

OHR NET

SHABBAT PARSHIOT NITZAVIM-VAYELECH · SPECIAL ROSH HASHANA ISSUE 5764 /2003 · VOL. 10 NO. 48

PARSHA INSIGHTS

NITZAVIM

How's YOUR STANDING?

“You are standing today, all of you, before G-d... (29:9)

Fearing G-d is out of fashion right now. It's acceptable to be in awe of His Majesty, to sit on the top of a mountain and commune with Beyond. But fearing? Come on, G-d's a nice G-d. He won't really punish me for speaking *lashon hara* slander or for adjusting my income tax a little. All that punishment stuff is really for kids anyway. Why do I need something so crass as fear when I have awe?

There can be no true awe without real fear.

The essence of fearing G-d is to accustom ourselves to be aware that He is watching us all the time; that He knows what we are thinking; that He sees every move we make — every move that we don't make but would like to.

If there is a time in the day when we visualize standing in front of the Creator more than any other, it is during the *Amida* prayer that we say three times daily. (*Amida*, quite literally, means, “standing”.) If there is a day in the year when we try to visualize standing in front of the Creator more than any other, it is Rosh Hashana.

Rosh Hashana, a day that should strike fear into our

hearts, “...who will live, and who will die ...who by water, and who by fire.” Who in a bus, and who in a restaurant...

And yet are we really frightened about what sort of year this will be for us? I don't think so.

Why not?

A true story:

Jerusalem has its fair share of parking problems for which one fellow had his own unique solution. After driving round the block a couple of times, he would pull up to a curb with red stripes. Getting out of the car, he would reach for his trusty can of black mat spray-paint, and proceed to black out the red stripes the entire length of his car.

How much of the time do we do just that in our relationship with G-d? How much of the time do we try to alter the rules to suit ourselves and our own ideas of right and wrong?

Rosh Hashana is a time to come clean, to clean off the spray paint from the sidewalks of our lives.

Before we get more than a ticket.

Source:

• Story heard from Rabbi Dov Brezak

PARSHA OVERVIEW

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 Hashem'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 Hashem 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.

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 Hashem 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)”?
11. The Hebrew word for nose and anger are the same. What is the connection?
12. Why is Hashem described in anthropomorphic terms?
13. What two cities were destroyed along with Sodom and Amorah?
14. When is the entire nation punished for the sins of an individual?
15. When and where did the Jewish People become culpable for each other's sins (*areivim zeh lazeh*)?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Nitzavim'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 Hashem.
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 Hashem, and yet — ‘*Atem nitzavim*’ — Hashem 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 Hashem as if they were committed intentionally. “Drunkenness” refers to sins committed unintentionally. “Thirst” refers to sins committed intentionally.
11. 29:19 - When one gets angry, his nostrils flare.
12. 29:19 - The Torah speaks in terms that people can understand.
13. 29:22 - Admah and Tsevoyim.
14. 29:28 - When the Jewish People fail to bring the sinner to judgment.
15. 29:28 - When the Jewish People took the oath at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eval.

The Ohr Somayach Family wishes you and yours and all of Israel a year filled with happiness, health and peace.

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FLESH AND BLOOD

When the Torah commanded Jews to offer their sacrifices only in the designated sanctuary, the passage dealing with this seems to offer conflicting signals regarding one aspect of the rules of sacrifice:

“You will make your sacrifices, the flesh and the blood on the altar of Hashem, your G-d, and the blood of your slaughtered sacrifices shall be spilled upon the altar of Hashem, your L-rd.” (*Devarim 12:27*).

The first part of the passage connecting the flesh of the sacrifice and its blood indicates an interdependence, and leads to the conclusion that if the flesh of the sacrifice disappeared or became destroyed, the blood would no longer be eligible for sprinkling upon the altar as a sacrificial service. The second half, which mentions only the blood, seems to signal the opposite – that the blood may be sprinkled without regard to the existence of the flesh.

Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua have different explanations of this passage. The former contends that the blood can indeed be sprinkled upon the altar even where the flesh is no longer around as indicated by the second half of the passage. The connection made between flesh and blood in the first half, he explains, is not to indicate an interdependence but rather to make an equation – just as blood is sprinkled upon the altar from a distance so must the flesh of an *olah* sacrifice be thrown, and not placed, on the altar surface. For this purpose there was a slight gap between the ramp leading up to the altar and the altar surface itself – so that the *kohen* carrying the flesh would have to throw it.

Tosefot (*Mesechta Pesachim 77a*) raises an interesting question regarding this point. Even if there was no air space between the ramp and the altar could the *kohen* still not be able to carry out the necessary throwing after reaching the top? Certainly, comes the answer, but the air space served as a reminder that such throwing was required.

• *Zevachim 104a*

THE MYSTERIOUS MESSENGER

The Torah prohibited offering sacrifices outside of the *Mishkan* or *Beit Hamikdash* and warned that one guilty of doing so would be liable for extirpation (*Vayikra 17:9*). The question arises, however, as to whether this punishment is due only if he offers such a sacrifice upon an altar or even if he simply places his sacrifice on a single rock or stone.

In opposition to the view of Rabbi Yossi it is the opinion of Rabbi Shimon that even offering a sacrifice on a single rock constitutes a sacrificial act for which one is considered guilty if he performs it outside the place which G-d designated. As support for his position he cites the example of Manoach, the father of Shimshon. After being informed by a mysterious stranger that his long barren wife would give birth to a son he took a kid goat and placed it on a rock as a sacrifice to G-d (*Shoftim 13:19*).

Rabbi Yossi, on the other hand, rejects this proof because Manoach was acting in accordance with a Heavenly command which empowered him to offer the sacrifice in an irregular manner. The very fact that he was able to offer such a sacrifice outside of the *Mishkan* Sanctuary in Shiloh is evidence that he was permitted to act outside of the regular rules because of a Heavenly command.

But where do we find such a command which can be issued only by G-d or one of His messengers? The answer lies in the words of that mysterious stranger who Manoach assumed go be a human prophet whom he wished to honor with a feast on a kid goat he was prepared to slaughter. “I shall not eat your food,” said the stranger, who was actually a Heavenly angel, “but if you wish to offer it as an *olah* sacrifice to G-d you may do so.” (*ibid. 13:16*)

Only after that stranger wondrously brought fire forth from that rock to consume the sacrifice and then departed to Heaven in the resulting flames did Manoach realize that the stranger he assumed to be a prophet was indeed an angel.

• *Zevachim 108b*

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RESTING IN THE HEART

“And Moshe went and spoke these words to all Yisrael” (31:1)

Why doesn't the Torah tell us *where* Moshe went? In every Jew throughout the ages, there is a little spark of Moshe Rabbeinu. That's where Moshe went. That was his resting place. Thus the end of the verse: *“And Moshe went (and spoke these words) to all Yisrael.”*

Maybe that is one of the reasons that no one knows where Moshe is buried, because Moshe's final resting place is in the heart of every Jew.

GETTING TO THE UPPER THIRD

“Gather together the nation, the men and the women and the children...in order that they will hear and they should learn...” (31:12)

Every seven years, the king reads the Torah in the presence of the entire nation. This is the mitzvah of *Hakhel*. Even though the young children did not understand what was being read to them, their parents received reward for bringing them.

This reveals to us a major principle in the education of the young. Even though they may make noise and be distracting to their elders, the experience for them is irreplaceable; for they feel, through osmosis, the importance of the Torah. Even though they cannot understand a word, they have imbibed a vital lesson: That the Torah is the life blood of the Jewish People.

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky *zt”l* was once visiting a

kindergarten of a Torah school. Noticing that all the *mezuzot* on the doors were placed in the lower third of the doorposts, he remarked “It's a lovely idea to put the *mezuzah* in a place where the children can easily reach up and touch them, but please put them where they belong, on the upper third of the doorpost, and let the children use a stool to reach the *mezuzah*. Otherwise they will grow up thinking that you can put the *mezuzah* anywhere you wish. One does not raise children with untruths.”

This story can serve as a parable for our whole relationship to the Torah. *We must go up to the Torah, not bring the Torah down to our level.* Wherever the attempt has been made to make Judaism “easier”, the outcome is that people have come to despise it and reject it altogether.

We may be no more than spiritual children, but we will never grow into adults unless we look up to that *mezuzah*. And then, maybe, one day, we will be able to reach it by ourselves, unaided by a stool. But if we learn that we have to make no effort to raise ourselves up to the Torah, we will make the mistake of thinking that we are already shoulder-high to the Torah — that we need to make no efforts to change and improve ourselves. We will thus both debase the Torah and give ourselves no motivation to grow. We will merely sit back like self-congratulatory pygmies, convinced that we are already spiritual giants.

• Based on a story reported by
Rabbi Nisson Wolpin in the Jewish Observer

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, Hashem 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 Hashem, the covenant and reward and punishment. Hashem tells Moshe that his end is near, and he should summon Yehoshua to stand

with him in the *Mishkan*, where Hashem will teach Yehoshua. Hashem tells Moshe and Yehoshua that after entering the Land the people will be unfaithful and worship other gods. Hashem will then completely “hide His face,” so that it will seem that the Jewish People are at the mercy of fate, hunted by all. Hashem 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.

1. How old was Moshe when he died?
2. Why was Moshe unable “to go out and come in” (31:2)?
3. What happened to Moshe’s Torah knowledge on the day of his death?
4. How did Moshe foresee the relationship between Yehoshua and the Elders?
5. What did Hashem tell Yehoshua concerning his relationship with the Elders?
6. How often does the *hakhel* (assembly of the Jewish People) take place?
7. Why does the Torah call the year of the *hakhel* the “*shemita* year”?
8. What sections of the Torah does the king read at the *hakhel*?
9. In what physical location does the king read at the *hakhel*?
10. Why were the men commanded to come to the gathering?
11. Why were the women commanded to come to the gathering?
12. Why were the parents commanded to bring their infant children to the gathering?
13. What does it mean when Hashem hides his face from the Jewish People?
14. What function does the song *Ha’azinu* serve?
15. Where was the Torah that was written by Moshe placed?
16. What was the normal manner of assembling the congregation? Why was it not done that way for the teaching of *Ha’azinu*?
17. In 30:19 Moshe called upon the heavens and the earth as witnesses, and in 31:28 he does so again. What is the difference between the two times?
18. What did Moshe say that the Jewish People would do immediately after his death?
19. How long after Moshe’s death were the Jewish People careful in their service of Hashem?
20. How did Moshe perceive the period in which Yehoshua led the Jewish People?

Answers to Vayelech’s Questions!

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

1. 31:2 - Exactly 120.
2. 31:2 - Hashem did not let him, because the power of leadership was being transferred to Yehoshua.
3. 31:2 - The well-springs of knowledge were closed up for him.
4. 31:7 - He foresaw that they would work in partnership.
5. 31:7 - That he alone would be the leader — for there can only be one leader in each generation.
6. 31:10 - Once every seven years, in the first year of the new *shemita* period.
7. 31:10 - Because the laws of *shemita* still applied to the harvest.
8. 31:11 - From Devarim: 1:1-6:9; 11:13-21; and 14:22-28:69.
9. 31:11 - On a wooden platform erected in the *azara*.
10. 31:12 - In order to learn.
11. 31:12 - In order to hear words of Torah.
12. 31:12 - So that the parents could receive a special reward for bringing them, because they demonstrated how precious Torah learning is even for those who cannot yet understand it.
13. 31:17 - He ignores their distress.
14. 31:21 - It comes as a warning to the Jewish People of what will befall them if they abandon Torah.
15. 31:26 - There are two opinions: It was placed beside the *Aron*; or it was placed inside the *Aron* itself.
16. 31:28 - The Jewish People were normally assembled by blowing the trumpets, however at this time the trumpets had already been hidden away.
17. 31:28 - In 30:19 he was informing the Jewish People of his intention to call upon them as witnesses. In 31:28 he was actually calling upon them.
18. 31:29 - Corrupt themselves.
19. 31:29 - Throughout the entire reign of Yehoshua.
20. 31:29 - As if he himself were still ruling.

WHEN DID IT ALL BEGIN?

When an *olah* or *shelamim* sacrifice was offered in the *Beit Hamikdash* it had to be accompanied by *nesachim* consisting of a *mincha* flour offering and a wine libation. This rule is introduced with the following words:

“When you enter the land of your dwelling place which I have given you” (*Bamidbar 15:2*).

Were these *nesachim* additions to the sacrifices in effect while Jews were still on their way to Eretz Yisrael and offered sacrifices in the *Mishkan* sanctuary? It all depends on how you read those words.

Rabbi Yishmael's view is that *nesachim* were not offered before entering the land. The above passage introduces a requirement of *nesachim* for sacrifices offered upon the temporary communal altar that stood in Gilgal during the 14 years the Jews were busy conquering and dividing the land before establishing a more permanent sanctuary in Shiloh. Even though it was permissible during this period for individuals to offer sacrifices for private altars the requirement of *nesachim* was limited to the communal altar as indicated in the words “which I have given you”, an expression of an altar belonging to the entire nation.

Rabbi Akiva, however, contends that *nesachim* were already offered in the *Mishkan* in the wilderness before arrival in Eretz Yisrael. What the above-mentioned passage dealt with was the need for *nesachim* on the private altars, which only became permissible when Jews entered the land and until the *Mishkan* was established in Shiloh. He sees a support for this in the words “your dwelling places” which seem to refer to the private altars which could be located in all the places that Jews dwelled upon entering the land. There was no need for the Torah to mention this requirement for the communal altar in Gilgal because this practice had already been in effect in the communal *Mishkan* in the wilderness.

• *Zevachim 111a*

WAS THE OATH FOR BOTH?

When the Torah was given to the Jewish People the “sounds and thunder” (*Shemot 19:16*) accompanying it were heard throughout the world. Rabbi Elazar Hamodoi says that the kings of all the nations were

seized with fear in their palaces and sang praise to G-d. This is the scene described by King David when he speaks of a powerful sound encompassing the universe which resulted in “each in his palace giving honor to G-d” (*Tehillim 29:9*). These panic stricken rulers all came to Bilaam and asked this wicked prophet to explain the meaning of these sounds which they feared heralded a world destroying deluge. He reassured them that G-d had already taken an oath never again to destroy the world through a flood. When they raised the possibility that this oath did not preclude destroying the world through fire, he again reassured them that the Divine oath precluded destruction of the entire world through any medium and that the alarming sounds they heard were merely those accompanying the giving of the Torah by G-d to His people.

The impression we get from this dialogue is that G-d's oath made after the world destroying waters of the great deluge receded was not limited to water but included fire as well. This seems to be in conflict with the *gemara* (*Mesechta Sotah 11a*) which describes the deliberations of Pharaoh and the Egyptians in how to persecute the Jews in their land without fear of Heavenly retribution. They rejected the idea of oppressing them with fire or sword because of their awareness that Divine justice could punish them for this measure for measure. They therefore decided to suppress the growth of the Hebrew nation through water, confident that G-d's oath to refrain from another deluge would preclude punishing them through water. This reasoning led them to decree the drowning of newborn Hebrew children. They were nevertheless punished, measure for measure, by eventually being drowned in Yam Suf.

It seems from this *gemara* that the Egyptians assumed that the Divine oath did not preclude fire, while Bilaam told the kings that it did.

Maharsha offers a simple resolution. Bilaam's point was that the Divine oath precluded universal destruction through any medium. The error of the Egyptians was to extend this oath to the fate of an individual nation. They assumed that G-d had ruled out destroying even a single nation through water while reserving the option to do so through fire. As the above-mentioned *gemara* points out, their fatal error was in misinterpreting the Divine oath which dealt only with universal destruction but left them, as a single nation, vulnerable to measure for measure punishment through water.

• *Zevachim 116a*

VIRTUAL FORGIVENESS

From: E. T. in Denver

*Dear Rabbi,
Is it permissible to ask for mechila (forgiveness) over an email network rather than in person? I know it's not preferable, but many of us work in large networked environments. We considered the option of sending it receipt-requested to a specific address rather than an all-points broadcast. Thanks!*

Dear E. T.

There are two components in achieving forgiveness from someone we have wronged. One is the initiative of asking for forgiveness; the other is the granting of the forgiveness. Ideally, we try for both. While doing so in person is the best way to appease someone, it is not always possible. Asking for forgiveness in a written letter, over the phone or in cyber space is also acceptable – particularly when the person responds. Nevertheless, even if a person doesn't confirm his forgiveness, in the pre-Kol Nidre confession a Jew says that he forgives anyone who wronged him, and prays that Heaven will inspire others to forgive him as well.

FOREGOING BLOWING

From: A. A.

*Dear Rabbi,
Rosh Hashana will soon be with us, and this year we will not be blowing the shofar on the first day because it is Shabbat. I would like to understand more deeply why we have this custom. Is it because we don't use ritual objects on Shabbat? But we read from the Torah on Shabbat. Or is forbidden like other musical instruments, since if they break you might come to fix them?*

Dear A. A.,

As you say, there's no prohibition against using ritual objects on Shabbat. We read the Torah on Shabbat. Nor is the shofar forbidden on Shabbat Rosh Hashana because of the prohibition against musical instruments. On Shabbat and holidays, musical instruments are forbidden; nevertheless blowing the shofar on a non-Shabbat Rosh Hashana holiday is permitted. Rather, the reason is as follows: everyone wants to fulfill his obligation to hear the shofar, but not everyone knows how to blow the shofar. Someone might bring his shofar to an expert to learn how, and thereby acci-

dentally desecrate Shabbat by carrying the shofar in a prohibited domain. Therefore the Sages used their authority to suspend the mitzva of shofar when it occurs on Shabbat.

I once heard a beautiful idea which can be learned from this Rabbinic decree, an idea especially appropriate for Rosh Hashana. The Sages of Israel forfeited their own mitzva — sacrificing their own spiritual elevation and that of the entire nation — for the sake of some simple, perhaps unlearned Jew, living far from any major Jewish community. They cared about him, concerned that he too keep Shabbat properly. This highlights the inseparable connection shared by all Jews, teaching us to care about each other and unite as one people.

Sources:

- *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 588:5, Taz, Mishna Brurah 13 Ran, Rosh Hashana, Ch. 4.*

LIFE IN THE FAST VEIN

From: I. E.

*Dear Rabbi,
If someone is sick and knows that he is going to have to eat on Yom Kippur, why not do so through intravenous? It's my understanding that since intravenous is not the normal way of eating, it's not technically a violation of the requirement to fast. If you tell me that intravenous is too big a bother or expense, isn't it true that a person must go to all lengths and expense not to transgress a negative commandment? So why don't sick people check into a hospital before Yom Kippur and 'eat' intravenously?*

Dear I. E.,

The obligation to fast applies only on Yom Kippur itself. Therefore there's no obligation to hook up to intravenous before Yom Kippur in order to 'fast' on Yom Kippur. Once Yom Kippur arrives, it may be forbidden to hook up to intravenous. First, inserting a needle when not needed for health is prohibited because of causing a wound and spilling blood. Second, the intravenous may cause some unforeseeable health risk which the person is not required to take.

While on intravenous, I'll tell you a story. Once, a man on intravenous had an overwhelming desire for a glass of tea, and he convinced the doctor to administer it to him intravenously. When the tea began to flow, the man winced. "What's the matter?" asked the doctor, "Too hot?" "No, too sweet."

Sources

- *Iggrot Moshe Orach Chaim 3:90*

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TAKING LEAVE OF THE TREE

From: D. S.

*Dear Rabbi,
If a tree above a succa prevents one from seeing the sky because of its leaves, does that invalidate the succa? A tree is above the porch which would be the most convenient place for a succa. However, an alternate location with clear sky is available.*

Dear D. S.,

A succa must be directly under the sky; if it's built underneath anything else, it's invalid. Even if the foliage of the tree is very thin, it could still invalidate an otherwise valid succa according to some authorities. Therefore, caution should be taken when building a succa to avoid placing it under a tree.

Sources:

- *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 626:1*
- *Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chaim 626*

ALL FOUR ONE

From: M. in Ontario

*Dear Rabbi,
Why must the four species of Succot be bound together?*

Dear M.,

The Torah commands, "Take yourselves...fruit of the etrog tree, branches of date palms, boughs of myrtle and willows of the brook, and rejoice before the Lord your God seven days" (Leviticus 23:39-40). Our Sages taught that the etrog, which has both taste and fragrance, corresponds to Jews who possess both Torah and good deeds. The branch of the date palm, whose fruit has taste but no fragrance, corresponds to Jews who possess Torah but lack good deeds. The myrtle which has fragrance but no taste represents Jews who possess good deeds but are

lacking Torah. Finally, the willow branch, which has neither taste nor fragrance, symbolizes Jews who lack both Torah and good deeds. All of these "species" are inextricably bound together in order that each one's strengths will make up for the others' shortcomings. And more, only by 'taking ourselves' into this unity, for better or for worse, can we truly rejoice before the Lord our G-d.

Sources:

- *Vayikra Rabba 30.*

GOING AROUND IN CIRCLES

From: R. in San Francisco

*Dear Rabbi,
Why on Simchat Torah do we dance seemingly endlessly around in a circle?*

Dear R.,

It is an ancient Jewish custom to dance around the *bima* table with Torah scrolls on *Simchat Torah*, the festival on which we celebrate the completion of the yearly Torah-reading. Yet as soon as we finish the last verse, we immediately start, "In the beginning" (Gen. 1:1). This continuous cycle is like a circle which symbolizes eternity. It has no beginning and no end; it goes on forever, eternally, just as the One who gave us the Torah is Eternal. This circle of dancing then, symbolizes the eternity of the Torah and its Author.

The circle is also a symbol of equality. Every point on the circle is equidistant from the center. This teaches that while there are many different kinds of Jews: Jews from Iran and Jews from Indianapolis, Jews of all colors and from all walks of life, Jews who strongly differ in their emphasis in service of the Creator such as *Chassidim* and *Litvaks*, *Ashkenazim* and *Sephardim*. Nevertheless, as we dance in that circle we must realize that even though we may be 180 degrees away from our fellow Jews, we are all equidistant from the center, from G-d.

Sources:

- *Rabbi Zev Leff, Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair*

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

TALKING TO THE WALL

Any rabbi or teacher who sometimes has the frustrating feeling that his audience is not paying attention and that he is virtually “talking to the wall” can take heart from a story told about a Jerusalem *maggid* (Torah lecturer) of a generation ago.

Rabbi Weiss spoke every Shabbat in a particular synagogue, exhorting his many listeners to examine and improve their ways. Although an extraordinary heat wave one summer Shabbat made it highly unlikely that anyone would turn up for his sermon, he refused to disappoint anyone and sweatingly made his way to what turned out to be a completely empty synagogue. Not

one to abandon a regular weekly routine even in such circumstances, he proceeded to deliver his fiery sermon to the walls.

As soon as he finished, a youngster came running towards him shouting, “Rabbi, I promise to repent my sins and become a better Jew!”

This fellow, who had somewhat slipped in his religious observance, had been passing by the synagogue when the intense heat overcame him and he took a nap in the ladies gallery. Roused from his slumber by the Rabbi’s booming voice, he, unseen by the speaker, listened to his message and took it to heart.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

ADAM – HEAD MATERIAL

When G-d created the first man He formed his torso from the dust of Babylon, his head from that of Eretz Yisrael and his limbs from all the other lands. (*Mesechta Sanhedrin 38b*)

The whole world was created for man to utilize in serving his Creator, explains Maharsha, so it was necessary to form man from the entire earth and give him



mastery over it. This provides an understanding why the head, which contains the brain in which is seated human intelligence and soul power, was formed from the material of Eretz Yisrael. The very air of Eretz Yisrael makes one wise, say our Talmudic Sages, and Yerushalayim is where the Gate to Heaven is for the soul.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

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THE CAB-BUS WORLD WAR

Question: As one who avoids intercity travel with my own car because of the parking problem in my place of work I regularly get to my destination either by bus or taxi depending on how much of a rush I am in. This gives me an opportunity to share in the frustration of the driver of the bus I am on when a cab stubbornly obstructs his path to pick up or discharge his passenger. But I am sometimes that very passenger! What is the right thing for me to do in such a situation?

Answer: A cabbie friend of mine once compared the perpetual battle between drivers like himself and the busmen to the historic struggle in the “old west” between the cattlemen and the homesteaders. Each side is absolutely convinced that justice is on his side and blames the other for “thinking he owns the street”.

Without actually taking sides in this “world war” (although it would seem that if traffic laws accord a public vehicle the right of way this should extend to giving prior-

ity to the bus as well) in which tempers flare, there is no reason for you to be an accomplice to a cabbie’s inconsiderate action. If you are hailing a cab and he stops for you smack in front of a bus, just signal to him to pull over to a spot which will not obstruct the route of the bus. The same procedure should be followed when the cabbie stops in front of a bus to let you out. Politely tell him that you wish him to drive over to a spot where your disembarking will not be at the expense of the bus driver and his passengers.

In both cases your cabbie may get upset at your telling him how to run his business. Remember, however, that you are the paying customer and have a right to make such demands. You may also be losing a minute of your precious time by insisting on such consideration. But isn’t it worth sacrificing a minute of your time to save a minute for dozens of passengers on the bus behind you – especially since you know how they feel from your own experience as a bus rider?

ISRAEL Forever

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

In the dark tunnels of life there often appears a real or imaginary light. For the man of faith it is a ray of hope that the darkness will soon be over; for others it is the signal of an oncoming train!

Jews have passed through many tunnels of darkness throughout their history. In order to ensure that they would never lose their faith and hope they were told by their leader Moshe, “You stand here *“today”* as he made a covenant between them and their Creator.

This word “today”, which Jews will hear read in synagogue throughout the world on the last Shabbat of this year, introduces a very special message of encouragement. In his commentary, Rashi quotes the words of our Sages:

“Today, like this day which lives and which has light following darkness – so too has He brightened the darkness for you in the past and so will He bring you light in the future. The curses and the suffering spelled out in the

previous chapter serve to preserve you and firmly establish you before Him.”

For the Jew of faith, darkness is not a mere historical accident or even a simple manifestation of anti-Semitism which are challenges to his power of survival. Just as the day is inexorably comprised of light and darkness, with each serving its purpose, so too is Jewish history made up of triumph and tragedy. While we all long for the happiness of the light we must never lose sight of the purpose of the darkness which redirects us to our true mission as a people.

Jews in Eretz Yisrael have suffered a great deal of curses and darkness in the year gone by. In wishing all of our readers a Happy and Healthy New Year we cannot help but quote the closing words of a prayer traditionally recited in the waning hours of the year:

“May the old year with its curses come to an end. May the new year with its blessings begin.”