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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org
date: Sep 14, 2017 subject: Rav Frand - Teshuva is Cumulative / We Try, Hashem Helps

Good Shabbos & Shana Tova U'mesuka! This will be the last shiur until Parshas Noach.

"Complete Repentance" In Our Time

The Maharal (as well as other commentaries) asks a famous question: Last week's parsha (Parshas Ki Savo) contained the terrible Tochacha [Prophetic listing of curses that will befall the Jewish nation if they abandon the Torah].

Parshas Bechukosai, at the end of Sefer VaYikra, also contains a terrible Tochacha.

The end of the Tochacha in Parshas Bechukosai contains a consolation, while the Tochacha at the end of Parshas Ki Savo ends without any consolation. The Torah in Bechukosai writes "And I will remember the covenant with Yaakov..." [Vayikra 26:42]. It ends, so to speak, on a positive note. The narration in Ki Savo merely ends with the pasuk, "And the L-rd shall bring you back to Egypt in ships...and there you shall sell yourselves to your enemies for bondmen and for bondwomen and no man shall buy you." [Devorim 28:68] Period!

Why are there words of comfort at the end of the Tochacha in Parshas Bechukosai, but not at the end of the Tochacha in Parshas Ki Savo? I once said over an insight from Rav Yoshe Ber Soleveitchik, zt"l, that in fact there is consolation to be found at the end of the Tochacha in Parshas Ki Savo as well — except that it comes in Parshas Nitzavim. The Tochacha in Parshas Bechukosai foreshadows the destruction of the First Bais HaMikdash [Temple] and Galus Bavel [the Babylonian Exile]. Galus Bavel was finite. It was supposed to last for 70 years and then it ended. There was light at the end of the tunnel. It came. It was scheduled to end at a specific time. It finished. Therefore, the consolation in that Tochacha comes right away.

The Tochacha in Parshas Ki Savo foretells the calamities that accompanied the destruction of the Second Bais Hamikdash. It is now almost two thousand years later and Hashem has still not redeemed us from this destruction. There is a consolation to this second Tochacha, just like there will be an end to this exile. However, the consolation is not immediate. It comes later on — in Parshas Nitzavim. What is the consolation? The consolation is "And it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you — then you will take it to your heart among all the nations where Hashem, your G-d has dispersed you; and you will return unto Hashem, your G-d, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and all your soul." [Devorim 30:1-2] The consolation is that Klal Yisrael will in fact do Teshuva and then the exile will end.

This is what the Rambam writes in Hilchos Teshuva [7:5]: "All the prophets exhorted regarding Teshuva [repentance] and Israel will only be redeemed through Teshuva. And the Torah has already promised that in the end, Israel will do Teshuva at the end of their exile and immediately they will be redeemed as it is written 'And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon you... and you will return unto Hashem, your G-d...'"

In a nutshell, Rav Yoshe Baer concluded, the consolation to the Tochacha in Parshas Bechukosai, which was finite, came right away. However, the Tochacha in Parshas Ki Savo, which is indefinite in length, comes eventually. It comes later in our parsha, Parshas Nitzavim, and the consolation is that at the end of days, Klal Yisrael will do Teshuva and then the Geulah will come.

Whenever I study this Rambam, I contemplate the following question. I do not for a moment doubt the Rambam's words that in the end Israel will do Teshuva, but I have always wondered — how on earth is this going to happen? When the majority of Klal Yisrael today does not know about Shabbos and does not know about Teshuva and does not know the most basic ideas of Jewish practice or tradition, how is it going to happen that in the end of the exile, suddenly, Klal Yisrael will repent?

How is it going to happen? Can you imagine it? Even most people today who are somewhat affiliated know almost nothing. They do not even know that they are doing anything wrong. What scenario can we envision such that “in the end of days Israel will repent?”

I found somewhat of an answer to this question this year in the sefer Shem m'Shmuel [by Rav Shmuel Borenstein; the second Sochatchover Rebbe 1855-1926], the son of the Avnei Nezer].

On the pasuk in our parsha “v'shav Hashem es Shevuscha v'reechamecha” [the L-rd will return your captivity and have compassion on you] [Devorim 30:3], the Shem m'Shmuel writes... The simple interpretation of the word “shevuscha” comes from the word “shevi” [captives]. The pasuk thus means that the Ribono shel Olam will return our captives and he will gather us from all the nations to which he has dispersed us.

The Targum Yonasan ben Uziel reads the pasuk in an entirely different fashion. He interprets the word “shevuscha” from the word “Teshuva” [repentance]. The pasuk thus means that the Ribono shel Olam will gather in (i.e. — accept) all our repentances and have mercy on us. He will gather in all the thoughts of repentance that have been uttered over all the generations.

The Targum Yonasan ben Uziel alludes to a Gemara [Rosh Hashanah 17], which qualifies an expression from the High Holiday liturgy: “ma'avir rishon rishon...” [He removes the first (sin), the first (sin)] and teaches, “However the first (sin) itself is not erased.” The Talmud interprets that when the Heavenly Court weighs our sins against our merits — if they are evenly balanced such that taking away one sin will tip the scales in favor of mitzvos, the Ribono shel Olam does that.

However, the Gemara says, “The sin itself is not erased.” The Almighty does not toss away that aveirah, but rather, He holds it in abeyance. He puts it in cold storage. If the time will come when the person will do more sins, the Almighty will say, “Okay, I gave you a chance, but now I am going to add this back onto the pile.” Thus far, we have been quoting the interpretation of the Gemara.

The Shem m'Shmuel says, “If the Ribono shel Olam holds sins in abeyance for the “right time” (or the “wrong time”) then certainly the Ribono shel Olam puts all the Teshuvahs and thoughts about Teshuva that people have done for tens of centuries in cold storage. This includes Teshuvahs that were perhaps not complete and Teshuvahs that were perhaps done for the wrong reason and perhaps only preliminary thoughts contemplating a Teshuva which never came to fruition. The Ribono shel Olam collects all of these and He waits. He has this entire pile of these less than perfect thoughts and acts of repentance.

The Shem m'Shmuel says that with this concept, he understands how it could be that if a person was a rasha [wicked person] his entire life and then on his deathbed, he has hirhurei teshuva [contemplative thoughts about repentance]; Hashem considers it as if he died as a baal teshuva [one who has repented].

What kind of Teshuva is this? There is no “acceptance upon oneself to improve in the future” [kabbalah al ha'asid]. He is going to die within hours! The answer, says the Shem m'Shmuel, is that this person, even though he has been a rasha his entire lifetime, had thoughts of Teshuva. During his lifetime, these thoughts never came to fruition, but on his deathbed, when he was in fact sincere, the Ribono shel Olam takes all these thoughts of Teshuva that even this person did over his entire lifetime and now He considers it that he dies a Baal Teshuva.

The Shem m'Shmuel says that we can say the same thing about the Tochacha. The above idea does not only apply to individuals but it applies to all of Klal Yisrael. The Teshuvah fragments from throughout Klal Yisrael from throughout the thousands of years of exile combine into one “appropriate” Teshuva. Over the last two millennia, the Almighty has collected all sorts of thoughts about repentance and good intentions to change people's ways, which taken as a single conglomeration, meets the bill for a “complete and appropriate repentance,” even though until now they had been pushed off to the side and held in abeyance. This, the Shem m'Shmuel writes, is how “complete repentance” could happen even in our day.

In the final generation, as spiritually weak as we may be, we will only need a little repentance to supplement the vast reserves of “Teshuva” that we have collectively amassed over the millennia. Therefore, in our generation, in spite of all the people who perhaps do not even know how to do Teshuva, we — who do know how — have it within our power to tip the scales. We should therefore not give up hope and every single day we should be anxiously awaiting and anticipating the arrival of our righteous Moshiach.

This is an old question — if Moshiach did not come in the days of Rav Chaim Ozer, the Chofetz Chaim, or the Chazon Ish — how can we have the audacity to suggest that he might come in our day? Nevertheless, at the end of time, we must be exceptionally strong in the belief in his coming “...for my redemption is indeed at hand...” (k'rova yeshuasi lavvo [Yeshaya 56:1]). With this Shem m'Shmuel, we can understand the Rambam that says, “In the end, Israel will do Teshuva at the end of their exile” [Hilchos Teshuva 7:5]. Only a tiny bit of extra Teshuva will be required at the very end. Those are encouraging words.

The Mogen Avraham Is Not Teaching Us Segulahs

The Mogen Avraham writes “One time a Baal Tokeah could not get a sound out of his shofar so he took the shofar and whispered into the wide end the pasuk ‘May the pleasantness of the L-rd, our G-d, be upon us; our handiwork, establish for us; our handiwork, establish it.’ [Tehillim 90:17] Suddenly, he was able to blow it again.” [Orach Chaim Siman 585]

The Tolner Rebbe, shlit"a, asks three questions on this Mogen Avraham: Why did the Mogen Avraham need to tell us this? The Mogen Avraham is not in the business of telling us miraculous incidents nor is he in the business of teaching us segulos [supernatural Divine aids to accomplish matters]. The Mogen Avraham was so poor that he had no paper and sometimes he even needed to write on the walls of his house. He is clearly not inclined to waste space and precious paper to tell us miraculous incidents. What was so special about the pasuk the Baal Tokeah recited? If he wanted to say a pasuk from Tehillim he could have recited “G-d has ascended with the blast; Hashem, with the sound of the shofar” [Tehillim 47:6] or “Blow the shofar at the new moon's renewal, at the time appointed for our festive day” [Tehillim 81:4]. But what does Tehillim 90:17 have to do with shofar blowing? If you cannot get the shofar to blow — into what side of the instrument should one whisper a segulah pasuk? It should obviously be whispered into the narrow side. We blow from the narrow side of the shofar (according to the Levush) based on the pasuk “From the (narrow) straits did I call upon G-d...” [Tehillim 118:5]. Why did the Baal Koreh in this incident whisper into the wide side of the shofar? The Tolner Rebbe explains that this Mogen Avraham is not sharing miraculous incidents and he is not teaching us segulahs — he is telling us the basis of Rosh Hashanah. He is telling us the basis of Teshuva and of life itself.

When was this pasuk of “May the pleasantness of the L-rd, our G-d, be upon us; our handiwork, establish for us; our handiwork, establish it” first said? It was said by the completion of the Mishkan, by Moshe Rabbeinu. The Mishkan was an example of a situation where the people had no relationship to construction or artistry or the skills necessary for the many tasks required to complete that project. Based on their own skills and talents, there is no way they could build the Mishkan. Yet, the Ribono shel Olam took slaves out of Egypt who only knew about working in fields and told

them to build a Mishkan. How are we to understand this unlikely occurrence?

The answer is that the experience of building the Mishkan taught the Jews a fundamental lesson of life. The lesson is “you need to try.” Once we do our part, we can hope that the Ribono shel Olam will answer our prayers and bless our efforts with success. This is the essence of the pasuk, “May the pleasantness of the L-rd, our G-d, be upon us; our handiwork, establish for us; our handiwork, establish it.”

When the Mishkan was completed, the people were not able to erect it. Moshe Rabbeinu tried. Suddenly he had the merit to erect the Mishkan. If the Almighty wanted a Mishkan, why did he not just send down a Mishkan as He will do (according to some authorities) with the Third Beis HaMikdash? The answer is that the Ribono shel Olam is teaching us a lesson — yours is to do. Give it your best effort — even if the task is seemingly impossible — and I will make it happen.

This is what the Mogen Avraham is trying to tell us. The Baal Tokeah tried to blow. It did not work. So he said to the Ribono shel Olam, “Master of the Universe, You want us to blow shofar on Rosh Hashanah. It is not happening. We tried. ‘May the pleasantness of the L-rd, our G-d, be upon us.’ We made a sincere effort, just as by the Mishkan they made a sincere effort. Now the rest is up to you.”

This is the reason he whispered the pasuk into the wide side of the shofar. Out of the straits I call to G-d. I am supposed to blow from the narrow side of the shofar. I tried doing that. It did not work. Now we need “...G-d answered me with expansiveness” (the end of this same pasuk that begins “Out of the straits I call to G-d...”). Now it is up to Him. That is why the Baal Tokeah whispered the pasuk into the wide side of the shofar.

This in fact explains the whole service on Rosh Hashanah. Chazal say that the reason why we blow shofar is to encourage the Almighty to get up, as it were, from the Throne of Judgement (Kissei haDin) and to sit on the Throne of Mercy (Kissei haRachamim). If G-d wants to be merciful, He can go straight to the Throne of Mercy. However, that is not how it works. We need to do something. By blowing the shofar, that is what we do. We inspire, as it were, the Almighty to get up from the Kissei haDin and move to the Kissei haRachamim.

We are haunted in our arduous task of trying to do Teshuva each year by the thought that all of our efforts in previous years to accomplish this same goal have not always been 100% successful. But this is the idea with which we must approach it. We need to do our part. Maybe this year, HaKadosh Baruch Hu will grant us the Divine Assistance that He has not granted us in the past and we will be able to do it.

This is why the Mogen Avraham told us this incident. It is not to provide a segulah telling us how to get the shofar to sound. He is teaching us how to approach Rosh Hashanah and how to approach the service of the day. He is teaching us how to approach the entire task of doing teshuva. There is a fundamental requirement that we begin by putting our own effort into the task.

This is not only a truth about Rosh Hashanah and the service of the day; this is a truth about life. There are so many things about life that are overwhelming, raising children not the least of them. How are we supposed to do it? It is so hard. We need to begin by making a sincere effort; then the Ribono shel Olam will help us complete the job.

There is a Medrash in Shir HaShirim that records an incident involving Rav Chanina. Rav Chanina saw people going up to Yerushalayim and he was jealous of them when he saw they were bringing up such beautiful korbanos [sacrifices]. He went out into the forest and found a beautiful rock. He polished it with love and devotion and he wanted to bring it up to the Bais HaMikdash [Temple] Courtyard, but it was too heavy. The Medrash says he tried to hire workers and they cited an exorbitant fee. The Medrash continues that he then turned around and five “people” appeared out of nowhere (but they were not really people; they were angels). They said, “We will take up the rock for five selaim [a miniscule price] on the condition that

you lend us a hand.” The “people” together with Rav Chanina schlepped the rock up to Yerushalayim. When they got to the Beis HaMikdash, Rav Chanina turned around and the “people” vanished.

What is the Medrash teaching us? The Medrash is teaching the same lesson. Sometimes things seem beyond our power. How are we ever going to be able to do this? You need to make the effort: “Providing that you lend a hand.” If we do that, then hopefully we will merit S’yata D’ishmaya [Help from Heaven] in completing the task: “May the pleasantness of the L-rd, our G-d, be upon us; our handiwork, establish for us; our handiwork, establish it.”

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This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

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From: **Rabbi Ozer Alport** <oalport@optonline.net> date: Thu, Sep 14, 2017 at 8:34 PM subject: **Parsha Potpourri** - Nitzavim/Vayeilech
Parsha Potpourri Parshas Nitzavim / Vayeilech – Vol. 12, Issue 46
Compiled by Ozer Alport

[When you obey the L-rd, your G-d, to observe His commandments and His statutes written in this Torah scroll, [and] when you return to the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul.] (30:15) At the end of Parshas Nitzavim, Moshe informs the Jewish people that he has placed before them life and good, and death and evil. In addition to the obvious difference between life and death, to which good and evil are likened, Rav Yitzchok Hutner explains that there is a more profound distinction between them. Life requires continuous sustenance, and a person who does not regularly eat and drink and constantly breathe will die. Death is different, in that once something has died, it will remain dead and nothing is needed to maintain its status. With this distinction, Rav Hutner explains that we can now appreciate more deeply the comparison of life to good and death to evil. A person who chooses the path of Torah and mitzvos – the ultimate good – is spiritually alive, yet he can never let his guard down, for life requires continual nourishment and vigilance. In contrast, a wicked person who has fallen and spiritually died will remain in that state without any effort. Rav Hutner adds that this dichotomy can help us answer a question raised by Rav Elchonon Wasserman. The Gemora in Kiddushin (40b) teaches that a person who performs a mitzvah and subsequently regrets it loses the merit he accrued for that mitzvah. If Hashem allows remorse to uproot prior good deeds, it naturally follows that sins that are regretted should also be erased, for Hashem’s attribute of giving reward is 500 times greater than His attribute that punishes. However, if a mere thought has the power to undo our past deeds, what is so unique about the concept of teshuvah (repentance) and why do we consider it such a valuable gift from Hashem? According to Rav Hutner’s insight, we now understand that there is an important difference between the two cases. The Gemora says that if a person does a mitzvah but subsequently decides not to maintain it, it becomes lost and dies, for like life, good requires ongoing sustenance. Sin – spiritual death – is different, for once something has died, the laws of nature mandate that it

stays eternally dead. Thus, even if a person attempts to stop sustaining spiritual death by regretting his transgression, it will still be dead. Accordingly, teshuvah for a sin is fundamentally unlike “teshuvah” for a mitzvah and indeed represents a tremendous gift from Hashem, in which He enables us to resurrect and rectify a misdeed that according to the laws of nature should remain irreparable and permanently dead. Applying this concept to our own lives, Rav Yisroel Reisman explains that the lesson we derive from here is that spiritual achievements must be continuously nourished and maintained. If we find ourselves still working on areas on which we focused in previous years, rather than despair, we should recognize that life and spiritual good need ongoing sustenance. At the same time, once we have successfully implemented a positive change in our lives, we should never take it for granted, but must constantly stay vigilant to ensure that our accomplishments stay with us for years to come.

From: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> date: Thu, Sep 14, 2017 at 10:46 PM

Why Be Jewish?

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

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 consent 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 a 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 will 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 even possible for a monarch to abdicate. But no one chooses to be heir to a throne. 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.

[1] This is what R. Elazar of Modiin means when he refers to one who "nullifies the covenant of our father Abraham", Avot 3:15.

From: **Rabbi Berel Wein** <genesis@torah.org> reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: rabbiwein@torah.org date: Fri, Sep 15, 2017 at 12:18 AM

Rabbi Berel Wein

Parshas Netzavim

A Final Warning

The final chapters of the Torah are poetic and to a certain extent melodious. Moshe sums up the Torah with a final warning to the Jewish people of the consequences of ignoring the covenant with God. But he also has soothing words about the ultimate destiny and accomplishments of the Jewish people, of their unending loyalty to their God and land, and of a better world for all of humankind.

In reality the parshiyot of this week sum up the pulls and twists of Jewish history. All other nations facing the events and destructions visited on the Jewish people over the ages would not have survived, let alone prospered and persevered. But it is the eternal covenant of God with Israel that has sustained us till this very day. And the covenant exists and remains binding and effective even when portions of the Jewish people deny or are unaware of its existence.

Ben-Gurion, the reputed skeptic and agnostic, nevertheless once famously said that miracles are the normalcy of Jewish life and existence. That idea is certainly the basis for Moshe's words in these final chapters of the Torah.

The realization of the existence and continuing effectiveness of this ancient covenant that has weathered all storms and survived all attempts to obliterate it. Moshe tells them in advance that the song of the covenant will eternally rise to remind Israel of its mission and ultimate role in human affairs.

That is part of the mystique that allows the Torah to call itself a "song." It is the melody of holiness that resonates in our hearts and souls even amongst those who have forgotten the lyrics – the holy words – of the song itself. Melodies are not easily forgotten or eradicated from our subconscious. They create associative memory that does not easily leave us. People have their favorite songs. Countries have their national anthems. The melodies govern us even when the words are no longer sounded or expressed clearly. The Torah is therefore not only its holy words but also the haunting melody of Jewish existence and God's covenant throughout the ages.

Melody is one of the great memory aids of all time. For Selichot, we will say "to listen to the melody and to the prayers." Apparently, prayer without lasting melody accompanying it falls short of its desired purpose. Therefore, Jewish prayer throughout all of our history has been infused and beautified by melody. Some melodies are considered so sacrosanct that they defy change or improvisation. The Torah itself is read publicly to melody and special cantillations. In fact, rabbinic commentary has drawn upon the melodies of the Torah reading to find meanings and direction in the very words of the Torah itself. Thus, the covenant of the Torah itself is put to music, so to speak, by its holy melodies, and it rises continually to refresh our memories and strengthen our souls in all times of danger and challenges.

Shabat shalom. Shana tovah

Rabbi Berel Wein

Crash course in Jewish history

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From: **Rabbi Berel Wein** <info@jewishdestiny.com> reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com date: Wed, Sep 13, 2017 at 6:04 AM subject: Parshat Nitzavim - Vayelech 5777- Rabbi Berel Wein

In My Opinion

SELICHOT

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The custom of reciting selichot – penitential prayers – preceding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is an ancient one dating back to the period of the Geonim in Babylonia if not even to Talmudic times. There are different customs as to when to begin reciting these prayers. Most Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jewish congregations begin the recitation of selichot at the beginning of the month of Elul while European Jewish communities begin their recitation the week preceding Rosh Hashanah itself. Over the centuries the number of piyutim available for the selichot recitation has increased exponentially. There are many hundreds of such selichot piyutim in our repertoire of religious poetry. A substantial number of them were composed during the early and later Middle Ages and were the work of the great men of both the Ashkenazic and Sephardic worlds. It was commonly accepted and even expected that Torah scholars would also produce such selichot. Some of the greatest sages of Israel, such as Rashi, Rabbenu Gershom, Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel and others, are represented in the Ashkenazic version of the selichot services. In later times, especially in the modern era, the number and authorship of the selichot has become fixed,

though even in the Ashkenazic tradition there is quite a difference between the selichot of German, Lithuanian, and Polish custom. Needless to say, all of these Ashkenazic versions of selichot vary widely from the piyutim recited by the Middle Eastern Sephardic communities, and there too there are differences between certain localities and ethnic groups. The basic prayer of selichot, upon which all various communities agree, is the recitation of the thirteen so-called attributes of the Almighty. They are revealed to us in the Torah itself when Moshe hid his face in the presence of the Divine spirit passing over him. The recitation of this Torah description of Godly attributes is one of the central themes of Yom Kippur, when we recite this section of selichot numerous times during the prayer services of the day. In fact, the climactic prayer of neilah on Yom Kippur includes the recitation of these thirteen attributes thirteen times! It is as though this prayer ordained, so to speak, by God is the only weapon left in our arsenal of prayer and tears that will deliver us to life and goodness. The theme of the High Holy Days is to call unto our Creator when he is close to us and can be easily reached. The recitation of the selichot prayers, from before Rosh Hashanah until through the day of Yom Kippur, reinforces this idea of closeness and immediacy with the divine and the infinite. Selichot is an invaluable conduit to achieve this exalted connection with Godliness and spirituality. It is no wonder that throughout the ages the Jewish people have constantly observed and even strengthened this custom in our never ending quest for soulful spirituality. Early hours of rising and devotion testify to the level that all Jewish communities dedicate to this custom of penitential prayer. What I have always found interesting and noteworthy in the piyutim of selichot is that most of them concern themselves with the sorry and sad state of the Jewish people in our long and bitter exile. It is as though we not only expect to be forgiven for our sins and shortcomings but we implore Heaven to intercede on our behalf and improve our lot in life. Except for the ashamnu prayer the selichot piyutim reveal very little contrition or assumption of guilt for sins on our part. It is as though we are saying to Heaven that the deplorable circumstances of Jewish life in the exile are why we are unable to fulfill our spiritual obligations on a constant and productive basis. This emphasis on national calamity, rather than on personal guilt, points out to us that the High Holy Days are not merely a personal experience but a national one as well. We are all in this together and the eternal covenant of Sinai joins all of us into one unit. Every Jew's personal fate is intertwined with our national fate and future. And in an even farther leap, the prayers of Rosh Hashanah tie us all as human beings to common fates and challenges. In Judaism, the individual, the national and the universal are all bound together in judgment and in blessing. Therefore there can be no better introduction to and understanding of the holy days that are coming upon us than the prayers of the selichot services. Shabbat shalom Berel Wein

From: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com> date: Thu, Sep 14, 2017 at 11:20 AM

Vort from the Rav: Nitzavim-Vayeilekh

Devarim 30:12 **Lo Bashamiyim Hih It is not in heaven**

Posted by: Arnold Lustiger in Posts, Vort from the Rav Sep 14, 17

Halachic Man does not stand and waits for the revelation of the truth and inspiration by the spirit. He does not search out transcendental, ecstatic paroxysms, frenzied experiences that whisper intimations of another world into his ears. He does not require any miracles or wonders in order to understand the Torah. He approaches the world of halachah with his mind and intellect, just as cognitive man approaches the natural realm. And since he relies upon his intellect, he places his trust in it and does not suppress any of his psychic faculties in order to merge into some supernal existence. His own personal understanding can resolve the most difficult and complex problems. He is not particularly submissive and retiring, and is not meek when it is a matter of maintaining his own views. His most characteristic feature is strength of mind. He does battle for every jot and tittle of the

halachah, not only motivated by a deep piety but also by a passionate love of the truth. (Halakhic Man, pp. 78-79)

The Gemara in Eruvin 55a interprets this phrase to mean that Torah is not to be found among the arrogant (Eruvin 55a). Humility is the *conditio sine qua non* of learning. A pupil should never be ashamed to ask a question even if this might lead to ridicule. The humility that qualifies one for the role of pupil is never terminated. To be a pupil is an infinite task; in it is expressed the great ethical norm of incessant ascent, of perennial progress and advancement. Humility means awareness of ignorance, the need for self-criticism, sincerity, frankness, disregard of public opinion and the eternal quest for the ontic root of one's existence.

One must recognize the authority of the teacher. Learning, besides its intellectual aspect, is a volitional-emotional gesture. One must be determined to benefit by one's association with one's teacher or master. If this determination is missing, intellectual brilliance is of no avail. One must surrender to one's teacher on an ontic level. One should feel inferior to him and be aware of one's dependence upon him. This feeling of dependence is akin to that absolute surrender and fascination which man experiences in his relationship to God. The pupil sees his existence rooted in that of his master; he clings to him as the flowers to the sunbeam. To be in the presence of the master is a joy which borders on rhapsody. To be away from him is anguish. The pupil is always lonesome for his master and driven by an irresistible passion to him. Yet, in spite of the pupil's flight to the master, he can never come too close to him. Reverence for him precludes any intimacy between pupil and master. The halachah, cautious and reserved, has compared fear of God with reverence for a teacher (Pesachim 21b). (Halakhic Morality, pp. 117-119)

From: **Rabbi Kaganoff** <yorkkaganoff@gmail.com> to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com date: Tue, Sep 12, 2017 at 3:25 PM subject: Responsible Jews

Responsible Jews

By **Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

Since parshas Netzavim alludes to the agreed covenant of one Jew being responsible for others, it is an appropriate time to discuss the laws and rules of what we call areivus.

Question #1: Making Kiddush Twice When might I be required to recite the two brochos of the Friday night Kiddush a second time on Shabbos morning?

Question #2: A Halachic Conundrum Can a situation exist whereby someone is halachically required to observe a mitzvah, but cannot fulfill it without someone else performing it on his behalf?

Introduction

Answering both of our opening questions requires that we spend some time understanding a halachic concept called **areivus**. In the midst of the discussion of the tochachah in parshas Bechukosai, the harsh admonition for not observing the mitzvos, the Torah mentions *Vechoshlu ish be'achiv*, "Each man will stumble over his friend" (Vayikra 26:37). Rashi suggests a different understanding of the letter *beis* – not "Each man will stumble over his friend," but "Each man will stumble because of his friend." A midrash that may have served as Rashi's source reads more explicitly: "*Vechoshlu ish be'achiv* -- Do not explain this as over his friend, but because of the sins of his friend." The midrash continues: "From this we see the concept *she'Yisroel areivin eilu la'eilu*," that Jews are accountable for one another (Eichah Rabbah, Parashah 3). This idea is popularly referred to as *kol Yisroel areivim zeh lazeh*, an expression that I have not found in Chazal, although it is used frequently by rishonim and acharonim. The closest use I found in Chazal is in a passage of Gemara, where it says "*Vechoshlu ish be'achiv... melameid shekulan areivim zeh bazeh*" (Sanhedrin 27b).

Different halachic ramifications There are numerous halachic ramifications of this general concept, including:

(1) The mitzvah of tochachah, which requires that one Jew reprove another Jew who is disobeying the laws of the Torah (see Vayikra 19:17).

(2) The prohibition called chanufah, usually translated as “flattering,” that prohibits complimenting or honoring someone, either implicitly or explicitly, who violates the Torah (Sifrei, Bamidbar 35:33).

(3) A requirement to protest when we see someone breaching the Torah (see Shabbos 54b).

(4) A legal concept called areivus. Although we usually think of areivus as a social responsibility, it also includes a legal concept with very specific halachic ramifications. We will leave the details of the first three mitzvos for another time. This article will explore some of the concepts of the fourth, the law of areivus.

Areivus explains why someone who has already fulfilled a mitzvah can perform it again to assist someone else fulfill their obligation. To understand this properly, I will first introduce an overview of how areivus works and what it accomplishes. We will then study some Talmudic passages that explain the principles of areivus.

How areivus operates Here is a very common example of how areivus operates: Reuven has not yet fulfilled the mitzvah of reciting Kiddush, but he is unable to read the text himself. There are people available who can recite Kiddush on Reuven’s behalf, but they have already fulfilled the mitzvah. Does Reuven fulfill the mitzvah if they recite Kiddush on his behalf?

The answer is that he does, because of the concept of areivus. Since Reuven is obligated to fulfill the mitzvah, and the other people are also commanded to observe it, they may recite Kiddush on his behalf, notwithstanding that they are not fulfilling the mitzvah at the moment. (The person performing the act of the mitzvah is called the motzi, because he is enabling someone else to fulfill the mitzvah. The word motzi can be used either as a noun, defining the person performing the mitzvah, or as a verb, when it describes the performance of a mitzvah on behalf of someone else. In the course of this article, I will be using the word both ways, so stay alert!)

The three requirements: For areivus to work, three requirements must be met:

1. The motzi must be obligated The motzi must be someone who is obligated to observe this mitzvah. As we mentioned above, the motzi does not need to be fulfilling the mitzvah at the moment -- he may have fulfilled the mitzvah already, or, for that matter, plan to observe the mitzvah later.

2. Have in mind to be motzi The motzi must have in mind that he is performing the mitzvah on behalf of someone else, who will now be fulfilling the mitzvah. He can have in mind that whoever hears the words or sounds of the mitzvah, even if the motzi is unaware that the other person is listening, thereby fulfills the mitzvah.

3. Have in mind to fulfill the mitzvah The person for whom the motzi is performing the mitzvah must have in mind that by hearing the words or sounds of the mitzvah, he (or she) is fulfilling the mitzvah.

Some Talmudic background Before we discuss some practical examples of these laws, we will explore some of the Talmudic sources that demonstrate these rules. The first passage we will study requires an introduction.

The Torah recognizes a halachic status called an eved kena’ani, a gentile slave, which is someone non-Jewish who is owned by a Jew. An eved is not required to observe all the mitzvos of a Jew – after all, he is not Jewish -- yet he must observe many of the mitzvos. The eved accepts the obligation to fulfill these mitzvos in a procedure that is similar to that of geirus, conversion. After circumcision, he immerses in a mikveh and accepts the mitzvah that an eved is obligated to keep.

As just mentioned, an eved is not obligated to observe all the mitzvos. For example, he is exempt from such mitzvos as shofar, sukkah, tefillin, and studying Torah. However, when an eved is freed, he achieves the status of a Jew and becomes obligated to observe all the mitzvos, like any other Jew.

A blasting slave! Since an eved is not obligated to observe the mitzvah of shofar, a Jew does not fulfill the mitzvah if an eved blows the shofar on the

Jew’s behalf. As I mentioned above, the first rule of areivus is that the motzi must be someone who is obligated to observe this mitzvah.

The half slave What happens if a slave was purchased by two people in equal partnership, and then one of the owners frees him? That owner can only free the half that he himself owns. That half of the slave is now free, which means that he is obligated to observe mitzvos. On the other hand, half is still owned by the other master. This means that the eved now has the nebulous status of being half-Jewish and half-eved. The halachah calls him very literally chatzi eved chatzi ben chorin, “half slave, half freedman.”

Here is where this half-slave now treads new halachic ground. His half that is free is duty-bound to observe all the mitzvos, whereas the other half is obliged to observe only those mitzvos compulsory for an eved. Regarding most mitzvos, this means that he now observes them. He will be obligated to observe, for example, the mitzvah of sukkah. What does he do in regard to fulfilling the mitzvah of shofar, since half of him is obligated to observe the mitzvah, and the other half is not? Can he blow shofar to fulfill the mitzvah, or must he hear the shofar from someone else?

The Gemara quotes a beraisa that rules that a half-eved is required to hear shofar, but cannot blow shofar on behalf of other people, even on behalf of other half-eveds. The Gemara then explains that he does not fulfill the mitzvah if he blows shofar even to fulfill the mitzvah for himself. Why not? How can he be required to observe the mitzvah of shofar and not be able to fulfill it himself?

The answer is that his eved part is not required to observe the mitzvah, and his non-eved half cannot blow the shofar by itself. As a result, the shofar is being blown by someone who is not fully obligated in the mitzvah (Rosh Hashanah 29a). Even if the chatzi eved chatzi ben chorin happens to be a master blaster, he has no other way to fulfill the mitzvah other than to hear the shofar blown by someone else, that is, a Jewish adult male who is fully obligated in the mitzvah! (Since a fully freed man has the halachic status of a Jewish adult male, he can be motzi others in the mitzvah, including a chatzi eved chatzi ben chorin.) Thus, we have an anomalous situation -- he is required to observe the mitzvah, yet someone else must be motzi him! We now have the answer to one of our opening questions: “Can a situation exist whereby someone is halachically required to observe a mitzvah, but cannot fulfill it without someone else performing it on his behalf?”

Areivus and brochos The Gemara discusses whether areivus will allow someone to recite a brocha for you before you eat, even when the one reciting the brocha is not eating. Why should this case be halachically any different from what we have already discussed? Allow me to explain. Of the conditions mentioned above for areivus to work, one was that both the motzi and the person fulfilling the mitzvah must be required to observe the mitzvah. The reason for these requirements takes us back to our Biblical sources for the concept of areivus -- one Jew is responsible for another. Since one Jew is responsible for the mitzvah observance of another, the inability of one Jew to fulfill a mitzvah devolves onto other Jews. They become required to fulfill his mitzvah for him.

However, this concept holds true only regarding a mitzvah that the motzi is required to perform. Since no one is required to eat specific foods or to smell pleasant fragrances, these brochos hanehenin, blessings of benefit, are not required unless one is, himself, benefiting. Consequently, the rule of areivus does not apply. The Gemara explains that although areivus allows a motzi to recite a birchas hamitzvah on behalf of someone else, one cannot recite a brocha of benefit, unless the motzi is also enjoying the benefit.

Exception The Gemara subsequently concludes that there are two instances in which one may use areivus and recite the brocha, even though the motzi is not presently fulfilling the mitzvah. These two exceptions are the brocha of hamotzi, recited prior to eating matzoh at the Pesach seder, and the brocha of hagafen, recited as part of Kiddush. In these two instances, although the brocha appears to be a regular brocha of benefit, since one is required to partake in this benefit in order to fulfill these mitzvos, one is therefore required to recite these brochos. Consequently, they have the halachic status

of birchos hamitzvah. Thus, in these two instances, one person can be motzi another in the brochos, although the motzi is not fulfilling the mitzvah.

King Yannai A difference passage of Gemara (Brochos 48a) relates an interesting story that reflects a different context of the law of areivus. To quote the entire passage of Gemara:

King Yannai and his queen had concluded a banquet, and, since he had killed all the rabbis, there was no one to bensch on their behalf.

Yannai said to his wife, "Who will provide us with someone to recite the brochos for us?"

She answered him, "If you swear to me that you will not give him any trouble, I'll bring you such a man." He swore to her. She then brought her brother, Shimon ben Shetach, and had him sit between them at the head of the table. Yannai then said to Shimon ben Shetach, "See how much honor we give you!" to which Shimon ben Shetach responded, "It is not you who provide us with this honor, but the Torah." Yannai then turned to his wife, "I see that he does not accept my rule."

They then brought Shimon ben Shetach a cup of wine upon which to recite the brochos of bensching. He now wondered aloud. "How should I recite the zimun (since he had not eaten with them)? Should I say, 'Blessed is He from Whose [bounty] Yannai and his friends have partaken'?" He then drank the cup of wine, because he held that this would require him to recite birchas hamazon (see Tosafos ad loc.). They then brought him another cup of wine, which he used for the bensching.

The Gemara concludes that Shimon ben Shetach followed his own opinion here, which is not accepted by the other authorities, in that he held that one could recite birchas hamazon to be motzi others, even if all that he had consumed was a cup of wine. The accepted halachah is that one must eat bread to recite birchas hamazon and to be motzi others in zimun.

There are several fascinating historical, sociological and halachic conclusions to be drawn from this passage of Gemara.

1. Although King Yannai had assassinated almost all of the rabbonim and gedolei Yisrael, he was still interested in having birchas hamazon recited at his banquet.

2. No member of King Yannai's entourage knew birchas hamazon by heart, yet they wanted it to be said correctly.

3. None of the assembled had a written copy of birchas hamazon. (Based on a passage of Gemara in Mesechta Shabbos [115b], this is probably accurate. However, we will leave this topic for a different article.) Alternatively, none of them knew how to read.

4. Although Yannai's wife suspected that, given the opportunity, Yannai would kill Shimon ben Shetach, she knew that if he swore an oath, he would abide by it. Thus, he was more concerned about violating his oath than eliminating someone whom he felt challenged his authority.

5. Notwithstanding King Yannai's personal history, Shimon ben Shetach was unafraid of talking to him in a direct, blunt way. (See a similar story about Shimon ben Shetach and King Yannai in Sanhedrin 19).

6. Although Shimon ben Shetach was the head of the Sanhedrin (see Chagigah 16b), there are areas of halachah in which we do not rule as he does.

7. Shimon ben Shetach assumed that the wine was kosher.

Women leading zimun Another passage of Gemara (Brochos 20b) applies the above-quoted rules of areivus to a different situation. The Gemara there discusses whether the requirement that a woman recite birchas hamazon is min haTorah or only miderabbanan. The Gemara notes that a practical difference in halachah that will result is whether women may lead the bensching – what we call the zimun. In earlier days, the person who led the zimun also bensch on behalf of the assembled. Thus, a requirement is that he be someone obligated to fulfill the mitzvah on the same level as they are. Only someone who is required to bensch min haTorah may lead the zimun if it includes men, who are required to bensch min haTorah. Therefore, if women are required to bensch min haTorah, they may lead the bensching of

a group that includes men. On the other hand, if women are not required, they may not lead such a bensching.

Since the question whether women are obligated to bensch min haTorah or not remains unresolved, women do not lead a zimun when men are part of the zimun. However, when there are only women in attendance, they may create their own zimun (Brochos 45b; Arachin 3).

Areivus in action! Here are some less common applications of the mitzvah of areivus. Mr. Goldberg is, unfortunately, hospitalized, and no one else in his family is able to recite Kiddush. On his way home from shul, Mr. Berkowitz can stop off at the Goldberg house and recite Kiddush on their behalf, although he is not fulfilling the mitzvah now, but intends to fulfill the mitzvah only when he gets to his own home. This is because the Goldbergs are required to recite Kiddush, and the law of areivus allows another Jew obligated in the mitzvah to perform the mitzvah on their behalf. (According to some authorities, the ladies of the house should daven maariv before Mr. Berkowitz can recite Kiddush for them. This is a topic that we will leave for a future article.)

Havdalah and not Kiddush One of my daughters was born when I was a rav in a small Jewish community. Since it has become common custom that one celebrates the birth of a daughter with a Kiddush, I was now faced with an interesting conundrum. Some of the people who would attend the Kiddush might drive on Shabbos to attend, so I could not consider the standard Kiddush as an option. My wife and I decided to avoid this problem by making a melaveh malkah on a Saturday night instead.

What does this have to do with areivus? Although I had already made havdalah that night, at the melaveh malkah, I recited havdalah another time, on behalf of those individuals who had not yet performed the mitzvah. This could be done, because of the concept of areivus. Of course, this should be done only when there are individuals who have not as yet performed the mitzvah and would have in mind to fulfill the mitzvah of havdalah when it is performed for them.

Kiddush Shabbos morning Sometimes, one has guests Shabbos morning who did not yet recite or hear the Friday night Kiddush. Since that Kiddush can be recited the entire Shabbos, these guests are required to hear both brochos of Kiddush during the daytime of Shabbos. Therefore, one should recite that Kiddush on their behalf at the Shabbos morning meal. However, bear in mind that, since they will be yotzei only if they intend to be, they must be sufficiently interested in Judaism to understand that they are thereby fulfilling a mitzvah. I suggest discussing this with your own rav or posek for guidance what to do.

Conclusion The mitzvos of the Torah were given not to the Jewish people as individuals, but as a community, and to each individual Jew as a member of that community. This affects many areas of halachah, one of which is the mitzvah of areivus that we have just introduced. My fellow Jew's obligation to observe mitzvos transfers to me in a way that I can now enable him to perform them.

From: **Peninim on the Torah** <peninim@hac1.org> date: Tue, Sep 12, 2017 at 8:02 AM subject: Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilech

Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum

And you will ponder in your heart... and you shall return unto Hashem your G-d. (30:1,2)

When things do not seem to go your way, you see more curse than blessing -- and begin to become anxious. You finally start believing that Heaven might just be conveying a message to you – and you begin to think. Sforno explains the thought process and what should be coursing through your mind: "When you carefully examine and consider the conflicting aspects (of your concepts and actions) and call them all to mind, so as to distinguish truth from falsehood, then you will recognize (realize) how far you have distanced yourself from Hashem in your opinions and behavior which are contrary to His Torah."

As a result of Klal Yisrael's experiences in galus, exile, they will, at some point, come to the stark realization that their defection from the Torah has caused their being cursed and oppressed. This will, in turn, result in some serious self-examination.

The Torah calls this introspection, the "pondering of the heart," and Sforno interprets it to be one's consideration of the inner conflict that wages within him between good and evil/truth and falsehood. Man always attempts to resolve the conflict, although he is not always successful. When man realizes the folly of his ways, he will eventually repent and return to Hashem.

When one focuses on his inner conflict, the ambiguities of his life, he perceives a fresh perspective, which ideally becomes a catalyst for teshuvah/repentance. I would think that one should focus on the clear-cut sins, the overt errors of one's life – not the conflicts and ambiguities.

Horav Henach Leibowitz, zl, observes that the special prayer Al Cheit, which we recite on Yom Kippur, has the following confession: al chet shechatanu lecha b'yodim u'blo yodim; "I confess for the sins of which we are aware (yodim) and those of which we are unaware (lo yodim)." One would normally think that, for the most part, our sins fall under the category of yodim, with the minority being lo yodim, ones that we do not know. Thus, it would make sense that the individual who is determined to repent successfully would focus on those sins that are well-known, that are obvious.

Afterwards, he can introspect and continue his search for those covert sins, which may have slipped his mind. Sforno implies an idea entirely different from this hypothesis. He intimates that one must first and foremost focus on his inner conflict and ambiguous, sinful behavior, in order to understand: his vested interests; his proclivities; and his internal struggle between right and wrong, truth and falsehood. Indeed, implicative from his exposition is the notion that the majority of one's sins are indeed lo yodim.

Only after one has come to grips with his internal struggles, his feelings concerning right and wrong, and his reactions based upon his personal proclivities, can he begin to understand the reason that he is distant from Hashem. To put it in simple terms (I think): It is not necessarily what one does, but rather: why he does it; what provokes him; what his personal failings are, all of which determine his gravitation toward sin. This is a powerful observation, because one is hard-pressed to address sin and the best approach to teshuvah until he is acutely aware of the factors which contribute to his sin.

The Rosh Yeshivah notes a second lesson to be derived from Sforno. It is possible to have a window to peer through at the inner workings of our psyche. Our subconscious (according to Sforno) is not a closed door which is impossible for us to penetrate personally. Even when a person is within the grips of sin, under the influence of passion and uncontrolled desire, he can still introspect and search within himself to understand and reflect upon his tendencies that affect his subconscious. Sforno's position, however, does not seem to coincide with Shlomo Hamelech's comment in Mishlei 21:2, Kol derech ish yashar b'einav v'shochein libos Hashem; "A man's every way is upright in his eyes, but Hashem resides within his heart." Rabbeinu Yonah explains that a person's middos, character traits, and his nature are straight in his own eyes. He sees nothing questionable or wrong with himself, because he is unable to see beyond his personal vested interests. How then can a person repair/correct himself, his middos, to make them consistent with Hashem's demands of us? Hashem helps him. Hashem grants him the help that he needs. He must, however, make use of this assistance. In any event, we see that man cannot do it alone. His middos are stronger than he is. How then are we to understand Sforno?

The Rosh Yeshivah explains that two forms of vested interest are imbedded in our subconscious. Some are buried so deep that we are unable to unearth them without Hashem, but Hashem is present, and He does help. For others, we are able to do it alone, to introspect and see what it is that is causing us to make the wrong turn – all of the time.

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim From the **teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a**

Text Message Q&A #264 Ask Rav Aviner: toratravaviner@yahoo.com

Prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Tzion Visit our blog: www.ravaviner.com Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Mother's Milk

Q: How is mother's milk permissible when we have a general principle that anything which comes from a non-Kosher animal is non-Kosher? A: Since the Torah mentions that people nursed, it is a sign that it is Kosher. And if it were only permissible in a life-threatening situation, the Torah would mention that it is permissible only in such a case. By the way, the Torah does not explicitly mention that it is forbidden to eat a human being. While it is obviously forbidden to do so, there is a discussion among the Poskim as to the source of the prohibition (See Rambam, Hilchot Machalot Asurot 2:3, 3:4. Ra'avad ibid. Rosh, Ketuvot 5:19. Rama, Yoreh Deah 79:1).

Free Choice for Animals

Q: Do animals have free choice? A: Not to any significant degree. Igrot Ha-Re'iyah Volume 1, p. 104. Shyness

: I am very shy and cannot give a Torah class. What should I do? A:

Prepare the class in written form and read it. Immersing a Utensil to be Given as a Gift

Q: Is it true that one may not immerse a utensil which is to be given as a gift?

A: Correct. The majority of Poskim rule this way, since the utensil is not yet designated for a meal but rather for another person, i.e. a gift (Tevilat Kelim pp. 87-88). There are those, however, who rule that it is permissible to immerse it without a blessing when one is giving the utensil to someone who will not immerse it (Taharat Kelim p. 120). And some recommend that one grants ownership of the utensil to the receiver before giving it to him and then immerses it. Ha-Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, however, does not agree with this recommendation (Tevilat Kelim pp. 239-242). And others recommend immersing the utensil and then using it for a short time before giving it as a gift. This, however, is not always possible.

Shidduch with One who Visits the Temple Mount

Q: Should I cancel a Shidduch with someone who visits the Temple Mount?

A: No. A person is judged by the majority of his actions. Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 3:1). Arabs from Jewish Descent Q: How should we relate to a study that 65% of Arabs of the Galilee are from Jewish descent? A: The study does not have a solid scientific basis. Its purpose was political, in order to convince us to give up portions of Eretz Yisrael. Scientific studies cannot, in any case, serve as halachic proofs.

Gifts for a Teacher Q: I am a teacher. Parents sometimes bring me gifts. Is it permissible to accept them? A: It is not good. The gift should be a joint one from all of the parents.

Netilat Yadayim for First Responder Q: If I am on call as a first responder, and receive a call in the middle of the night while I am sleeping, am I exempt from Netilat Yadayim, since every second is important? A: It does not seem so, since you get dressed and do not go in your pajamas. Special thank you to Orly Tzion for editing the Ateret Yerushalayim Parashah Sheet

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From: **Chanan Morrison** <ravkooklist@gmail.com> reply-to: rav-kook-list+owners@googlegroups.com to: [Rav Kook List <Rav-Kook-List@googlegroups.com>](mailto:Rav-Kook-List@googlegroups.com) date: Wed, Sep 13, 2017 at 4:10 AM subject: **[Rav Kook Torah]** Nitzavim: Two Levels of Teshuvah

Nitzavim: Two Levels of Teshuvah

The Torah portion of Nitzavim is always read before Rosh Hashanah, a fitting time to speak about reflection and repentance. Often we have a strong

desire to make changes in our lives. We may want to be better parents, better spouses, and better people. We aspire to greater spirituality in our lives, to devote more time to Torah study, to be more thoughtful in our interpersonal relationships. And yet, circumstances may make such resolutions very difficult to keep. Our goals may seem unattainable, and our personality faults beyond correction.

The Exodus National Teshuvah

The Torah describes the national teshuvah (repentance) of the Jewish people as they return to their homeland and their faith:

“Among the nations where the Lord your God has banished you, you will reflect on the situation. Then you will return up to the Lord your God.... He will gather you from among the nations... and bring you to the land that your ancestors possessed. “God will remove the barriers from your hearts... and you will repent and obey God, keeping all of His commandments.... For you will return to the Lord your God with all your heart and soul.” (Deut. 30:1-10) Twice, the verse states that “you will return to God.” Is there a purpose to this repetition? A careful reading reveals a slight discrepancy between the two phrases.

After reflection in the exile, the Jewish people will return to the land of their fathers. Here the text says, “you will return up to God,” using the Hebrew word ‘ad’ (‘ad’).

After returning to the Land of Israel and God removes the barriers of their hearts, they will learn to fully love God and keep His commandments. This time the Torah says, “you will return to God,” using the preposition ‘el’ (‘el’).

Two Stages of Teshuvah

How are these two types of national return different? What is the difference between ‘ad’ and ‘el’?

The first teshuvah is the physical return to their homeland, to their language, and to their national essence. This is returning “up to God” - approaching, but not fully attaining. Thus the Torah uses the preposition ‘ad,’ indicating a state of “up to, but not included in the category” (a Talmudic expression, ‘ad ?? ?? ???’). This is a genuine yet incomplete repentance, obscured by many veils.

After this initial return, the Jewish people will merit Divine assistance that “will remove the barriers from your hearts.” This will enable the people to achieve the second stage of return, a full, complete teshuvah, all the way “to God.” This is an all-embracing return to God “with all your heart and soul.”

Thoughts of Teshuvah

It is important to recognize and appreciate these different levels of teshuvah. This lesson is also true on a personal level. We should value even partial efforts to change and improve. The Sages praised even hirhurei teshuvah, the mere desire to improve (Pesikta Rabbati 44). Perhaps we are unable to fulfill our spiritual ambitions to the extent we like. Nonetheless, we should view our desire to change and improve as tools that purify and sanctify, leading us on our way to attaining complete spiritual elevation.

(Gold from the Land of Israel (now available in paperback), pp. 339-341. Adapted from Olat Re’iyah vol. I p. 335; Orot HaTeshuvah 17:2)