine, but I feel I am living without purpose, without goals and objectives. It is the same thing every day. There is no excitement in my life. No meaning.

"At first, I thought the answer could be found in religion. Religious Jews have a daily plan which guides them. They go to the synagogue twice daily. They seem to have purpose in their lives. They are focused, but I have no idea how it all began. Who decided that observant Jews should attend services in the synagogue, wear Tallis and Tefillin? You might say that a group of elderly scholars conversed and made these rules. Well, that does not turn me on. A group of elderly Jews - regardless of their brilliance, piety and virtue - does not impel me to observe. I need much more than that to convince me. For me to observe Shabbos and the Jewish dietary laws, I must be committed to G-d. I must know and believe that this is what G-d wants of me. Otherwise, I simply cannot undertake this obligation."

Rav Lau observed that such an individual, a true seeker of the word of Hashem, is an anomaly. It was twelve years since the Holocaust had occurred, a decade after the War of Independence, a time when the last thing people were contemplating was a return to Hashem. Teshuvah was not uppermost in anyone's mind. If someone was a standout and interested in learning more about Judaism, it was incumbent that the young yeshivah student give it his all.

He began with the time-honored argument that our "history," the origin of our nation, is not based on conjecture and hyperbole, but on the reality of 600,000 men over the age of twenty-years old witnessing a Revelation that had been unprecedented and unparalleled in the annals of time. It was an argument that even an agnostic could not refute. This young man wanted to believe. He just needed to get it all together and take that "small step" for himself. He left the yeshivah, saying that he had much to think about. He would get back to Rav Lau.

Weeks went by, and he had yet to return. Finally, after about six weeks, the man appeared once again at the yeshivah with the same perplexed countenance he had evinced the first time he came. "What happened?" Rav Lau asked him. "It has been a considerable amount of time since you were last here. Is everything all right?"

"Well," the fellow began, "I took what you said to heart. I went home and started reading, researching the history of the Jewish people. Evidently, the secularists have closed the door on our origins. It is almost as if they do not want us to study our roots. Thus, I decided to begin a life of observance, but I have encountered serious challenges: My wife thinks that I have lost my mind. My children do not know what to think anymore. Now, my wife has practically given me an ultimatum: either become "normal" again or she is leaving! What should I do? I cannot seem to convince her to accept this way of life!"

"This issue is beyond my purview. I am an unmarried student who has no experience in matters of family life. Perhaps you will join me and present the question to the Rosh Yeshivah," was Rav Lau's reply. The man acquiesced, and they went to the office of Horav David Povarsky, zl, to seek his sage counsel.

"Describe for me your last Shabbos at home," the Rosh Yeshivah said to the man.

"The Rosh Yeshivah must take into consideration that it is still summertime. I told my family that we had already entered into the month of Elul, a time for spiritual advancement and introspection. Therefore, I was not about to use the services of a taxi to go to the beach on Shabbos. It just was not right. On the other hand, my wife continues to cook on Shabbos; the radio is blasting away its usual perversion; everything is as usual - with the exception - I do not drive to the beach on Shabbos."

Rav David smiled, "I, too, do not drive on Shabbos, nor do I go to the beach. Yet, my wife does not think that I am insane. Do you want to know why your wife thinks you are not normal? Because Shabbos cannot be divided. If your wife were to know and see that you are thoroughly committed to every aspect of Jewish observance, she would respect your decision and eventually go along with it. It is because you are acting like a

hypocrite that she is turned off! Beach, no! Radio, yes! This is not Shabbos observance. If you want respect, you must show respect!"

The man understood quite well the Rosh Yeshivah's advice. It was to be either all or nothing. Teshuvah is neither a game, nor a part-time vocation. It is not a feel-good experience for those who need to stroke their egos. One is either committed, or he is not!

Va'ani Tefillah

Avinu Malkeinu... Baavur avoseinu she'batchu becha, va'tilamdeim chukei chaim... kein techaneinu u'silamdeinu.

Our Father, Our King, for the sake of our forefather who had faith in You, and You taught them the laws of life, so may You also endow us spiritually and teach us.

Horav Arye Levine, zl, makes a powerful observation that, sadly, we all often overlook. We daven to Hashem constantly, offering supplication after supplication, entreating Him for our many needs. We offer many tefillos to Hashem, daily, weekly, monthly, annually. There is only one prayer that is prefaced with a number of unique hakdamos, introductions: the Tefillah of Ahavah Rabbah, which is recited each morning prior to reciting the Shema Yisrael prayer. We begin, "You have loved us with ever-increasing love, Hashem, Our G-d. You have shown us great and overwhelming compassion." This is followed by relating how the Almighty blessed our forefathers with the Torah, and how He taught them the Torah way to live. Only then do we say the actual prayer: Kein tichaneinu u'silamdeinu, "So may You also endow us spiritually and teach us." Why all the introductions? Why not come immediately to the point: "Hashem, please endow us spiritually! Hashem teach us Torah."

Rav Arye explains that, in order to achieve success in Torah study, one must be machnia, subdue, his ego, and literally transform himself into a vessel prepared to accept the Torah within himself. Hachnaah is an essential pre-requisite for Torah study, without which one cannot develop into a talmid chacham, true Torah scholar. He might be a scholar, and he might possess wisdom, but, without hachnaah, he is not a Torah scholar. This attitude was underscored by Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen, who each wanted to study from the other. Neither one felt worthy to teach the other.

l'zechar nishmas R' Moshe Yehuda Leib ben Asher Alter Chaim z'l Feldman by his family

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org

Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column, Parshat Nitzavim

"This Season's Leitmotif: Return!"

Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a"h

We have all been brought up to believe in the importance of progress. For the past several centuries, the goal of philosophy, religion, culture, and certainly science has been to develop ideas and practices which advance humankind beyond its present state.

Poets have acclaimed the superiority of progress; one of them, Robert Browning, put it this way:

Progress, man's distinctive mark alone,
Not God's, and not the beasts': God is, they are;
Man partly is, and wholly hopes to be.

Browning is certainly not the only person who enthusiastically endorsed progress to the point of seeing it as the hallmark of humanity, and as that which sets him apart from and above the animal world, and even distinguishes him from the Almighty Himself.

So forceful has been the emphasis upon progress that any attempt to return to past ideas and methods is almost universally criticized as backward and primitive, and, at the very least, old-fashioned. The antonym for progress, regress, is a word with strong negative connotations. No one wants to be seen as a regressive.

At this time of the year, with just a few days remaining until Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, the theme of progress is definitely in the

air. We all hope to progress to a better year, to a year of growth and development. Indeed, many synagogues conclude the old year and begin a new one with the refrain, "May this year and its curses be gone, and may a new year with its blessings begin!"

No one seems to wish that the coming year be one of status quo. Certainly, very few hope for a return to the past.

And yet, it is precisely "return" that our Torah promulgates, especially at this time of year.

This week's Torah portion, Parshat Nitzavim, contains the following passage (Deuteronomy 30:1-10). I provide a literal translation of some of the verbs, in accordance with their Hebrew root:

"When all these things befall you – the blessing and the curse... And you take them to heart [literally, and you return them to your heart]... And you will return to the Lord your God, and you and your children will heed His command... Then the Lord your God will return your captivity... He will return you from all the nations... You will return and again heed the voice of Lord... For the Lord will return to delight in your well being... Once you return to the Lord your God with all your heart and soul."

In the space of just several verses the word "return" appears, in one form or another, at least seven times! It was in the writings of the great Nechama Leibowitz that I first learned the importance of a word that appears repetitiously in the course of a single text. We are to think, she wrote, of such a term as a leitwort, a leading word, a word which gives us a clue and leads us to the deeper meaning of the text at hand.

Even my limited familiarity with the German language was sufficient for me to draw the comparison between leitwort, a word that identifies the theme of an entire passage, and the word leitmotif, which is a thought or melody that pervades a literary work or a musical composition.

The ten days that begin on Rosh Hashanah and conclude on Yom Kippur are known as the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah, which is usually translated as The Ten Days of Repentance. But teshuvah does not really mean repentance, and it certainly does not mean penitence, as it is frequently rendered. Rather, it means return.

The leitmotif of this entire season is the Torah's call for us to engage in profound introspection and to return to a place which we have lost, forgotten, or abandoned. It is not progress that is demanded of us during the next several weeks; it is, oddly enough, regress.

It can legitimately be asked, return to what? I would like to provide an answer or two to that question, inspired by the book that I find so personally meaningful at this time of year. It is The Lights of Teshuvah, by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook.

Rav Kook emphasizes that over the course of time, we each develop as individuals, and in that process isolate and alienate ourselves from others, from our families, from the people of Israel. To return means to return from our self-centeredness to the collective, from the part, or single unit, to the klal, or all-encompassing group. There can be no teshuvah unless the person reconnects with larger components of society. We all, in our heart of hearts, know the ways in which he has cut himself off from significant people in his life, and each of us knows how to reconnect to those individuals.

My experience as a psychotherapist has taught me that there is another destination to which it would pay for us to return. I speak of our childhood. As we mature and develop in life, we grow in many positive directions. But we also move away from our innocence, from our childish enthusiasm, from the hope and sense of potential that characterizes the young, but which older individuals eschew cynically.

People find it very rewarding to, if only in their imaginations, return to their youth and recapture some of the positive qualities that they left behind as they made their adult choices.

Finally, we all need to return the Almighty, to His Torah, and to His Land. No matter how intense our worship of Him during the past year was, we can return to Him for an even stronger connection.

No matter how studiously we explored His Torah, we can return to even deeper levels of its impenetrable depth.

No matter how loyal our faithfulness to the land of Israel was, we can return to even greater loyalty and more courageous faith.

And no matter what our relationship was with others in our lives, we can draw upon our own inner sources of generosity and compassion and enhance those relationships in a spirit of genuine teshuvah, of returning to those others, and, in the process, to our truer selves.

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Why Be Jewish?

In the last days of his life Moses renews the covenant between God and Israel. The entire book of Devarim has been an account of the covenant – how it came about, what its terms and conditions are, why it is the core of Israel's identity as an am kadosh, a holy people, and so on. Now comes the moment of renewal itself, a kind of national referendum as it were.

Moses, however, is careful not to limit his words to those who are actually present. About to die, he wants to ensure that no future generation can say, "Moses made a covenant with our ancestors but not with us. We didn't give our consent. We are not bound." To preclude this he says these words:

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. (Deut. 29: 13-14)

As the commentators point out, the phrase "whoever is not here" cannot refer to Israelites alive at the time who happened to be somewhere else. That cannot be since the entire nation was assembled there. It can only mean "generations not yet born." The covenant bound all Jews from that day to this. As the Talmud says: we are all mushba ve-omed me-har Sinai, foresworn from Sinai (Yoma 73b, Nedarim 8a). By agreeing to be God's people, subject to God's laws, our ancestors obligated us.

Hence one of the most fundamental facts about Judaism. Converts excepted, we do not choose to be Jews. We are born as Jews. We become legal adults, subject to the commands and responsible for our actions, at the age of twelve for girls, thirteen for boys. But we are part of the covenant from birth. A bat or bar mitzvah is not a "confirmation." It involves no voluntary acceptance of Jewish identity. That choice took place more than three thousand years ago when Moses said "It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with ... whoever is not here with us today," meaning all future generations including us.

But how can this be so? Surely a fundamental principle of Judaism is that there is no obligation without consent. How can we be bound by an agreement to which we were not parties? How can we be subject to a covenant on the basis of a decision taken long ago and far away by our distant ancestors?

The sages, after all, raised a similar question about the wilderness generation in the days of Moses who were actually there and did give their assent. The Talmud suggests that they were not entirely free to say No. "The holy one blessed be he suspended the mountain over them like a barrel and said: If you say Yes, all will be well, but if you say No, this will be your burial-place" (Shabbat 88b). On this, R. Acha bar Yaakov said: "This constitutes a fundamental challenge to the legitimacy of the covenant." The Talmud replies that even though the agreement may not have been entirely free at the time, Jews asserted their identity voluntarily in the days of Ahasuerus, as suggested by the book of Esther.

This is not the place to discuss this particular passage, but the essential point is clear. The sages believed with great force that an agreement must be free to be binding. Yet we did not agree to be Jews. We were, most of us, born Jews. We were not there in Moses' day when the agreement was made. We did not yet exist. How then can we be bound by the covenant?

This is not a small question. It is the question on which all others turn. How can Jewish identity be passed on from parent to child? If Jewish identity were merely racial or ethnic, we could understand it. We inherit many things from our parents – most obviously our genes. But being Jewish is not a genetic condition, it is a set of religious obligations. There is an halakhic principle, zakhin le-adam shelo be-fanav: "You can confer a benefit on someone else without their knowledge or consent." And though

it is doubtless a benefit to be a Jew, it is also in some sense a liability, a restriction on our range of legitimate choices. Had we not been Jewish, we could have worked on Shabbat, eaten non-kosher food, and so on. You can confer a benefit, but not a liability, on someone without their consent. In short, this is the question of questions of Jewish identity. How can we be bound by Jewish law, without our choice, merely because our ancestors agreed on our behalf?

In my book *Radical Then, Radical Now* (published in America as *A Letter in the Scroll*) I pointed out how fascinating it is to trace exactly when and where this question was asked. Despite the fact that everything else depends on it, it was not asked often. For the most part, Jews did not ask the question, *Why be Jewish?* The answer was obvious. My parents are Jewish. My grandparents were Jewish. So I am Jewish. Identity is something most people in most ages take for granted.

It did, however, become an issue during the Babylonian exile. The prophet Ezekiel says, "What is in your mind shall never happen—the thought, 'Let us be like the nations, like the tribes of the countries, and worship wood and stone.'" (Ez. 20: 32). This is the first reference to Jews actively seeking to abandon their identity.

It happened again in rabbinic times. We know that in the second century BCE there were Jews who Hellenised, seeking to become Greek rather than Jewish. There were others who, under Roman rule, sought to become Roman. Some even underwent an operation known as epispasm to reverse the effects of circumcision (in Hebrew they were known as *meshukhim*) to hide the fact that they were Jews.[1]

The third time was in Spain in the fifteenth century. That is where we find two Bible commentators, R. Isaac Arama and R. Isaac Abarbanel, raising precisely the question we have raised about how the covenant can bind Jews today. The reason they ask it while earlier commentators did not was that in their time – between 1391 and 1492 – there was immense pressure on Spanish Jews to convert to Christianity, and as many as a third may have done so (they were known in Hebrew as the *anusim*, in Spanish as the *conversos*, and derogatively as *marranos*, "swine"). The question "Why stay Jewish?" was real.

The answers given were different at different times. Ezekiel's answer was blunt: "As I live, declares the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out I will be king over you." In other words, Jews might try to escape their destiny but they would fail. Even against their will they would be known as Jews. That, tragically, is what happened during the two great ages of assimilation, fifteenth century Spain and nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe. In both cases, racial antisemitism persisted, and Jews continued to be persecuted.

The sages answered the question mystically. They said, even the souls of Jews not yet born were present at Sinai and ratified the covenant (Exodus Rabbah 28: 6). Every Jew, in other words, did give his or her consent in the days of Moses even though they had not yet been born. Demystifying this, perhaps the sages meant that in his or her innermost heart even the most assimilated Jew knew that he or she was still a Jew. That seems to have been the case with figures like Heinrich Heine and Benjamin Disraeli, who lived as Christians but often wrote and thought as Jews.

The fifteenth century Spanish commentators found this answer problematic. As Arama said, we are each of us both body and soul. How then is it sufficient to say that our soul was present at Sinai? How can the soul obligate the body? Of course the soul agrees to the covenant. Spiritually, to be a Jew is a privilege, and you can confer a privilege on someone without their consent. But for the body, the covenant is a burden. It involves all sorts of restrictions on physical pleasures. Therefore if the souls of future generations were present but not their bodies, this would not constitute consent.

Radical Then, Radical Now is my answer to this question. But perhaps there is a simpler one. 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.

The people of whom God himself said, "My child, my firstborn, Israel" (Ex. 4: 22) knows itself to be royalty. That may be a privilege. It may be a burden. It may be both. It is a peculiar post-Enlightenment delusion to think that the only significant things about us are those we choose. For the truth is some of the most important facts about us, we did not choose. We did not choose to be born. We did not choose our parents. We did not choose the time and place of our birth. Yet each of these affects who we are and what we are called on to do.

We are part of a story that began long before we were born and will continue long after we are no longer here, and the question for all of us is: will we continue the story? The hopes of a hundred generations of our ancestors rest on our willingness to do so. Deep in our collective memory the words of Moses continue to resonate. "It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with ... whoever is not here with us today." We are part of that story. We can live it. We can abandon it. But it is a choice we cannot avoid and it has immense consequences. The future of the covenant rests with us.

To read more writings and teachings from the Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, please visit www.chief Rabbi.org.

Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Nitzavim: Dances of Teshuvah in Poriah

"The Eternal your God will once again gather you from among all the nations where He scattered you... bringing you to the land that your ancestors occupied.

"God will remove the barriers from your hearts, and from the hearts of your descendants; and you will love the Eternal your God with all your heart and soul." (Deut. 30:3-6)

In 1911, 18-year old Avraham Rosenblatt ran away from his parent's home in Kishinev. His parents objected to Avraham's strong desire to leave Russia for Palestine, then under the oppressive rule of the Ottoman Empire. So the young man, active for many years in a local Zionist youth group, quietly stole away from home, and made his way to Eretz Yisrael.

Decades later, Rosenblatt was a highly respected accountant and comptroller in Tel Aviv. But when he first came to the country, he was employed in the moshavot of the Galilee area, working as a farm hand and security guard of the Hashomer organization.

In the winter of 1913, Rosenblatt found himself working in Poriah, near Tiberius and the Kinneret. Poriah was a fledgling agricultural community recently established by a group of 40 young pioneers from St Louis, Missouri. The moshavah was eventually abandoned several years later, after relentless confiscations and persecution by the Turks during World War I. It would be another 40 years before the village of Poriah was reestablished.

Yet a high point in the short history of Poriah took place one legendary evening in 1913. Many of the *chalutzim* present, including Rosenblatt, cherished the memory of that wonderful winter night, when the young secular pioneers sang and danced together with Rav Kook, then chief rabbi of Jaffa.

The Rabbi's Journey to the Galilee

A small delegation of rabbis, led by Rav Kook, set out in mid-November 1913 to visit the new communities of the Galilee and north. The goal of this rabbinical tour was to strengthen ties with the isolated moshavot and bolster religious observance. As Rav Kook observed in his introduction to Eileh Massei, a pamphlet documenting the rabbis' month-long tour:

"We are called upon to assist as best we can, to 'come to God's aid for the heroes' - to visit the moshavot, to raise their spirits, to inject the dew of holy life into the bones of the settlements... [We must] elevate the life of faithful Judaism, and publicly announce the call to peace and unity between the Old Yishuv [the established religious communities in the cities] and the New Yishuv [the new Zionist settlements]."

The journey enabled the rabbis to meet the Second Aliyah pioneers first-hand, and learn of the difficulties of life on the moshavot. Meeting Rav Kook and the other rabbis had a powerful impact on many of the pioneers, awakening in them a desire for greater observance of Shabbat and kashrut. Practical arrangements for separating agricultural tithes were instituted, and other religious matters were worked out. But the most crucial issue - the problem of education, which required fundamental changes - could not be properly rectified during such a short visit.

The Visit to Poriah

When the chalutzim of Poriah heard that the rabbinic delegation was nearby, they sent two representatives - on Shabbat - to invite the rabbis to visit their community. Since Poriah was beyond the Sabbath limits, Rav Kook did not give them an immediate answer, in order to prevent further Sabbath desecration on their return trip. He told them that if they waited until Shabbat was over, he would respond. When Shabbat was over, the Rav agreed to visit the following evening.

The visit to Poriah made a powerful impression on the young pioneers who, until then felt very distant from rabbis, Torah and mitzvot. Rav Kook spoke to them about matters of Torah, and the mitzvah of settling the Land. He spoke of the need to unite the entire nation, a connection of soul and spirit, from the elderly rabbi of Jerusalem, Rabbi Sonnenfeld, to the youngest laborer in Poriah. The pioneers responded with cheers and applause. Full of youthful enthusiasm, the young men jumped up and danced with Rav Kook.

The Guard's Account

We are fortunate to have the testimony of one of the guards who was present that evening. In a letter penned nearly 60 years afterwards, Avraham Rosenblatt described in detail this inspiring encounter, vividly etched in his memory:

I recall a beautiful episode that took place 57 years ago, when Rav Kook toured the moshavot in the Galilee. I was working in the Poriah farm near the town of Tiberius. We were just a handful of 60 workers then. In the end of Tishrei 5774, we heard that Rav Kook, together with three other rabbis - Rabbis Sonnenfeld, Yadler, and Horowitz - were touring the isolated moshavot in the Galilee in order to influence them for kashrut and purity.

I remember that we were informed that the delegation was nearby, and that the rabbis would also visit Poriah. We sat in the dining hall, singing and dancing as was our custom back then. Then we were told that the delegation had arrived and were in the office of the manager, Eliyahu Israelite; and that the rabbis wished to meet with us.

We had already finished eating. We were dancing and singing, 'God will rebuild the Galilee,' when Rav Kook joined in and danced with the men.

Suddenly Rav Kook turned to me and my friend [Pinchas] Schneerson. We were both on guard duty that night, and wore Arab cloaks and kefiyyeh

headdresses, with rifles on our shoulders. Rav Kook asked us to accompany him to the manager's office. I was shorter than the Rav, but Schneerson was tall. So the Rav asked Schneerson if he could borrow his 'uniform.'

The three of us returned to the dancing, with the Rav wearing a kefiyyeh and a rifle over his shoulder. Everyone stared at Rav Kook's change of dress. In fact, the clothes suited him. The Rav began to sing 'Vetaheir Libeinu' - 'Purify our hearts to serve You sincerely.'

Then the Rav stopped and spoke to us.

"Dear brothers! Holy brothers! Builders of the Land! Just as I am not embarrassed to wear your garments, so too I request - do not be embarrassed by the Torah of Israel! In the merit of observing the Torah's mitzvot, you will live many years in the Land of Israel, in kashrut, in purity, in the study of the holy Torah. Is it so hard to be a Jew? In your homes in the Diaspora, you were certainly educated in the spirit of Judaism. Your homes were certainly conducted in purity and kashrut. Please, please..."

Rav Kook concluded his address with these words:

"I will not remove the uniform of your guard unless you promise me - all of you, with one heart and a willing soul - that you will fulfill my request. I ask that you should be guards, and guard over your 'pintele yid,' your inner Jewish spark."

We all cried out, "We promise!" And the Rav responded, "Happy is the eye that witnessed such dances of teshuvah and holiness. Praised be His name!"

Rav Kook then went to the manager's office and quickly returned, to join in our dancing. He sang 'Vekariev pizureinu' - 'Bring our dispersed from among the nations' - and other such songs. The Rav continued to dance and sing with us for over an hour.

The delegation remained the following day to oversee the kashering of all the kitchen utensils. The rabbis gave instructions to the young women working in the kitchen, and they departed in joy and happiness.

Together in Our Hearts

Many years later, Zeev Horowitz, a member of Kibbutz Geva, recalled the happy exuberance of that evening:

"I will never forget that image: Rav Kook, a tall, handsome man with a high hat, spied a security guard wearing a Bedouin cloak. He said, "Let's exchange - I'll take your 'rabbinical cloak,' and you'll take mine." Everyone's spirits were high. At the end, the Rav announced: "I wore your clothes, and you wore mine. So it should also be on the inside - in our hearts!"

(Adapted from Megged Yerachim no. 156 (Elul 5772); Eileh Massei; Encyclopedia of Founders and Builders of Israel)

Comments and inquiries may be sent to: <mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com>

Please address all comments and requests to Hamelaket@Gmail.com