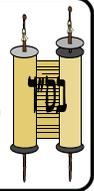




Kinder Torah

Parashas Nitzavim – Vayelech



Follow Your Heart

Rosh Hashanah is coming quickly, Abba. It is less than a week away. What's going to be?"

"What do you mean, Avi?"

"I want to do teshuva, Abba. What's going to be with me? How will I ever succeed?"

"What is the problem Avi?"

"Teshuva seems so far away, Abba. I have so many things to work on. I feel so far away from Hashem."

"Can you give me an example, Avi?"

"Yes, Abba. I need to pray better. I must say my *berachos* (blessings) with more *kavannah* (intention). I should learn better, with more intensity and understanding. I need to be more patient and sympathetic toward people. I must make a bigger effort to avoid the wrong kind of music, clothing, and food. I have to overcome my desire to speak *loshon hora*. The list is so long, Abba. What can I do?"

"Avi, the answer to that question is in this week's parasha. The Torah states, 'For this commandment that I command you today – it is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in heaven (for you) to say, "Who can ascend to heaven and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and perform it? Nor is it across the sea (for you) to say, "Who can cross the other side of the sea and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and perform it? Rather, the matter is very near to you – in your mouth and your heart – to perform it' (Devarim 30:11-14). The Ramban explains that the Torah is referring to the mitzvah of teshuva. Teshuva is not far away. Quite the contrary! It is very nearby. It is in our hearts."

What does that mean, Abba?"

"The Sforno explains that our hearts should recognize Hashem, and the sins that separate us from Him. We should then turn our hearts toward Hashem, and return to Him."

"But I have so many sins, Abba. It seems overwhelming."

"Don't worry, Avi. Rav Avraham Yaakov Pam zt"l, in his sefer *Atarah Li'Melech*, has some inspirational words for you. He says the verses that we quoted are a wonderful source of *chizuk* (inner strength.) Do not give up! Do not feel that teshuva is so hard to do. It is very close and easy."

"I see Abba. Hashem is telling me that I can do it. I can really come close to Him."

"Definitely, Avi."

"Where do I begin?"

"The verse gives you a good piece of advice. Teshuva is in your heart. Therefore, follow your heart. Work on what you want to work on. Begin with what is close to your heart. Pick the area that you most want to improve, and work on it."

"What about everything else?"

"You will get to that. Your success in the chosen area will give you the strength and encouragement to go on to other areas. You will draw *kedusha* (holiness) into your soul, and it will spread. As a result of this, all of your mitzvos will be strengthened, and your aveiyros will weaken or disappear."

That is so inspiring!"

"Yes, Avi. Now you have a plan. Follow your heart's desire to return to Hashem. Work on your chosen area, and pray for success. He will draw you close to Him. You will become a great and holy person,



one who is close to the Almighty."

"Abba, thank you for showing me the way. The way to Hashem."

"It's very simple, Avi. Just follow your heart."

Kinderlach . . .

Rosh Hashanah is almost here. Now is time to do teshuva. How do we do it? What shall we work on? There is so much to do. Where do we start? Rav Pam zt"l tells us to begin with our hearts. Which mitzvah do you desire the most? Which way do you want to come close to Hashem? Do you want to speak to Him personally with tefillah (prayer)? Do you want to hear His words clearly when you are learning? Do you want to help His kinderlach – your fellow Jews?

These are all ways to get close to Him. Pick the one that you desire the most, and get to work. Ask Him for Siyata Di'Shmaya (Heavenly Assistance). With His help, you will succeed and He will draw you back to Him.

Kinderlach, this Rosh Hashanah, you should all be written and sealed for a good year.

Choose Life

And choose life in order that you and your offspring will live." (Devarim 30:19). "Why does the Torah need to write this?" asks Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l. The previous verse (30:15) already stated that doing good brings life, and evil brings death. However, there is a deeper point here. The way that we choose to fulfill the mitzvos can bring life. Do we perform mitzvos begrudgingly, out of a feeling of obligation? Are our mitzvos a "lifeless" routine? If so, they will not have a positive influence on our offspring and students. They will sense that the fulfilling the mitzvos of the Torah is a big burden, and find excuses to throw off the yoke.

Contrast this with one who does mitzvos with great simcha (happiness). He learns Torah with tremendous joy. He puts "life" into his mitzvos because they are his life's pleasure. All other fleeting delights pale in comparison. This person will merit true life - great happiness in this world, and eternity in the world to come. And his children will see it, feel it, and follow in his footsteps.

Kinderlach . . .

Just one more week until Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the month of Tishrei.

Tishrei has more mitzvos than any other month! Shofar, sukkah, lulav, simchas yom tov are just a few. The Ramban zt"l counts thirteen mitzvos d'oraysa (from the Torah) in the month of Tishrei. What a wonderful opportunity to be happy! Each mitzvah brings us happiness. Thirteen mitzvos are enough to make us ecstatic. Be happy, kinderlach. Enjoy life.

Parasha Questions:

- Which day does the verse, "You are standing today," refer to? (Rashi 29:9)
- With whom is Hashem making a bris (pact)? (29:14 and Rashi)
- Why are the choices of life and good grouped together? (Rashi 30:15)
- When, where, and with whom does the mitzvah of "hakhel" take place? (31:10-13 and Rashi)

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