

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHIOT NITZAVIM-VAYELECH · 23 ELUL 5769 - SEP. 12, 2009 · VOL. 16 NO. 47

PARSHA INSIGHTS

NOT ANOTHER LOVE STORY

“...for He is your life and the length of your days...” (30:20)

I'll never forget the first time I fell in love. I gazed across the kindergarten tables (all of 14 inches high) as my beloved entered the room. The world stopped. Everything seemed to go into slow motion as she floated through the classroom to her seat. And later that day, life seemed to have come to an end when her mother called up to say that she couldn't come over for tea.

When you're really in love, it's as though all you are living for is that person. Nothing else exists. Everything else in the world – eating, drinking, breathing — are no more than boring distractions. If one's love was not in the world nothing would matter one bit.

It's interesting, but that's just how the Rambam describes the way we should feel about G-d. (*Laws of Kriat Shema 1:1*)

The Rambam says we should be lovesick for G-d, and that all of Shir Hashirim (The Song of Songs) is a metaphor for that love.

The Rambam explains that we say the first para-

“...the Rambam is teaching us that the *yichud* of G-d, and our love of Him and our acceptance of His Torah are more than just *mitzvot*. They are the acceptance of an inescapable reality, outside of which there is nothing.”

graph of the Shema before the other two paragraphs because it contains the *yichud* of G-d — His Unity — our love of G-d and His Torah. This, says the Rambam, is the fundamental principle on which everything else stands. What's interesting is that the Mishna on which the Rambam presumably based this Halacha just says that we say the first paragraph of the Shema before the others because it contains the acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. That's all.

In other words, the Rambam is teaching us that the *yichud* of G-d, and our love of Him and our acceptance of His Torah are more than just *mitzvot*. They are the acceptance of an inescapable reality, outside of which there is nothing.

If we live just to fulfill *mitzvot*, that's not being in love. Real love is the feeling that our entire existence depends on G-d, and that without Him there is no exist-

ence. Nothing.

There is no other love story in the world

Nitzavim

On the last day of his life, Moshe gathers all the people, young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women, in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations yet unborn. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship because, in spite of having witnessed the abominations of Egypt, there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality. Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel which will result from failure to heed G-d's *mitzvot*. Descendants of that generation and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desolation of the Land and its apparent inability to be sown or to produce crops. The conclusion will be apparent to all — the Jewish People have forsaken the One who protects them in favor of powerless idols. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled. However assimilated they will have become among the nations, eventually G-d will bring them back to *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe tells the people to remember that fulfilling the Torah is not an impossibility; rather it's within the grasp of every Jew. The *parsha* dramatically concludes with Moshe comparing the Jewish People's choice to follow the Torah to a choice between life and death. Moshe exhorts the people to choose life.

Vayelech

On the last day of his life, Moshe goes from tent to tent bidding farewell to his people, encouraging them to “keep the faith.” Moshe tells them that whether he is among them or not, G-d is with them. He summons Yehoshua, and, in front of all the people, exhorts him to be strong and courageous as leader of the Jewish People. Thus, he strengthens Yehoshua's status. Moshe teaches the mitzvah of *hakhel*: Every seven years on the first of the intermediate days of Succot, the entire nation, including small children, is to gather at the Temple to hear the king read from the Book of Devarim. The sections read deal with faithfulness to G-d, the covenant and reward and punishment. G-d tells Moshe that his end is near, and he should summon Yehoshua to stand with him in the *Mishkan*, where G-d will teach Yehoshua. G-d tells Moshe and Yehoshua that after entering the Land the people will be unfaithful and worship other gods. G-d will then completely “hide His face,” so that it will seem that the Jewish People are at the mercy of fate, hunted by all. G-d instructs Moshe and Yehoshua to write down a song — *Ha'azinu* — which will serve as “witness” against the Jewish People when they sin. Moshe records the song in writing and teaches it to *Bnei Yisrael*. Moshe completes his transcription of the Torah and instructs the *levi'im* to place it to the side of the Holy Ark, so that no one will ever write a new Torah Scroll different from the original, for there will always be a reference copy.

ISRAEL Forever

LAST SHABBAT OF THE YEAR

As we prepare for the last Shabbat of the year there is an opportunity to reflect on the relationship between keeping Shabbat and the security of Jews in Israel and throughout the world.

The old saying that “more than Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews” is as true today as it always was.

Not only is Shabbat observance a merit that protects us physically, but it is also a guarantee of maintaining our Jewish

identity. “Shabbat,” says G-d, “is an eternal covenant between Me and the Children of Israel.” This special relationship that entitles us to a land of our own depends greatly on how we keep our part of the covenant.

May this last Shabbat of the year be the first properly observed by so many of our alienated brothers and sisters and thus secure Israel forever.

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PARSHA Q&A?

Nitzavim

1. Why did Moshe gather the Jewish People together on the day of his death?
2. Who are the wood-cutters and water-drawers mentioned in verse 29:10?
3. How do two parties “pass” into a covenant?
4. What is the connection between the verse “*Atem nitzavim*” and the curses in the previous parsha?
5. Why can't G-d disassociate himself from the Jewish People?
6. How many curses were listed in *Parshat Ki Tavo*?
7. Which two leaders followed Moshe's example and assembled the people at the end of their rule?
8. With whom did Moshe make the covenant and oath?
9. Why did the Jewish People see only idols of wood and stone in Egypt?
10. What is meant by the punishment of “adding drunkenness to thirst (29:18)”?

Vayelech

11. How old was Moshe when he died?

12. Why was Moshe unable “to go out and come in” (31:2)?
13. What happened to Moshe's Torah knowledge on the day of his death?
14. How did Moshe foresee the relationship between Yehoshua and the Elders?
15. What did G-d tell Yehoshua concerning his relationship with the Elders?
16. How often does the *hakhel* (assembly of the Jewish People) take place?
17. Why does the Torah call the year of the *hakhel* the “*shemita* year”?
18. What sections of the Torah does the king read at the *hakhel*?
19. In what physical location does the king read at the *hakhel*?
20. Why were the men commanded to come to the gathering?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 29:9 - To initiate them into the covenant with G-d.
2. 29:10 - Canaanites who came to join the Jewish People.
3. 29:11 - The two parties place objects in two parallel lines and pass between them.
4. 29:12 - The Jewish People asked, “Who can survive such curses?” Moshe comforted them, saying, “You've done a lot to anger G-d, and yet — ‘*Atem nitzavim*’ — G-d didn't destroy you ...you're still standing before Him.”
5. 29:12 - Because He told them He wouldn't and because He swore to the *Avot* (Patriarchs) that the Jewish People would always remain His nation.
6. 29:12 - Ninety-eight.
7. 29:12 - Yehoshua and Shmuel.
8. 29:14 - With the people standing before him and all future generations.
9. 29:16 - Because these were exposed openly. The idols of gold and silver, however, were locked away by their owners for fear of theft.
10. 29:18 - Even unintentional sins will be considered by G-d as if they were committed intentionally. “Drunkenness” refers to sins committed unintentionally. “Thirst” refers to sins committed intentionally.
11. 31:2 - Exactly 120.
12. 31:2 - G-d did not let him because the power of leadership was being transferred to Yehoshua.
13. 31:2 - The well-springs of knowledge were closed up for him.
14. 31:7 - He foresaw that they would work in partnership.
15. 31:7 - That he alone would be the leader — for there can only be one leader in each generation.
16. 31:10 - Once every seven years, in the first year of the new *shemita* period.
17. 31:10 - Because the laws of *shemita* still applied to the harvest.
18. 31:11 - From Devarim: 1:1-6:9; 11:13-21; and 14:22-28:69.
19. 31:11 - On a wooden platform erected in the *azara*.
20. 31:12 - In order to learn.

- Ecological hazards and laws concerning them
- Determining ownership of a lost fledgling bird
- When statistics clash with proximity
- Protecting the environs of a city
- All about the different winds
- The clash between tree and pit
- Protecting a field from the plowing of the neighbor

- When one cannot bring *bikkurim* from fruits of his tree
- Obstructions in the public thoroughfare
- When one can claim he purchased a property without producing documentation of sale
- The pattern of goring which makes an ox a habitual offender
- When protest against contested ownership is effective

BRANCHES AND HOLES

If the branches of someone's tree extend into the public thoroughfare and interfere with animal traffic, those branches must be removed to the level that a camel and its rider are able to pass underneath without obstruction.

This trim is considered a sufficient safety measure by the Sages in our *mishna*, despite the fact that those branches will eventually grow back and pose a danger and require removal once again. In apparently sharp contrast with this position is the ruling by Sages that one may not create pits and cisterns beneath the public thoroughfare, even if a wagon filled with

rocks can now safely pass over the area of his excavation without causing the street to collapse, because there is the danger of collapse at a later time.

Rabbi Yochanan offers a resolution of the apparent contradiction.

In regard to digging below street level there is the likelihood that deterioration of the surface will not be noticed in time to avoid a dangerous collapse. Such digging is therefore categorically forbidden. Should branches grow back on the tree they will be immediately noticed and then removed so that there is no need to effect a permanent removal right away.

• *Bava Batra 27*

What the SAGES Say

"A communal pot is never hot and never cold (because each person relies on the other to watch it – Rashi)."

• *Rabbi Cahana - Bava Batra 24b*

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SHARPLY BLUNT

From: Anonymous

Dear Rabbi,

I recently had a discussion with someone I got to know not too long ago about a personal issue of his which I disagreed on his approach and I told him exactly how I felt and why I think he's wrong. Today, I wanted to ask him something and he told me that he's not willing to talk to me as he dislikes my form of communication and my tone of voice. I was really hurt and terribly angry as I never talked differently to him than to anyone else and I never affronted him or treated him inappropriately.

I think that this was pretty mean of him and he is the first person in my life who has said anything like that about me. I have been raised to always be open and direct towards others, to tell them exactly what I think and I accept other people behaving the same way towards me. I think he should take it as a compliment that I am open like that towards him as it means that I trust him and talk to him like I talk to my family.

Well, he does not seem to see it like that and now I do not really know how to behave. My feeling is that I should tell him that I do not want to talk to him ever again in my life as I'm still mad at him. He just does not stop complaining about me - which is not justified. On the other hand I ask myself if I should just ignore it and wait until he changes, but if he doesn't, I don't know if I'm willing to talk to him again if he does not apologize.

Could you please tell me what you think about it and what you would do in my situation? Have a nice day!

Dear Anonymous,

I understand how you feel, and from your perspective, you seem to be justified in feeling hurt and offended.

But to be honest and straightforward with you, as you prefer, your friend also has good reason to feel as he does and I want to help you see things from his perspective.

Let's first consider your approach of always being open and direct and telling people exactly what you think.

Being honest is generally good, but there's a big difference between that and being blunt. Even when someone asks your opinion, being honest but sensitive can help, but being too direct can hurt. This applies all the more so when we take the liberty to volunteer your opinion. Even good advice, if unsolicited, is usually unwanted and thereby offensive. In any case, regarding sensitive, personal matters, people are generally not objective, and often they're upset, wor-

ried and emotional. This is not the time to say exactly what you think, but to think about exactly what you say. After all, you want to help, not hurt, right? What we say and the way we say it makes a world of difference to how people hear us.

So if this is a sensitive person and a sensitive matter, and if he didn't explicitly ask your opinion, it's quite possible that even if you were honest, to the point and even right, he would view your communication as "offensive" and your tone of voice "unpleasant". This is certainly so if, in the name of honesty, you may have been blunt. Now all of these matters – communication, tone and directness – involve very subtle nuances and are therefore highly relative. To one person one form is acceptable and even desirable, while to another it is offensive. That's why even if you are accustomed to communicating this way with your family, and no one has ever objected to your approach, it still doesn't mean that your friend is wrong for being hurt — because either he or the issue is more sensitive than you thought.

Now regarding your expecting him to be grateful to you for "trusting in him" enough to say your mind and viewing his response as mean and insensitive, please realize that he sees it exactly opposite. More than you put trust in him to express your opinion, he put trust in you to discuss his personal matters with you. And after having opened up to you, you (of course unintentionally) responded in a way that hurt him and which he viewed as mean of you to do to him. I'm not saying he's right, I wasn't there to hear what and how things were said, but it doesn't matter anyway because, as I wrote, these matters are subjective and relative, and the fact is he was hurt.

So what should you do? Quite simply, you should not take his reaction personally. It's not about you as much as it is about his being hurt and feeling betrayed. The fact that he continues to complain about it shows that he really does care for you and values your friendship. Since he's the one who lodged the complaint about what you said, you should not expect or wait for an apology that, in his pain, he doesn't see as warranted. Rather you should take the initiative to apologize to him privately and sensitively and tell him you didn't mean to offend him. Say you only intended to help him as a friend or brother and that's why you were perhaps too direct. Tell him that you value him as a friend and don't want to lose a friend because you were trying to help. After he's forgiven you and calmed down, have another conversation with him in order to understand what went wrong so you can avoid this happening again.

GOOD NEIGHBOR ADVICE

Question: I recently complained to my upstairs neighbor about the disturbing noise late at night caused by his exercise machine only to hear in rebuttal that my washing machine was disturbing him in the early hours of the morning. Since I wish to maintain friendly relations with this good neighbor I would like to know what is the right thing to do.

Answer: Almost all neighborly quarrels result from the

reluctance of one party or both to admit they are wrong. There is no doubt that if you explain to your neighbor that you were not aware that you were disturbing him, he will reciprocate with the same explanation about his behavior.

From then on both of you will be more careful in regard to the timing of your noisemaking and neighborly harmony will reign.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE STRANGER AT THE WALL

The couple which had been childless for about 15 years decided to end their unsuccessful marriage in the least painful manner. A short while after their divorce the woman discovered that she was pregnant. The only thing standing in the way of her ex-husband remarrying her was that his name was Cohen and a *kohen* is prohibited from marrying any divorcee, even his own.

Heartbroken, he turned to the great halachic authority Rabbi Yosef Sholom Eliyashiv for guidance. The rabbi told him that there was no way he could halachically permit such a marriage if he was a *kohen* but urged him to go pray at the Western Wall for Heavenly assistance.

As the husband stood before the sacred wall tearfully and loudly praying he felt a tap on his shoulder. When asked what he was lamenting about he told the stranger his sad story.

“Do you have a father?” asked the stranger and the reply was that his father was in an old-age home in the US. The stranger urged him to immediately fly to visit his father. Although failing to understand what point there was in visiting his frail father who could hardly communicate, he decided to follow this advice.

When he arrived at his father’s bedside the doctor in attendance told him that his father, Mr. Cohen, had not spoken for months and he should not expect to communicate with him. But as the son related his problem the father, to everyone’s surprise, suddenly spoke and informed him that he was not his son, but rather a child he had adopted after the Holocaust. This meant that he was not a *kohen* after all and the story had a happy ending.

LOVE OF THE LAND- THE PLACES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

THE JORDANIAN BORDER

Israeli tourists who wish to cross the Jordan border to visit the neighboring Hashemite Kingdom are having difficulty in bringing with them such religious items as *tefillin*, *talit*, *siddurim* and *sefarim*.

The reason given by Jordanian officials for denying Jewish tourists the privilege of bringing along such items is their concern that visibly Jewish tourists would be exposed to terrorist attacks.



Israel’s Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger has appealed to Jordan’s King Abdullah to change this policy. This should serve as a reminder to Jews in Israel who fail to make use of such religious items despite their freedom to do so, that if the fulfillment of *mitzvot* thus identifies one as a Jew, they should rethink their own definition of a Jewish state.