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RETURNING THROUGH TESHUVA

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Rav Kook had the custom to read 10 pesukim from our parsha every day during the month of Elul as he would finish davening shacharit. The ten pesukim at the beginning of פרק ל discuss the phenomenon of teshu-

va. The verb שׁוּב appears seven times in these ten pesukim. Seven is the number associated with nature and Rav Kook understands teshuva to be a process of returning to one's natural state.

The Torah uses two slightly different phrasings when describing the process of teshuva in these pesukim. In פסוק ב, the Torah says וּשְׁבַת עַד ה' אֱלוֹקֶיךָ, whereas in פסוק י, the Torah says כִּי תָשׁוּב אֶל ה' אֱלוֹקֶיךָ. Professor Nechama Leibowitz points out that the King James Version got it wrong when it translated פסוק ב as "And shalt return unto the Lord" and פסוק י as "And if thou return unto the Lord."

Returning אֱלוֹקֶיךָ עַד ה' should not be translated the same as returning אֶל ה' אֱלוֹקֶיךָ! Modern Jewish translators also got it wrong. Robert Alter translates both as, "turning back to the Lord." The Artscroll translation in fact gets it right by translating the two Hebrew phrases differently. פסוק ב is translated as, "And you will return unto Hashem," whereas פסוק י is translated as, "You shall return to Hashem." What though, is the significance of the different formulations, וּשְׁבַת עַד ה' אֱלוֹקֶיךָ and כִּי תָשׁוּב אֶל ה' אֱלוֹקֶיךָ?

Rav Kook offers two different answers to the question. In his commentary on the siddur, Rav Kook explains that returning אֱלוֹקֶיךָ עַד ה' is incomplete. It means that one approaches God but does not develop a deeper, closer, more intimate understanding of God. This approximate connection to God, עַד ה' אֱלוֹקֶיךָ, is the first stage of return – תְּשׁוּבָה מִרְאָה, returning to God out of fear. However the ultimate form of teshuva is תְּשׁוּבָה מֵאַהֲבָה, returning out of love. This type of teshuva is the second and more mature stage of teshuva. This is כִּי תָשׁוּב אֶל ה' אֱלוֹקֶיךָ -- it is not merely approaching God, but completely returning to Him.

In his Orot Hateshuva, Rav Kook offers a more nationalistic understanding of these two types of teshuva. The first stage of **פסוק ב** **ושובת עד ה' אלוקיך** described in **פסוק ב** refers to one's initial instinct to return to God. This is a teshuva in which we merely approach God. The next several pesukim refer to the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, and in **פסוק י** the Torah states that we will return **אל ה' אלוקיך**. Rav Kook explains that only once the Jewish people have returned to Israel will we be able to fully enter into the relationship in which we are able to not just approach God but to return completely to Him.

Whether we see the stages of teshuva as reflecting individual or national aspirations, we see that according to Rav Kook teshuva is to be understood as a process with many stages along a continuum leading to the ultimate connection to Hashem. This recognition should serve as both a comfort and a challenge. It should comfort us as we realize that even if we have not achieved ultimate teshuva, we may still be part of the teshuva continuum. It should challenge us, though, to never be complacent with the stage that we find ourselves in and instead to make sure that we continue to strive for the most profound form of teshuva in which we return to who we are meant to be and return to Hashem.

STANDING BEFORE HASHEM

YITZY LANNER ('19)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Netzavim, Moshe delivers his goodbye speech to Bnei Yisrael, just as he does in the other parshiyot in Sefer Devarim. Right after Moshe finishes explaining all of the curses that will befall Bnei Yisrael if they do not listen to Hashem's commandments, he says something that is seemingly strange and unnecessary. He tells Bnei Yisrael that they are all still standing before Hashem, their God. Why did Moshe feel that it was necessary to convey to the Jewish people that they were still standing before Hashem? What is the meaning of this seemingly obvious and irrelevant point?

There is a simple, yet profound answer offered to this question. The reason why Moshe felt the need to tell Bnei Yisrael that they were still standing before Hashem is because they were very nervous about Moshe's preceding words.. Moshe had just finished warning Bnei Yisrael about all of the curses that would come upon them if they did not listen to Hashem. After hearing

this long list of curses, Bnei Yisrael became anxious because they had all done sins throughout their lives, some of which may have resulted in receiving these terrible curses. Therefore, Moshe believed that it was necessary to express to Bnei Yisrael that they were still standing before Hashem. In saying this, Moshe meant that although they had done aveirot and had disobeyed Hashem, Hashem was and is still there caring for and believing in them.

Moshe was trying to stress to the Jewish nation that, despite the fact that they had all sinned at some point in their lives, there is always room for teshuva and the ability to come back to Hashem, as He will always be waiting with open arms for us to return to Him.

There is a very important lesson that we can and must learn from Moshe's encouraging speech. In the month of Elul especially, we have to know that, despite the fact that all of us have sinned and ignored the words of Hashem, He is still here caring for us and waiting for us to come back to him through teshuva. Therefore, we should always remember, specifically at this time of year, that as long as we do teshuva for our sins and try to get closer to Hashem, He will always be there to have us stand in front of Him as His nation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING JEWISH

YAFFA SHEKHTER ('20)

As both the book of Devarim and Moshe Rabbeinu's life come to a close, Parshat Nitzavim continues to discuss the brit, or covenant, between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael. Moshe urges the nation to uphold the brit and follow the Torah so that they may be rewarded when they reach the land of Israel. He also tells them that they are an "am kadosh," or holy nation. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks points out that Moshe, "wants to ensure that no future generation can say, "Moshe made a covenant with our ancestors, but not with us. We didn't give our consent. We are not bound." To refute this, Moshe also says that this brit applies to:

כִּי אֶת-אֲשֶׁר יֵשְׁנוּ פֹה, עִמָּנוּ עַמְד הַיּוֹם, לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ; וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנוּ פֹה, עִמָּנוּ הַיּוֹם

"but both with those who are standing here with us this day before the LORD our God and with those who are not with us here this day" (Devarim 29:14).

In other words, Moshe is saying: “Hashem swore to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and now He is renewing His covenant with you. But the covenant is not only for you, it is for the people who came before and are coming after you.” The Ibn Ezra comments that even the spirits of the unborn future generations were present during the speech. Expanding further on this idea, the Sforno points out that Bnei Yisrael had to be able to explain the brit to the future generations so they could be loyal to the agreement and so that their children would inherit the land only on that basis.

Aside from converts, we do not choose to be Jewish. We have already agreed to this covenant from birth. Just like we become legal adults at eighteen and are subject to certain laws, at twelve or thirteen we become subject to the mitzvot. It is not our choice, and to many people a Jewish identity is taken for granted. We often don't realize how lucky we are to have an eternal special connection with Hashem. He wants us to become close to Him, which will make us more holy. As we approach the Yamim Noraim, we should focus on strengthening our religious and spiritual connection to Hashem as He commanded to the Avot, and we should bring that way of life to the future generations.

PROPER DECISION MAKING

AARON GROSS ('20)

This Shabbat we read Parshat Nitzavim. Before the Jewish people cross the Jordan River and enter Eretz Yisrael, Moshe realizes he must renew the covenant between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael. This new generation's parents stood at Har Sinai and declared their allegiance to Hashem, but now Moshe must ensure that the future generations will follow in the footsteps of their parents. In order to prevent one from arguing that the covenant was accepted on their behalf, Moshe proclaims “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” (Devarim 29:13-14).

Clearly “whoever is not here with us today” cannot refer to Jewish people elsewhere, as the entire nation had been with Moshe in the desert for four decades. Instead, “whoever is not here with us today” refers to those who have not been born yet; the Talmud (Yoma 73b) says

that every Jew, “מושב ו עומד מהר סיני” -- swore and stood at Har Sinai.

However, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks raises an interesting question: how can one be obligated in something without prior consent?

The Sages explain that all of the souls of future generations of Jews were present at Har Sinai. They say that our souls gave consent at Har Sinai, and that we are beholden to the agreement between Hashem and our souls to this day. However, R' Yitzchak Arama argues that although surely all souls would give consent to adhere to the covenant with Hashem, how can the soul agree to the covenant without permission from the body?

This is a fundamental aspect of Judaism: the wishes of the soul are in agreement with Hashem, but the body inhibits absolute dedication. Through this, a valuable lesson can be learned. While our physicality has many benefits, including the ability to perform mitzvot, it often allows our Yetzer Hara to impact our decision-making. Instead of allowing our physicality to prevent us from adhering to our covenant with Hashem, we should always allow our souls to make the righteous decisions for us and allow our bodies to fulfill these actions.

HIDDEN REDEMPTION

DONIELLA ZAK ('21)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Nitzavim, Moshe rebukes the Jewish people for worshipping other gods after leaving מצרים. Immediately after that, Moshe states:

“הנסתרת לה' אלקינו והנגלת לנו ולבנינו עד עולם לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת”

“The hidden are for God, but the revealed are for us and our children forever, to carry out all words of this Torah” (Devarim 29:28).

What are these hidden and revealed things Moshe refers to? The **כתב סופר** discusses this topic and interprets it in the following way. In Sanhedrin 98a, the possible times for the arrival of **משיח** are identified. One is **בעיתה**, the time decided upon by Hashem at the beginning of creation, and the other is **אחישנה**, a time before the designated time that will occur if the Jews are deserv-ing of **משיח**.

Staff

In פסוק כז, Moshe responds to the nation's sin of worshipping other gods:

“וַיִּתְּשֵׁם ה' מֵעַל אֲדַמְתֶּם בְּאֵף וּבַחֲמָה וּבִקְצָף גָּדוֹל וַיִּשְׁלַכְם אֶל אֶרֶץ אַחֲרַת כִּיּוֹם הַזֶּה” meaning, “Hashem removed them from upon their soil with anger, with wrath, and with great fury, and He cast them to another land, as this very day.” In order to comfort the people after those harsh words, Moshe reminds the people that although salvation is “hidden,” and the exact time is only known to Hashem, משיח will eventually arrive.

To further lift their spirits, Moshe continues to say what has been “revealed” to the Jewish people and their children: by following the words of Torah, משיח will arrive soon. With ראש השנה and יום כפור coming up, may we all remember to always follow the תורה and do תשובה in order to improve ourselves as individuals and bring משיח early. Have a שבת שלום!



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