

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON NITZAVIM VAYELECH - 5759

B'S'D' Washington Post noted that the United Methodist Church removed the word

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From: Rabbi Yissocher Frand[SMTP:ryfrand@torah.org]

"RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Nitzavim / Rosh Hashana
These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 295, Burying The Dead on Yom Tov Sheni.
Good Shabbos and K'siva V'Chasima Tova!

Nitzavim: Giving In To the Dictates of One's Heart This week's parsha contains the pasuk [verse] "And it will be, that when he hears the words of this curse, he will bless himself in his heart, saying 'Peace will be with me, for I will go as my heart sees fit (ki b'sherirus leebi eilech)'" [Devorim 29:18]. This pasuk is discussing a person who does not take the multitude of curses threatened in the previous Torah portion seriously. Rash"i explains the expression "sherirus leebi" to mean "the way my heart sees it" (as in the expression ashurenu v'lo karov [Bamidbar 24:17]). In other words, whatever my heart perceives as being the correct path, that is how I will proceed. This is the simple interpretation of the expression. Rav Gifter (Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe Yeshiva, Ohio), however, provides an interesting insight. The word "sherirus" actually should be spelled -- shin reish YUD reish vov sof. It appears without the yud so that when reading the letters without vowels, the words sound like "b'serarus leebi" (by the rule of my heart). Rav Gifter says that if a person wants to follow the inclinations of his heart, eventually his heart will rule over him. His heart will control him. The task of every Jew is to rule over the dictates of his heart. Once a person says, "I want to go my own way, I will indulge and have a good time", ultimately he will be so controlled by his heart that he will be incapable of saying 'no'. When one goes after the _vision_ of his heart (sherirus), he ultimately winds up controlled by the _dictates_ (serarus) of his heart.

The Head of the Fish/The Hat of a Chossid:

Thoughts for the Days of Awe

On the holiday of Rosh Hashana, there is a Jewish custom that after returning home from shul [Prayer Services] at night, we eat various foods that are symbolic of a propitious start to the New Year. We eat the head of a fish or the head of a lamb so that we "will be at the head and not at the tail". We dip challah and apple in honey so that we will "have a sweet year". We eat fish so that we will "multiply like fish". Is it not peculiar that we spend a whole day in shul on Rosh Hashana, pouring out our hearts, asking for what we need, and yet when we come home from shul we need to rely on these "signs"? Will the head of the fish accomplish what six hours of davening [prayers] did not accomplish? To answer this question, let us ask one other question. Our Rabbis tell us that three barren women were remembered on Rosh Hashana -- Sarah, Rachel, and Channah [Rosh Hashana 11a]. What point are our Sages making by telling us this? The Shemen HaTov quotes a Tikunei Zohar: "The people, on the day of Yom Kippur, bark like dogs, 'give us sustenance' (like an aggressive dog, who barks for bread)." People come on the Days of Awe with a wish list. "Hav, Hav (Give, Give) -- give us food, give us sustenance." This human tendency to focus on one's physical needs causes us to miss the major focus of the day. If we look at the nature of the Rosh Hashana liturgy, we will notice that it contains very little by way of asking for personal needs such as livelihood, sustenance, etc. On Rosh Hashana we primarily ask G-d to "rule over the entire world with Your (His) Honor". Rosh Hashana is a cosmic day. Rosh Hashana does not deal with trivial and mundane pursuits. Rosh Hashana must be more elevated than that. Rosh Hashana is really all about the concept that He is the King and we are the servants. Nothing else in our entire life should concern us, other than that we establish that He is the King. A recent article in the

Washington Post noted that the United Methodist Church removed the word "Lord" from its liturgy, because "Lord" implies that we are servants (this was in 1993). "That is too harsh! Redeemer is fine; Healer is fine; Friend is fine; but if he is the Lord, where does that leave me? I would then be a servant." That seems to be politically incorrect thinking today. On the contrary, on Rosh Hashana, we stress that G-d is the King and we are indeed the servants. The true servant has no other wish in life other than that the King should be exalted and glorified. This is true to such an extent that the only time we really worry about our sustenance, about our ability to have children, or about having a little sweetness in our own lives, is when we come home at night after having finished in shul. Then we have the "signs". The context of those "signs" becomes "Yes, G-d, I know what it is all about. It is about serving You. But I can not serve You unless I have a livelihood, unless I have health, unless I have children, etc. Therefore, please help me out." That is why these three women were remembered on Rosh Hashana. These three women had something in common. They all worried about someone else. "G-d remembered Sarah as he said" [Bereshis 21:1]. Rash"i cites the connection between this portion and the immediately preceding portion. Since Avraham prayed for a cure for Avimelech, Avraham's own needs were answered. Avraham thought about someone else's needs, and therefore his needs were provided for. "G-d remembered Rachel" [Bereshis 30:22]. Why did G-d remember Rachel? G-d remembered Rachel because she remembered someone else. Rachel thought about the embarrassment of her sister. She was selfless. That is what Rosh Hashana is about -- selflessness. Chana was also remembered on Rosh Hashana [Shmuel I 2:21]. Why did G-d remember Chana? He remembered her because of the reason why she was asking for a child. Chana was not asking for a child because she wanted someone to cuddle. Chana wanted to have someone to dedicate to G-d all the days of his life. Her request was altruistic. This is the difficult task of Rosh Hashana. It is a day when we must put things in their proper perspective. Life is really about being a faithful servant. As hard as that may seem for modern man living in the end of the twentieth century, that is the name of the game. All the needs that we present to G-d must be in the context of "Can I thereby become a better servant?" The Shemen HaTov tells of the following incident, which involved the grandfather of the present Belzer Rebbe. It was Yom Kippur in Belz. They had finished the Mincha prayer early, and the Chassidim went to take a rest or a walk before they began the Neilah prayer, the final prayer of Yom Kippur. Everyone left the Beis HaMedrash [Study Hall]. Like many others, one of the honorable and wealthy Chassidim left his Shtreimel [fur hat worn by Chassidim] at his seat. When he returned before Neilah, the Shtreimel was missing. Someone stole a Shtreimel from the Beis HaMedrash in Belz on Yom Kippur! There was a great commotion. Who could do such a thing?! The Rebbe (unaware of what had happened) went to begin Neilah as scheduled. After Yom Kippur the Rebbe called over the Chassidim and asked them, "What was the big commotion before Neilah?" They told him "Someone stole a Shtreimel". The Rebbe told them to all to go and break their fasts. Later, the Rebbe asked to see a certain chossid. The chossid came to the Rebbe and the Rebbe told him "You stole the Shtreimel". The fellow denied it. The Rebbe persisted in the charge until finally the chossid broke down and confessed. The next day in Belz, "For the Jews there was Light" [Esther 8:16]. Everyone proclaimed a miracle: "the Rebbe has Ruach HaKodesh [Divine Spirit]." However, the Rebbe explained that "It was not Ruach HaKodesh. The way that I knew who stole the Shtreimel was as follows. Before Yom Kippur, all of my Chassidim gave me a kvittel (a small written note with their prayer requests). Everyone had needs. This one asked to see nachas from his children, this one asked to marry off a daughter, all sorts of requests. One Chossid, however asked only for Parnassah (livelihood). A Jew who can think to ask for nothing else on Yom Kippur besides Parnassah, is the type of person who would steal a Shtreimel on Yom Kippur." That is how the Rebbe knew. As important as all of our needs are, Rosh Hashana is the day on which we must put them in perspective. All these needs are only the medium for being able to do what we are supposed

to be doing -- working to establish the Kingship of G-d over the entire world, speedily in our days.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington twerskyd@aol.com
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Yerushalayim
dhoffman@torah.org

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http://www.torah.org/ Baltimore, MD 21208 (410) 602-1350 FAX: 602-1351

From: Jeffrey Gross [SMTP: jgross@torah.org] neustadt@torah.org Subject: Selichos and Erev Rosh Hashana WEEKLY-HALACHA FOR 5759
SELECTED HALACHOS RELATING TO SELICHOS AND EREV ROSH
HASHANA By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

For final rulings, consult your Rav.

SELICHOS and EREV ROSH HASHANAH:
COMMON QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

QUESTION: May the Selichos prayer be recited at night before going to sleep or must it be recited only upon awakening in the morning? ANSWER: Ideally, Selichos should be said at the end of the night, since that is an eis ratzon, a "time of appeasement(1)." But it is permitted to recite Selichos anytime from midnight on. Before midnight it is prohibited to recite Selichos(2). Under extenuating circumstances - if one cannot recite Selichos at any other time - Selichos may be recited once a third of the night has passed(3). But this leniency should not be relied upon on a regular basis.

QUESTION: Must Birchos ha-shachar be recited before Selichos? ANSWER: Birchos ha-Torah should be recited before Selichos(4). The other blessings need not be recited before Selichos, but may be recited then even though it is before alos ha-shachar(5). [If Al netilas yadayim is recited before Selichos - as recommended by some poskim(6) - one should be sure not to repeat it after Selichos from force of habit.]

QUESTION: Are women obligated to recite Selichos? ANSWER: Since the recitation of Selichos - even for men - is not an obligation but an ancient custom which has been practiced for many centuries, we are not obligated to do more than what custom dictates. Customarily, women did not go to shul to recite Selichos. If they wish to do so, however, women may go to shul to recite Selichos, or they may recite Selichos at home. But the following rules apply when reciting Selichos without a minyan [for both men and women]: 1) When reciting E-l melech, some poskim hold that the words Zechor lanu ha-yom bris shelosh esrei are omitted(7). 2) The 13 midos are omitted(8). 3) Machei u'masei (recited towards the end of the Selichos) and any other segment which is in Aramaic is omitted(9).

QUESTION: Must a person who fasted [half a day] on erev Rosh Hashanah in the past, continue to do so every year(10)? ANSWER: The Shulchan Aruch(11) writes that it has become customary(12) to fast on erev Rosh Hashanah(13). Many people, especially during their younger years, adopt this custom but find it difficult to maintain as they get older. The process for giving up fasting on erev Rosh Hashanah depends on how the custom was adopted originally. There are three possible cases: If the custom was accepted initially as a lifelong commitment, one must annul his vow. If the custom was accepted initially on a year-by-year basis, no hataras nedarim (annulment of vows) is required. If the custom was accepted initially without specifying the length of the commitment, then one follows the general principle that any proper custom which was accepted without a b'li neder stipulation, automatically becomes a neder and may not be dropped without hataras nedarim. [Note that this halachic problem is not unique to the custom of fasting on erev Rosh Hashanah. Any proper custom, once accepted and followed, may not be dropped without undergoing hataras nedarim. People who adopt even "simple" customs which they are not really obligated to

practice, like reciting Tehilim daily or studying the daf yomi(14), without making the b'li neder stipulation, require hataras nedarim should they decide to discontinue their practice. An exception to this rule is when one undertakes a practice which he thinks is obligatory, but later finds out that it is not. In that case, he may drop his practice without hataras nedarim(15). For instance, a person who ate chalav Yisrael butter only because he thought it was absolutely required, but later found out that this is not the case, may discontinue his practice without being matir neder.] A possible solution to the problem of discontinuing a custom may be found in the concluding declaration that is recited after the hataras nedarim ceremony that takes place every year on erev Rosh Hashanah. The declaration states that "I cancel from this time onward all vows and oaths that I will accept upon myself... and that all of them are totally null and void, without effect and without validity." Harav S.Z. Auerbach rules that this declaration can also cover any proper custom that was undertaken without a b'li neder(16).

QUESTION: Can anyone be a member of the court for the purpose of annulment of vows (hataras nedarim)? ANSWER: Any male adult(17) can be a member of the court, even if he is related to the other members or to the petitioner(18). Three judges suffice for hataras nedarim. Some poskim prefer ten judges(19) and some insist on eleven(20), but it has become customary to have only three.

QUESTION: Must women officially annul their vows on erev Rosh Hashanah? ANSWER: Hataras nedarim on erev Rosh Hashanah(21), even for men, is a custom, not an obligation. It was never customary for women to annul their vows on erev Rosh Hashanah, and there is no compelling reason to begin such a custom now. Many men are accustomed to include their wife's vows at the time that they annul their own(22). L'chatchilah, a wife should appoint her husband to be her emissary for annulling her vows. If, however, she forgot to do so, her husband may annul her vows for her without being expressly appointed as her emissary, as long as he is absolutely certain sure that she wants him to annul her vows for her. A woman who has a specific vow that she must annul should do so in front of a court of three judges. Although her father and brother [or any other relative] may be members of that court, her husband may not(23). A daughter cannot appoint her father [or anyone else] to petition the court on her behalf (24). For the annulment to be valid, the petitioner and the members of the court must understand exactly what is being said. A woman [or a man] who does not understand the published Hebrew text, should annul her vows in English(25). Minors, even a boy over the age of 12 and a girl over 11, need not perform hataras nedarim(26).

FOOTNOTES: 1 O.C. 581:1 and Mishnah Berurah. 2 Mishnah Berurah 565:12. One who finds himself in a shul where Selichos are being recited before midnight should not recite the Thirteen Attributes along with the congregation; Sha'arei Teshuvah 581:1 quoting Birkei Yosef. 3 Igros Moshe O.C. 2:105. See Yechaveh Da'as 1:46, who advises reciting Selichos before Minchah as the better alternative. 4 Mishnah Berurah 46:27. 5 Rama O.C. 47:13. See Mishnah Berurah 31 who writes that asher nassan la-sechvi binah should l'chatchilah not be recited before alos ha-shachar. 6 Sha'arei Teshuvah 6:5; Aruch ha-Shulchan 4:5; 6:10. Chayei Adam 7:6 and Mishnah Berurah 4:4 and 6:9, however, recommend that it be recited right before davening, after using the bathroom. 7 Be'er Heitev 565:6; Mateh Efrayim 581:21; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 128:9. 8 O.C. 565:5. It is permitted, however, to read them as if reading from the Torah, with the proper cantillation marks. See also Igros Moshe Y.D. 3:21 who allows them to be chanted to any melody, as long as it is different from the melody used in davening. 9 Based on O.C. 101:4, quoted by Mateh Efrayim 581:21. Even when reciting Selichos with a minyan, the Aramaic segments should not be recited unless there are ten men present in the shul and at least six of them reciting this segment; Harav S. Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Nitei Gavriel, pg. 27). 10 If one is not feeling well, he is exempt from fasting on erev Rosh Hashanah. It is proper to mention this problem to the members of the court who are going to annul his vows on erev Rosh Hashanah after Shacharis. 11 O.C. 581:2. 12 Although Mishnah Berurah 16 writes that women also fast,

this is not widespread today. 13 In most communities the fast is only for half a day, or until after Minchah Gedolah. 14 See Teshuvos Ohr ha-Meir 75 (Harav M. Shapiro), who remains undecided as to whether one may switch his study schedule from the study of daf yomi. See also Yechaveh Da'as 6:52, who rules that one who switches from studying the daf yomi to studying practical halachah does not need any hataras nedarim, since he is raising his level of learning. 15 Y.D. 214:1. See Igros Moshe Y.D. 1:47. 16 Minchas Shelomo 91 based on Teshuvos Salmas Chayim 2:38. See also Yabia Omer 2:30 and 4:11-9 who relies on this as well. [Although women do not customarily petition for hataras nedarim on erev Rosh Hashanah, as discussed later, it would be advisable for any woman to recite this declaration, even to herself, thus preventing questionable situations in the future.] 17 An adult is defined as being over thirteen if he has visible beard growth, and at least over eighteen if no beard growth is noticeable; see Magen Avraham, Shulchan Aruch Harav and Pri Megadim 39:1, and Chayei Adam 14:1. See also Beirur Halachah 39:1, who is even more stringent. See also Shevet ha-Levi 4:54-4. 18 Y.D. 228:3. 19 Since vows which were undertaken during a dream can be annulled only by ten judges; see Mateh Efrayim and Elef ha-Magen 581:49. 20 Since a court should not be made up of an even number of judges; see Mishnas Ya'avetz O.C. 53. 21 If not done on erev Rosh Hashanah, it may be done anytime during the week, even at night (Y.D. 228:3), until Yom Kippur; see Mateh Efrayim 581:49. 22 This is the custom in Israel and other places. Harav S. Wosner is quoted (mi-Beis Levi, Tishrei, pg. 18) as dismissing this custom. 23 Y.D. 234:57. 24 Y.D. 228:16. 25 Chayei Adam 138:8; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 128:16. 26 She'arim Metzuyanim b'Halachah 128:24. See Shevet ha-Levi 5:129-3.

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From: Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky :rmk@torah.org Drasha Nitzavim -- Vayelech -- Battle Hymn of the Republic Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The final portions of the Torah don't let us escape from the harsh realities of real-world trials and tribulations. In this week's combined portions of Nitzavim & Vayelech, and in the following portion of Ha'azinu, the Torah discusses the harsh realities of sin and consequences. Hashem describes the scenario that will arise after the death of Moshe. "And this nation will arise and turn to foreign gods, and they will leave the treaty that I cut with them. And my wrath shall burn upon them and I will leave them. They will be for prey and many evils, and pain will find them, and they will say on that day, 'is it not because G-d is not with us that all this evil befalls us!' And I will hide My face on that day for all the evil that they did; for turning to other gods." (Deuteronomy 31:16-19). The next verse seems totally out of place. "And now write this song for them and place it in their mouths and teach it to the children of Israel, so that this song will be for Me as a testimony in the Children of Israel!" (Deuteronomy 31:20). The juxtaposition of the verses provokes many questions. Why does Hashem tell Moshe to write the song now? Why is the impending doom called "a song"? Why does the Torah say "it will be a testimony for Me"? Who is testifying and to whom? What does it mean "put it in their mouths"? Shouldn't the Torah be put in their ears? Why would we want to sing this distressing song anyway? Of course, Rashi and many of the great medieval commentators explain these verses with great clarity. I, however, would like to take a homiletic approach.

This past Sunday I had the pleasure of meeting with William Goldberg, a true friend and supporter of Jewish education. He left me with a moving story that he heard this past Shabbos from Rabbi Shlomo Riskin of Efrat,

who was the Scholar-In-Residence at the Atlantic Beach Jewish Center.

After World War II, the Klausenberger Rebbe, Rabbi Yukisiel Halberstam, of blessed memory, a survivor of the concentration camps held a minyan in the Beth Moses Hospital in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. Parshas Ki Savo arrived and with it, the section known as the tochacha (admonishment), which is filled with foreboding warnings of doom and destruction, lest the Jewish nation stray from the will of G-d. The verses warn of unimaginable horrors: exile, starvation, rape, robbery, and torture -- to name just a few. The custom of Jews world-over is to read the verses of tochacha quietly, so as not to rile up enemies, celestial and otherwise, who may think those calamities a good idea to cast upon the Jewish Nation. So it was the portion of Ki Savo, and the Klausenberger Rebbe and his minyan of ravaged survivors were about to read the tochacha and re-live horrors of their recent history through the words of the ancient prophecies. The Torah-reader started the verses of doom in a hushed tone. He began reading them quietly and quickly. Suddenly the Rebbe banged on his lectern. "Hecher!" he shouted. (Yiddish for louder.) The reader looked up from the Torah with a puzzled look on his face. Perhaps he was reading the Torah a bit too low. He raised his voice a notch, and continued in a louder undertone. But the Rebbe was not satisfied. "Louder!" he exclaimed. By now the reader was reading as loudly as his normal recitation, and yet the Rebbe continued to bang on the lectern and exclaim, "HECHER!" The reader could not contain his puzzlement and instead of shouting the portion he stopped and looked to the Rebbe for an explanation. "We no longer have to read these miserable curses quietly," the Rebbe exclaimed. "There is no curse we have not experienced. There is no affliction we have not suffered! We saw it all. We lived it all. Let us shout with pride to our Father in Heaven that we have already received all the curses! We have survived these curses, and now it is His turn to bring us the blessings and the redemption!" And with that the reader continued reading the tochacha loud and clear as if singing an anthem to his nation's tenacity.

Hashem tells Moshe to write this song and teach it to every Jew that will face difficulties. It shall be "a song that should be in our mouths. And it will be a testimony before the Almighty." Our experiences should be sung with honor as a badge of courage and fortitude. Like the Purple Hearts of wounded soldiers, they shall be a witness to Him. So that when calamities befall us we shall surmount our misfortunes. They will not be agonies that we shall cower behind. Rather, they will be a testimony to our faith, our commitment, and most importantly our eternity.

Dedicate in honor of the Bar Mitzvah of our son Joshua by Suzanne and Barry Rozenberg A special Pre-Rosh Hashana class will be held on Wednesday, October 8, 1999 at 1:00 PM in NYC at the office of Martin Oliner -- 375 Park Avenue corner 52nd. 37th floor entitled "The Sounds of Silence" Drasha, Copyright (c) 1999 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc. Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Associate Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore, <http://www.yoss.org/> . Project Genesis: Torah on the Information Superhighway learn@torah.org 17 Warren Road, Suite 2B <http://www.torah.org/> Baltimore, MD 21208

From: Yeshivat Har Etzion's Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash :yhe@vbm-torah.org] Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash Project(vbm) Student Summaries of Sichot Delivered by the Roshei Yeshiva PARASHAT NITZAVIM SICHOF HARAV LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A THE PRINCIPLE OF CHOICE AND THE PRINCIPLE OF TESHUVA Summarized by Danny Orenbuch

"In the beit midrash (study-hall) of Rabbeinu Nissim it was once asked, 'Why do we divide the [double] portion of Nitzavim-Vayelech into two when there are two Shabbatot between Rosh Ha-shana and Sukkot (not counting Yom Kippur), rather than dividing [the double portion of] Mattot-Mas'ei, which are longer?' And he answered, 'Because in the parasha of Nitzavim there are curses with which he cursed Israel, and we

wish to conclude them before Rosh Ha-shana.' But this reply is difficult, for we do not count the curses which Moshe Rabbeinu cursed! And furthermore, according to this explanation why do we not read [parashat] Ha'azinu before Rosh Ha-shana, for here too there are curses?... Therefore it seems to me that the reason we divide them is because we want to finish and to read on the Shabbat before Rosh Ha-shana a parasha which makes no mention of curses, in order not to juxtapose curses with Rosh Ha-shana." (Tosafot Megilla 31a, s.v. Kelalot)

According to the second opinion in Tosafot above, our parasha contains no curses but rather, on the contrary, is to be considered as a break from them. Even Rashi who, contrary to the Ramban (who holds that Sefer Devarim is a book of good tidings about appeasement and mercy), believes that this is a book of rebuke, perceives a change in our parasha:

"And a midrash aggada teaches: Why was the parasha of Nitzavim placed next to that of the curses? Because [the nation of] Israel had heard one hundred curses minus two... Their faces fell, and they said: "Who can stand this?!" Moshe Rabbeinu began to appease them: "You are standing (nitzavim) here today" - you have angered God greatly, but He has not destroyed you, and here you are, standing before Him today. And just as He exists today and He darkens and makes light, so he made light for you [in the past], and so will He make light for you in the future..." (Rashi, Devarim 29:12)

Indeed, our parasha, although short, may be considered the "minority which determines the majority" from the point of view of the important principles which it contains. We may perhaps even regard it as the crowning glory of the entire Sefer Devarim.

The first major principle is that of free choice. Even though this has been mentioned previously in the Torah, a concentrated discussion of the topic is presented here. Furthermore, our parasha explicitly presents the choice between the two paths: "See, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil" (Devarim 30:15). Nevertheless, there is a command that we choose the normative path: "And you shall choose life."

Another important principle mentioned in our parasha is that of teshuva (repentance). This idea, too, has already been mentioned. In parashat Naso we are told, "A man or woman who commits any mortal transgression to sin against God, such that that person will be guilty, then they must confess their sin which they did and make full restitution for their sin" (Bamidbar 5:5-7). Earlier in Sefer Devarim, too, in parashat Va'etchanan, we learn: "And you shall return unto the Lord your God, and you shall listen to His voice." (Devarim 4:30)

Clearly, there is a difference between the two descriptions - the one in Sefer Bamidbar and the other in Sefer Devarim - in terms of both background and scope, and both in the procedure of teshuva and in its results and ramifications.

From the point of view of background, Sefer Devarim is speaking of people who are completely cut off and removed from God. So it is that parashat Va'etchanan describes a scene where, "when you give birth to children and grandchildren and you shall have stayed long in the land and shall become corrupt, and you shall make an idol, the likeness of anything, and you shall perform evil in the eyes of the Lord your God to make Him angry;" this describes a situation of idolatry with the purpose of angering God. This is also the background to our parasha - people who were expelled from the land and exiled as a result of the curses (spelled out in the previous parasha, Ki Tavo) which God visits upon them because of their evil ways and deeds. Sefer Bamidbar, on the other hand, deals with the person who happens to stray from the straight path on a particular occasion: one who commits a single transgression for which he seeks to atone.

As regards scope, too, there is a difference. While Sefer Devarim describes a general, national phenomenon, Sefer Bamidbar deals with the individual who sins.

Since the background to teshuva is different in these cases, the

process, too, is different. For the person who sinned in one particular instance, it is sufficient to perform a "technical" teshuva consisting of viddui (confession) and a sin-offering, after which he is considered to have atoned for his sin. In Sefer Devarim, which deals with the person who is - as a general state of affairs - distanced and cut off from God, a complete change of personality is required, penetrating his heart and innermost character: "And you shall take it to heart..." (30:1). Furthermore, because he is removed, he is obligated to return: "And you shall return to the Lord your God" (4:30). The effort required of him is also greater: "You shall find Him, if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul" (4:29), "and you shall return unto the Lord your God... with all your heart and with all your soul" (30:2).

The ramifications and reaction on God's part are also different. A person who is so far removed from God needs assistance from Above: "From there the Lord your God will gather you up, and from there will He take you" (30:4); "and the Lord your God will circumcize your hearts..." (30:6). And finally, the happy tidings of teshuva and redemption together: "And the Lord your God will return your captivity and will have mercy on you, and He shall gather you up again from all the nations among which the Lord your God scattered you."

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Friday, September 3, 1999 á á 22 Elul 5759 ááUpdated Fri., Sep. 03 02:05
SHABBAT SHALOM: Journey's end
By RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

(September 2) "For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off... But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it." (Deut. 30:11)

<Picture>Repentance is a world unto itself, covering every aspect of life. Indeed, repentance is not only a central theme of this month of Elul, as we prepare for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, but is a fundamental requirement all year round. To help us understand why and how every Jew might "buy into" teshuva, we must study the first half of this week's double portion of Nitzavim/Vayeilekh.

Some understand the words "this commandment which I command you this day" to be a reference to the whole of the Torah. Others see it as indicating the laws, chastisements and warnings in the book of Deuteronomy, while Nahmanides insists that it refers specifically to the commandment of teshuva (repentance) - for if we examine the 10 verses which precede the one just cited, the key word is shuv and the subject is repentance.

It is on this basis that the great sage Rav Menahem Mendel of Kotsk, commenting on the statement that repentance is not too far off, once asked his disciples to estimate the distance between east and west. He rejected all of their calculations, and said: "The distance between east and west is "only one small turn, nor ein klein drei." And that, he continued, is the secret of repentance: it requires only one small turn!

But clearly the change in direction is only the beginning of the process called repentance. Indeed, a careful reading of our biblical portion (the first 10 verses of chapter 30) will reveal three distinct stages of teshuva. The first: "And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon you - the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you - that you shall return to your heart [ve-hashivota el levavekha] from among all the nations wherein the Lord your God has driven you" (Deut. 30:1).

"Ve-hashivota el levavekha..." is a difficult phrase to translate. To the biblical mind, one's heart is the seat of the intellect - as well as the very

essence of the individual. The unique aspect of every human being is the "image of God" in which each human being is formed. We begin our daily prayers with the declaration, "Lord, the soul which You have given me is pure; ...You have bequeathed it unto me [as part of Your own spirit and eternity]."

My rebbe and mentor, Rav J. B. Soloveitchik z"l, speaks of sin as illness. When we say a person "sins," we're really saying that he is not at one with his most essential self. And so sin here is not limited to ritual laws, or even interpersonal laws, but includes the obligations a person has to his own essence. Every person wants to do the best he or she can; that can never happen unless one aspires toward and eventually reaches one's potential, not only professionally and materially, but intellectually and spiritually.

"Returning to the heart" is therefore the first step in repentance; it implies a turning away from the body, from the place in one's being where instinct rules. A person who concentrates exclusively on hedonistic pleasures must eventually reach a point where the relentless pursuit of pleasure no longer gratifies. And here we have an identity crisis, a crisis in the depths of one's being, a turning away from the body and a turning toward the heart and the mind. This is the start of a profound transformation.

Once this sense of inner discomfort erupts and is identified, we enter the second stage: "And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee... and you shall turn towards God [ve-shavta ad HaShem]."

Moving from stage one to stage two of repentance need not manifest itself as a seeking out of God in His traditional places, for at this point a person's discovery of transcendence thrills him or her to the possibility that what one is seeking may be found anywhere and everywhere. The seeker may not even realize that it is God he seeks.

And there are those who seek God in the wonders of nature, in the still starry nights, in the ocean waves, in volcanic explosions. A sizable proportion of Israel's post-army youth spends a year at the ends of the earth: the Himalayas, the Andes, the jungles of Brazil. Are they looking for the perfect sunset? Whoever said that climbing Mt. Everest was only about climbing a mountain! Or that volunteering in a hospital is only about aiding the weak and sick? This search for God is what the second stage of repentance is about. The individual yearns for closeness to the divine, to be near (ad) consummate goodness.

Then we are ready for the third stage, the subject of the final verse in our passage: "If you shall hearken unto the voice of the Lord your God, if you turn unto [el] the Lord your God [ki tashuv el HaShem] with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 30:10).

The change in prepositions from the ad (near) of verse two to the el (unto) of verse 10 is crucial for our understanding of repentance. Whereas ad implies nearness in space, the word el deals more with nearness in time. Ad is a desire to be near God, to hang out where He hangs out. El means to move toward a relationship. A movement closer to God implies leaving places where the Divine Presence is not to be found, rejecting the bars and the discos. A dialogue with the Almighty means attempting to hear His voice. The divine word is the lore and law "written in this book of the Torah..." (Deut. 30:10). Perhaps I move nearer to God when I eliminate the most obnoxious sins from my activities; but I only begin to relate to Him when I attempt to live a life of dialogue with the divine.

The passage at hand adds one crucial feature. Outside the Holy Land, it may be possible to feel close to God; but it is only within the Holy Land that we may aspire to enter a dialogue with the divine. And so after the return near (ad) comes a description of the ingathering of the exiles; only after that can there be a return unto (el).

Shabbat Shalom

From: Kenneth Block[SMTP:kenblock@worldnet.att.net]
Subject:NCYI Weekly Divrei Torah - Netzavim/Vayelech
Parshat Netzavim/Vayelech Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner Young Israel of Pawtucket/Congregation Ohave Shalom, RI 23 Elul 5760 September 4, 1999

Daf Yomi: Taanit 28

This week, the curtain begins to fall on the life of Moshe Rabbeinu. Before the end, though, we are shown a final act which contains a scene reflecting the theme of Moshe's existence the theme of Revolution. Moshe's very birth, accompanied by a flash of light, had been a revolution unto itself a protest against the Pharaonic policy of drowning baby boys. Moshe, never satisfied with a flawed status quo, contended and battled with kings and Malachim. When necessary, Moshe even argued with HaShem for the sake of the Jewish nation. Moshe's lifelong mission had been no less than a physical and cultural revolution a revolution against Egyptian enslavement of the body, and a revolution against the Egyptian culture's enslavement of the Jewish soul. Moshe, as both fiery revolutionary and humble messenger, taught a nation how to be free, and how to be slaves of HaShem.

What was this great revolutionary's last lesson to his people? What was Moshe's last charge to the people he had led for forty years?

In the final verses recording his life, Moshe presented the Jewish people with the 613th and last Mitzvah in the Torah, the Mitzvah for each Jewish man to write a Sefer Torah for himself. This Mitzvah is described thus in the Sefer haChinuch: Among the roots of this Mitzvah is the fact that people take action based on what is prepared for them. Therefore, HaKadosh Baruch Hu commanded that each Jewish man should have a Sefer Torah ready, with him, so that he will be able to read from it at all times, and he will not need to go elsewhere to find one.

It would seem, then, that the purpose of this Mitzvah is to have a Sefer Torah available, for study. The Rosh (Hilchos Sefer Torah 1), Tur (Yoreh Deah 270) and others have noted that one may fulfill some part of this Mitzvah by writing other Torah texts, besides a Sefer Torah. [The Sefer haChinuch explains that the obligation to fulfill this Mitzvah is limited to Jewish males because of the difference between the obligations of women and men as far as studying Torah.]

Executing this Mitzvah prepares a person to fulfill the Mitzvah of studying Torah, thereby enabling execution of all of the other Mitzvos. After a person has read about all of the other Mitzvos, he learns a method of guarding the other 612, ensuring that he will be able to continue his growth.

What is revolutionary about this Mitzvah? Perhaps this 613th Mitzvah is more than a safeguard for other Mitzvos. This Mitzvah, representing Moshe's final instruction to all of the ensuing generations, actually breaks new ground in the way a Jewish man should perceive his stake in Torah. This Mitzvah marks a new stage in the revolution which Moshe began, the struggle against Egyptian influence, and the attempt to create a bond between humanity and HaShem. This 613th Mitzvah is no less than an instruction to every Jewish man to create a Masorah [chain of tradition], himself.

The Mitzvah to study Torah plays a similar role, but where studying Torah perpetuates learning, making a physical copy of the Torah goes much farther. Faithful observance of this Mitzvah guarantees the creation of thousands, even millions of copies of the Torah, and copies of Moshe, among the Jewish people.

The Gemara (Menachos 30) teaches us: Whoever writes a Sefer Torah is as though he received the Torah, himself, at Sinai.

When we look at the specifics of this Mitzvah, we see this idea clearly spelled out. The ideal fulfillment of the Mitzvah is for each Jewish male to write a Torah himself, and not simply to purchase a scroll. Owning a scroll does not fulfill the Mitzvah, and inheriting a scroll does not meet one's obligation. It is possible to perform this Mitzvah by fixing mistakes in an existing Torah, but the ideal method of executing this Mitzvah is by writing a whole Torah.

Moshe's final instruction to his nation was designed to create generation upon generation of Jews who would not only learn the Torah, but who would write down the Torah. These people would grow to know each letter of Torah with the same intense intimacy as the man who had stood on Sinai

for forty days. These people would sweat over parchment sheets for years, and concentrate on spelling out HaShem's Name with the utmost intensity and mental focus. This Mitzvah is more than a safeguard for the it turns the person who fulfills it into a person who has undergone his own Sinai experience.

Moshe was warned that after his death, the nation would stay after the gods of the Canaanites. This would effectively end Moshe's revolution. HaShem presented the antidote immediately thereafter, and Moshe relayed it to the Jewish people, capping his forty-year struggle. The answer to "After your death, this nation will stray," is for Moshe to live forever. The revolution will not end, so long as the revolutionary is not dead. This 613th Mitzvah ensures that Moshe will not die, at all. With the writing of a Sefer Torah, Moshe is created anew, in every generation.

A project of the National Council of Young Israel 3 West 16th Street, New York, NY 10011 212 929-1525 800 617-NCYI Kenneth Block, Internet Administrator kenblock@youngisrael.org

From: Aish HaTorah[SMTP:aishlist@mail.netvision.net.il] AISH HATORAH'S Shabbat Shalom Weekly 23 Elul, 5759
<http://www.aish.edu>

DVAR TORAH: based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin

The Torah states, "And it will be when all these things come to you, the blessing and the curse which I have given before you, and you shall take it to your heart ... and you will return unto the Lord your G-d..." (Deuteronomy 30:1-2). Why does the Torah tell us that "you shall take it to heart?"

Rabbi Yonoson Eybeshuetz explains that every life situation has its unique test of our character and can either be utilized for growth or can cause a person to have new faults. When a person has blessing in his life and is financially successful, he can free his mind from things that distract his concentration during prayers and Torah study. Poverty, too, can help a person elevate himself by breaking his arrogance and conceit. This will be beneficial in his relationship with the Almighty and with his fellow man.

On the other hand, wealth can cause a person to commit all kinds of wrongdoings and to remove himself from the Almighty. Poverty can prevent a person from seeking self-improvement. Everything is dependent on how a person utilizes or misuses both the good fortune and the difficulties that the Almighty sends to test him. Therefore, the Torah tells us "you shall take it to your heart." It is entirely up to you how you will respond to various life-tests.

From: Zomet Institute[SMTP:zomet@virtual.co.il] Shabbat-B'Shabbato - Parshat Nitzavim-Vayeilech SHABBAT-ZOMET is an extract from SHABBAT-B'SHABBATO, a weekly bulletin distributed free of charge in hundreds of synagogues in Israel. It is published by the Zomet Institute of Alon Shevut, Israel, under the auspices of the National Religious Party. Translated by: Moshe Goldberg <http://www.moreshet.co.il/zomet>

A MITZVA IN THE TORAH PORTION: Teshuva - Repentance by Rabbi Binyamin Tabory "For this mitzva, which I command you today, is not hidden from you ... For this matter is very close to you, it is within your mouth and your heart to accomplish it." [Devarim 30:11-14]. One way to understand these verses is to interpret the phrase "this mitzva" as referring to the entire system of mitzvot. This would mean that the verse does not present a new, separate mitzva but encourages us to observe all the existing ones. However, the Ramban has given an innovative interpretation, that the phrase is a specific obligation for the mitzva of repentance, teshuva. The root of this word, "shuv," appears eight times in the first ten verses of chapter 30 of Devarim. The wording is more like a prose description than a direct commandment, and this might imply that in addition to the mitzva the Torah is giving a promise that in the end Bnei Yisrael will indeed repent.

The Sforno gives specific interpretations to each element of the above verses. Teshuva is close to you, and you therefore do not need a messenger or an agent to contact the Almighty. It is not hidden, and you therefore do not need any special help from the prophets. It is not far away, so you will not need help from great rabbis who live at a distance. The verse also hints at the three main elements of repentance, when it is written, "it is within your mouth and your heart to do it:" the mitzva of teshuva includes a verbal confession, repentance in the heart, and a resolution not to repeat the sin in the future. According to Rabbi Yona, in addition to the fact that there is a general mitzva of repentance all year round, there is a special requirement on Yom Kippur to purify ourselves and mend all our ways. He learns this from the verse, "For on this day will He forgive you, to purify you from all your sins" [Vayikra 16:30].

While the Ramban and Rabbi Yona agree that there is a mitzva of repentance, the Rambam is problematic. His words imply that there is a mitzva to confess but there is no special mitzva of teshuva. This issue has been widely discussed by the later commentaries. One intriguing explanation of the approach of the Rambam was given by the Chida: As is well known, the punishment of lashes is not given for a sin which can be corrected by a corresponding positive mitzva. But this would mean that if there were a mitzva of repentance it would never be possible to give a punishment of lashes, since in that case every single sin could be corrected by the positive mitzva of teshuva.

In any case, the Rambam writes as follows: "Even though repentance and prayer are always proper, they are especially suitable during the ten days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. During that time, teshuva is immediately accepted." [Hilchot Teshuva 3:10].

From: Jonathan Schwartz[SMTP:jschwartz@yemail.yu.edu] Subject: Internet Chaburah -- Parshas Nitzavim/VaYeilech (fwd)

Prologue: It is so close that it is in your mouth and your hearts to do (Lit. Keep) it (Devarim, 30:14). The meforshim question the order of the possuk, how proximity is noted first "in your mouth" and later "in your heart." Why this strange order? The Pirchei Shoshanna notes that there are times in people's lives when other things may be on a person's mind. Daagat Haparnassa, family illness or just the troubles of daily living. During these periods one often finds it difficult to concentrate on Divrei Torah. Still, at this time, it is essential for the individual not to wait until his troubles have passed or his tolerance level has been increased before resuming Torah study. Rather, let him speak Divrei Torah even without understanding them fully in his heart. This is because the sweet sounds of Torah have the strength to get one to concentrate on that which he is reciting. This is the intention of the possuk "in your mouth and in your heart." Even when one's spirit is broken and he lacks the resolve to study Torah, he must recall that the spirit is close by and can be returned by first attacking his stress by mouth (and action) which later will be followed by a swaying of the heart. Often Torah is so close by that we neglect to go to it, expecting Torah to meet us part way or even come to us. This week's chaburah looks at this issue entitled:

When so close could be too far The Talmud Yirushalmi (as cited by the Vilna Gaon, Orach Chaim 135) asks how the Kohanim were permitted to move a Sefer Torah in the Beis HaMikdash to the Women's section on Yom Kippur (when the Kohein Gadol read from it) since we are told that one should run after the Torah and not have the Torah run after us. The Yirushalmi answers that since great people are reading from it, it is not a disrespect to move the Torah for them. When discussing the issue l'halacha, the Shulchan Aruch paskins (Orach Chaim 135:14) that we do not move a sefer Torah for those imprisoned, even on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The Rema notes that this is true only if they move it for the immediate moment. However, if they move the Torah for the day or two, it is mutar to move the Torah. In an attempt to explain the Rema and the Yirushalmi, the Maharam Padauah (Shut Maharam Padauah, 88) notes that the issur to move

father, Reb Shimon Eliezer ben Reb Yechiel Wachtel (who passed away on 15 Elul 5757). TA'ANIS 21, 22 - Ari Kornfeld has generously sponsored the Dafyomi publications for these Dafim for the benefit of Klal Yisrael
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Ta'anis 20b AGADAH: THE UGLY PERSON QUESTIONS: The Gemara relates that one time Rabbi Elazar bar Rabbi Shimon was riding his donkey proudly on the river bank after having learned much Torah. He was greeted by a very ugly person and he did not reply to the greeting. Instead, he said, "Empty one! How ugly are you! Are all of the people of your city as ugly as you?" The person replied, "I don't know. But go and say to the Craftsman Who made me how ugly His handiwork is." When Rabbi Elazar realized what he had done, he dismounted the donkey, spread himself upon the ground before the person and begged for forgiveness.

(a) This incident poses some serious questions. Why did Rabbi Elazar not return the greeting of the person to begin with? Just because a person is not handsome is no reason to ignore his greeting!

(b) Second, how could he have said such an insulting comment to the person? It is inconceivable that such a great Tana would insult someone just because of his looks!

ANSWERS: (a) The reason Rabbi Elazar acted so harshly when the person greeted him was because Rabbi Elazar considered the person's greeting disrespectful, since we are told that it is not respectful for a less-learned person to greet a more-learned person (Berachos 27b and Shekalim 7a; see Insights to Shekalim 7:1). Proper respect dictates that one should wait until the Chacham greets him, and only then respond to the greeting. Therefore, when the person greeted him, Rabbi Elazar did not answer him because he maintained that the person did not conduct himself properly by greeting the Rav.

(b) Rabbi Elazar's comment may now be understood as follows. The Gemara in Shekalim says that different places had different customs as far as greeting the Rav. Some places did not know about the custom to refrain from greeting the Rav out of respect. Rabbi Elazar simply said to the person, "Are all of the people of your city *like this*?" Rabbi Elazar maintained that one may not greet someone greater than he, but he realized that this person was oblivious to this practice. He therefore asked whether the person had been brought up in a place where it was considered acceptable to extend greetings to a greater person. He asked in a disdainful manner to express that he considered such a custom inappropriate. The person, though, was not know aware that there was any custom *not* to greet a Rav, so when he was not greeting in return by Rabbi Elazar and he heard Rabbi Elazar's statement, he understood Rabbi Elazar to be insulting his physical features. "Are they like this," in his ears, meant "are they as ugly as you!" Although the Gemara quotes Rabbi Elazar as asking, "Are all of the people of your city *as ugly as you*," that is not what Rabbi Elazar actually said, but how the person *heard* what he said. Rabbi Elazar actually said, "Are all of the people of your city *like this*," but his relatively disdainful manner bespoke the sort of statement that the person thought he heard (see Tosfos in Nazir (10a), who says that the phrase "he spoke" can also refer to something expressed by one's actions). After hearing the response of the ugly person, Rabbi Elazar strongly regretted expressing himself in such a way without specifying what he was upset about (i.e. the way the person greeted him), and he regretted not having more tolerance for the other person's custom. This is why, in the end of the incident, Rabbi Elazar publicly taught that "a person should be soft as a reed and not as hard as a cedar." He was expressing his regret for the way that he had acted. According to the simple way of reading the incident, the issue was one of haughtiness, as the beginning of the incident implies. However, that has nothing to do with being "soft" (and tolerant) or "hard" (and stubborn). According to this explanation, though, the main issue was not haughtiness, but tolerance. Thus, it was appropriate for Rabbi Elazar to talk about being "soft like a

reed" and tolerant and not "hard like a cedar" and intolerant. (Based on ideas mentioned in the BEN YEHOYADA and IYUN YAKOV.)

Ta'anis 21 THE STORY OF ILFA AND REBBI YOCHANAN QUESTIONS: The Gemara relates the story of Ilfa and Rabbi Yochanan. Ilfa and Rabbi Yochanan were deeply immersed in learning Torah, and they suffered from abject poverty. Finally, their situation became so difficult that they decided to leave the Beis Midrash and go to work, in fulfillment of the verse, "There will be no destitute among you" (Devarim 15:4). When they were on their way to find work, Rabbi Yochanan overheard two Malachei ha'Shara conversing with each other, saying that these two people deserved to be killed for leaving the life of eternity (Torah study) and involving themselves in the temporary life of pursuing a material livelihood. The only reason they did not kill Ilfa and Rabbi Yochanan is because one of them would soon be experiencing a propitious fate. Rabbi Yochanan, who heard this conversation, decided to continue learning Torah in poverty and not to go to work, while Ilfa, who did not hear the words of the Malachim, went to work. By the time that Ilfa returned from his business endeavors, Rabbi Yochanan had been inaugurated as the Rosh Yeshivah, a position of great prestige and wealth (Rashi). The people of the town said to Ilfa upon his return, "Had you stayed and learned Torah (like Rabbi Yochanan), you would have become the Rosh Yeshivah!" When Ilfa heard this, he ascended the mast of a ship and suspended himself in the crow's nest at the top of the mast. He proclaimed, "If anyone can ask me a question -- which I cannot answer -- regarding the source in the Mishnah of any statement of Rabbi Chiya and Rabbi Oshiyah's teachings in the Beraisa, I will jump down from here and drown myself!"

This fascinating incident poses a number of questions. First, why did Ilfa climb to the top of a ship? Why did he not simply go to the top of a Beis Midrash, or some other structure on land? Second, how could he threaten to kill himself? No matter how disappointed he might have been, killing himself is certainly forbidden! (See BEN YEHOYADA) ANSWER: RAV JOSEPH PEARLMAN of London quotes his father, RAV REFOEL DOVID zt'l, (HA'MEIR, Parshas Vayechi, 5742), who gave a beautiful explanation for this Gemara. He explained that Ilfa felt that he was being criticized when he returned from his business endeavors for not reaching the heights in Torah which he could have reached. He felt that this criticism was unjust; he was perfectly justified in choosing the path of "Torah combined with Derech Eretz," learning Torah while at the same time working for a livelihood. He wanted to prove that his Torah had in no way suffered as a result of his involvement in pursuing a livelihood (as Rashi writes, "[Ilfa said:] Even though I became involved in commerce, I did not forget any of my learning"). Ilfa was a merchant who, like the people of Zevulun, traveled by ship to far away places to trade his wares. (This might be why he was called Ilfa; the word "Ilfa" in Aramaic means "ship.") By climbing to the top of the mast of the ship, Ilfa meant to say that although he had attained the highest pinnacle of success in his business, it had not interfered with his Torah learning. He declared that he was prepared to answer any question in Torah that he was asked, and if he was unable to answer it, he would "jump down" from the top of the ship -- that is, he would leave his immensely successful business and wealth and abandon his Derech of learning and working together -- and "drown himself" completely in the sea of Torah, in the same manner that Rabbi Yochanan had done. If his Torah learning had suffered as a result of his involvement in business, he was willing to jump down from the world of business and immerse himself in the sea of Torah. Let us add, that according to this Ilfa felt no regret for what he had done; he considered himself to have chosen the correct way in the service of Hashem, just as Rabbi Yochanan felt that *he* had chosen the correct way in the service of Hashem. But isn't it clear from the "threat" of the two angels at the beginning of the story that Rabbi Yochanan, and not Ilfa, was correct? RAV REUVEN MARGOLIOS (introduction to Margolios ha'Yam) suggests that both Rav Ilfa and Rabbi Yochanan did exactly what they were supposed to do; Ilfa accomplished no less than Rabbi Yochanan did.

The Midrash (Shir ha'Shirim Rabah 8:7) says that Rebbi Yochanan told Rebbi Chiya bar Aba that he used to own a large amount of real estate, but he sold it in order to continue learning Torah. Rebbi Chiya bar Aba cried for him that he no longer had anything with which to support himself when he became old. Ilfa, on the other hand, perhaps came from a very poor family. Had he not worked for a living, he would have had nothing at all to eat. Since Rebbi Yochanan had what to eat, and only wanted to work as to ensure that he would have sustenance when he became older, he made the right choice in giving up his plans of working and instead living off of his inheritance until it would be used up. He would trust in Hashem and not worry about what he would do when he became old. Ilfa, though, had nothing to sell, so he made the correct choice in deciding to involve himself with commerce.

According to this explanation, one may ask, why did the Malachim want to kill both of them for leaving the life of Torah study? What could they have had against Ilfa? The Gemara says that they were sitting underneath a weak wall which the Malachim wanted to topple on them. What difference does it make if the wall was weak? If leaving Torah is such a bad thing, then even if the wall was a strong one, the Malachim should want to push it onto Ilfa and Rebbi Yochanan for leaving Torah! The Gemara earlier (20a) says that one may not walk below a weak wall, because doing so diminishes one's Zechuyos, which become "used up" protecting him from the danger that it poses (Berachos 55a, Rosh Hashanah 16b). Ilfa and Rebbi Yochanan's lives were in danger simply because they neglectfully sat under a weak wall. The Malachim said that if they were still learning Torah, their Torah study would have protected them (Sotah 21a). Torah is not part in the realm of nature, and therefore those who study it are freed from nature's grasp (Bamidbar Raba 10:8: "The only one who is truly free is one who learns Torah."). But since they decided to stop learning Torah and instead to be involved in a worldly occupation, they no longer merited Divine protection from natural calamities. Nevertheless, they were protected in the Zechus of Rebbi Yochanan, who was destined to become the next Torah leader.

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