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Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Nitzavim



The Quantification of a Person As Revealed By His **YEARNING**

Hardship and Pain Temper the Jew

Torah: "You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your G-d..."

Midrash: "You (G-d) turn over the evil one so that he does not exit, but the house of the righteous remains standing. When G-d scrutinizes the ways of the evil and evaluates them, they cannot remain standing. As we see regarding the generation of the Great Flood, He scrutinized their actions and they did not remain standing....He scrutinized the community of Sodom and they did not remain standing. He scrutinized the ways of Egypt and they did not remain standing. As it states, 'Not any of them remained but one...'"

"He scrutinized the Babylonians after they destroyed the Temple and none of them remained standing. As it states, 'I will cut off from Babylon and there will be no descendant...' All the evildoers have been cast away and will not rise, but the Jewish people although they have fallen, they will rise. As it states, 'Even when

I have fallen, I will rise...' *Reb Chanina Bar Papa* says, 'G-d said, 'There was never a nation that I have smitten that I needed to smite again. However, you, who are the children of Yaakov were not consumed. As it states, 'My arrows will be expended but they will not be expended.'

"The Jewish people are similar to a target. Although the arrows penetrate the target, it remains in place. Why are the nations of the world destroyed when they are punished, yet the Jewish people are able rise? It is because when difficulties comes upon the nations, they bolt and rebel against G-d. They do not mention His Name. As it states, 'Your Wrath should pour out upon the nations who do not know You. They did no call upon Your Name.' However, in contrast, when tragedy befalls the Jewish people they become humbled/subordinate themselves and pray."

Rambam in Laws of Divorce: Although a writ of divorce (get) is only valid when it is given consensually,

if the husband does not want to divorce his wife, the court is permitted to coerce him to do so, even through physical coercion, until he says “I consent.”

Rambam: How is it a valid writ of divorce if we are fully aware that the husband is only in agreement because he could no longer tolerate the pain? Why is this considered a valid get? *Rambam* explains that the will of every Jew is to do the Will of G-d. It is true that one may be distracted or confused by his conflicts of interest and the evil inclination, but essentially the Jew wants to do what the Torah dictates. When the Jew is jolted through coercion, his conflicts of interest no longer interfere with his perception of truth and proper service of G-d.

In contrast, when the non-Jew is jolted as a result of upheavals, he believes that he is being victimized. Since his essence is not spiritual, he does not become humbled and consequently repent, but rather he rebels against G-d. Therefore, in order to properly punish the nations of the world, G-d must continue to punish them until they are destroyed because they will not repent and change their evil ways.

Rambam: Regarding the Egyptians, they no longer had free choice at the time of their destruction. It was withdrawn from them as a punishment. As it states, “He hardened the heart of Pharaoh.” If the Egyptians forfeited their ability to choose to change their ways, their state of defiance is unrelated to themselves because they had no choice. If so, how could G-d destroy them because they should not be culpable for their actions?

Rambam: Initially every human being has the power of choice; however, it is possible for one to forfeit and lose that ability through one’s extreme level of evil. It is considered an abuse of choice, which is a privilege. When one chooses to behave in an extremely evil manner, G-d withdraws the gift of choice. Thus, if one is no longer in a state of being able to choose, he is nevertheless held fully liable for his actions because it was only through his initial choice of evil that he chose to forfeit ability to choose.

Honing One’s Spiritual Capacity

Torah: During the first day of *Chol HaMoed Succos* of the eighth year of the Sabbatical cycle, the entire Jewish People; men, women, and children, must

gather on the Temple Mount to hear the reading of the Book of *Devarim* (*Mishna Torah*) by the King of Israel. This Positive Commandment is referred to as *Hakheil*.

Torah: The purpose of this reading is, “So that they (the Jewish people) should listen and learn to fear Hashem, your G-d and be careful to perform all the words of this *Torah*.” The objective of the *mitzvah* of *Hakheil* is to instill the fear of G-d into the hearts of the Jewish people. As a result of this reverence, they will observe the dictates of the *Torah* properly.

Torah: Regarding the Sabbatical year that the Land of Israel must remain fallow and one is not permitted to engage in agricultural pursuits. The Sabbatical year is referred to by the *Torah* as, “*Shabbos L’ashem* (A Sabbath for G-d)”.

Sforno: “*Shabbos L’ashem*” is a year that one should be dedicated to *Torah* study, introspection, and meditation. The Sabbatical year should be devoted completely to spiritual growth. It is after this year that the Jewish people gather on the Temple Mount in order to hear the King of Israel read *Mishna Torah* to learn to revere G-d and keep His *Torah*.

According to the understanding of “*Shabbos L’ashem*”, that the Sabbatical year is a time that is designated for spiritual pursuit, it would seem that the *mitzvah* of *Hakheil* should precede the Sabbatical year rather than follow it. If the purpose of the reading of *Mishna Torah* on the Temple Mount was to inspire the people to fear G-d to keep His *Torah*, it would seem that one should first gather on the Temple Mount to hear the Book of *Devarim* to be inspired. As a result of this inspiration, the following year should be dedicated to spiritual growth and introspection. However, the *Torah* states that this is not the proper order. Why is this so?

For one to have the capacity to internalize and be a beneficiary of a spiritual endeavor, one must hone his spiritual senses. In order to bring this about, one must dedicate a full year to be immersed in *Torah* study and reflecting on one’s spirituality. This should be done without any distraction whatsoever. The Sabbatical year is truly a year dedicated for G-d (*Shabbos L’ashem*).

After dedicating a year in this context, one experiences *Rosh Hashanah* (the Day of Judgment), the Ten Days of Penitence, culminating with *Yom Kippur*, during which one is spiritually purified before G-d. As it

states, “Before G-d you shall purify yourselves.” This is then followed by experiencing “You shall rejoice in your holidays” with *Sukkos*. It is only after all of this spiritual preparation that one has the capacity to be a full beneficiary of the *Hakheil* event.

Every day we recite in the blessing of Repentance in the *Amidah*, “Bring us back, our Father, to Your *Torah*, and bring us near our King to Your service and influence us to return in perfect repentance before You.” We see from the words of the Men of the Great Assembly (who had authored the *Amidah*) that the process to repent begins with the study of *Torah*. Only after one has studied sufficiently does he have an appreciation and understanding for what it means to be brought into the service of the King. Once one has internalized the study of *Torah* and actualizes G-d’s Will does one have the merit to be brought to perfect repentance. The Men of the Great Assembly understood from what is stated regarding the *mitzvah* of *Hakheil* that it is the only way that one can achieve a sensitivity for spirituality. One comes to “listen and learn (the *Torah*)” then subsequently it results in the “fear *Hashem*”.

The Order to Achieve Repentance

Torah: Regarding repentance, “It will be that when all these things come upon you – the blessing and the curse...and you will return unto *Hashem*, your G-d, and listen to His voice... Then *Hashem*, your G-d will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, to love *Hashem*... When you will listen to the voice of *Hashem*, your G-d, to observe His commandments and His decrees...”

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: “In order to properly address repentance, one must pursue three levels of initiative. Firstly, one must engage in the study of *Torah*. As it states, ‘You shall listen to His voice...’ How does one do this? One must study *Torah* (as it is written in the *Mishna* in *Ethics of our Fathers*, ‘*Ein am haaretz chasid* – An unlearned person cannot be scrupulously pious’) ...As a result of heeding the Word of G-d, He will return the Jewish people from their exiles. As it states in the *Zohar*, ‘In the merit of the study of *Torah* the Jewish people will be redeemed.’”

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: “How will one address the negative commandments? It states, ‘Hashem, your G-d will circumcise your heart...’ It is known that the covering of the heart is the source of all evil, lust, and

desire... Thus, after G-d will remove the covering on the heart, it will allow the Jew to be refrain from all negative behavior. He will no longer lust for what is forbidden. How will one then address the positive commandments? It states, ‘you will return...to observe His commandments and decrees...’ The fulfillment of positive commandments requires initiative. As a result of fulfilling the positive commandments G-d will rejoice with you...”

Thus, the repentance process begins with the study of *Torah*, then one needs to address the negative commandments. Only after one has distanced himself from the negative will he be overwhelmed with love for G-d, which will motivate him to fulfill the positive commandments.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: Adam was created as a pure and holy being. In order for Adam to achieve perfection he needed to abide by one directive not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. However, after ingesting the fruit that contained evil, he introduced impurity into his being and thus became spiritually putrefied and contaminated. The only way one can rehabilitate and restore the purity of one’s spirituality is to observe the negative commandments. Then, through the fulfillment of the positive commandments one will introduce a spiritual enlightenment into his being which will cause him to ascend spiritually.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh in *Ki Savo*: If one is not fully repentant regarding his sins, the positive *mitzvah* that he performs, although it may be performed on an advanced level (for its own sake – *l’shma*) its status is deficient. It is because of the impurity that the individual possesses that the *mitzvah* becomes spiritually tainted. In order for one to achieve full repentance, one must engage in the process for a lifetime. If this is so, how does one contend with the spiritual impurity that he possesses?

There will always be a level of interference that will not allow one’s *mitzvah* performance to be complete. If one truly wishes to repent, G-d will recognize that purity of commitment in the individual and value it as something wholesome. By embarking on *Torah* study in conjunction with the repentance process, G-d will grant one the ability to be a full beneficiary of one’s spiritual pursuits.

Giving One's Soul For G-d

Torah: "You will return unto *Hashem*, your G-d, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you today... with all your heart and all your soul."

Sforno: The verse, 'you will return unto *Hashem*, your G-d' means you will repent and return to G-d only to do His Will and no other motive.

Gemara in Tractate *Yomah*: The repentance of one who repents purely for the sake of G-d ascends to the Heavenly Throne.

Amidah (Silent Prayer) in the blessing for the restoration of the Davidic Reign: "The offspring of Your servant David (*Moshiach*) may You speedily cause to flourish..." We supplicate for the coming of *Moshiach* not for the purpose of alleviating the plight of the Jewish people in the world, but rather for the sake of G-d's Glory. It is for the sake of G-d's Name, which is being continuously desecrated and His Will not being not heeded.

This is the focus and theme of our supplications on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. We pray that all existence will recognize G-d and Glorify Him. All mankind should join together as one to serve Him with a complete heart. Although *Rosh Hashanah* is the day of judgment, when G-d judges the world, we do not supplicate Him for Mercy and forgiveness but rather we only address His Kingship and Glory.

Torah: "...according to everything that I command you today...with all your heart and all your soul (*b'chol nafshecha*)."

Mishna in Tractate *Berachos*: "With all your soul (*nefesh*)" in the first paragraph of the *Shema* can mean that one's love for G-d must be so great that one must be willing to even give his life for His sake. Every living creature has a "*nefesh*" which is the life force that provides for every aspect of one's physicality. The "*nefesh*" of the human being links to his physical make up. In addition, man has the "spirit (*ruach*) and soul (*neshama*). The "*nefesh*" is the source from which man's animalistic desires and needs emanate. These must be tempered by his spirituality "*neshama*" so that he may become spiritualized.

Sforno: "All your soul (*b'chol nafshecha*)" can mean that when one repents at a special level and attains a unique level of clarity, he will no longer be impeded by his desires. There will no longer be any interference regarding his spirituality.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: During the time of *Reb Yehudah* there was drought and it had not rained for an extended period of time. Part of the procedure of prayer to address this problem, one must fast and remove his (leather) shoes. When *Reb Yehudah* would remove only as much as one shoe, it would begin raining immediately. However in later generations, regardless of how much they prayed and fasted the rains did not necessarily come.

Gemara: "Although the *Torah* sages in the generation of *Reb Yehudah* were proficient in only two sections of the *Talmud* (there are six); nevertheless, they were worthy of the rains coming. In later generations, although the *Torah* sages were proficient in all six sections of the *Talmud*, regardless of their supplications, the rains did not come."

Gemara: The difference between the generation of *Reb Yehudah* and the later generations is that they were willing to sacrifice for G-d. Even with a small initiative they merited rain. However, other generations who did not sacrifice for G-d did not merit rain despite their efforts to bring it about.

Gemara: There was an incident in which a woman was dressed immodestly. *Reb Yehudah* witnessed this and reacted to correct the breach of modesty, regardless of the consequence to himself. He had believed that it was a Jewish woman who was behaving inappropriately; however, after he had reacted it was revealed that she was a non-Jewish woman. He was financially penalized and disgraced for his behavior. The *Gemara* refers to his action as "he gave his soul to sanctify G-d."

Being willing to give one's soul for the sake of G-d may mean actually giving one's life, but it can also mean being willing to compromise on one's status for the sake of G-d. This is similar to what *Sforno* explains regarding the individual who has a clear recognition of the truth and chooses to serve G-d with all of his soul. That individual does not allow his animal desires interfere with his service of G-d. Therefore, G-d was willing to alter nature for the sake of *Reb Yehudah* to bring about rain, which was not so with other generations.

Perceiving and Internalizing the Uniqueness of Torah (from Ki Savo)

Torah: “This day, Hashem your G-d, commands you to perform these decrees and the statutes, and you shall observe and perform them with all your heart and with all your soul.”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: “When you perform the *mitzvos* and study the *Torah* you should see them as being new in your eyes. It should be as if you were commanded to observe them on this day (by G-d).” The *Torah* on several occasions emphasizes the point of needing to see the *mitzvos* as being “new.” For example, in the first paragraph of the *Shema* the *Torah* states, “Let these matters that I command you today be upon your heart.”

Chazal: “Today” means that the *mitzvos* must remain “new” in one’s eyes. One would think that it is obvious that in order to maintain one’s interest and commitment to one’s *Torah* obligation, one must see it as being “new” and not as something of the past. If something is not seen as being unique and special, one’s interest will definitely wane and ultimately dissipate. This does not only pertain to one’s spirituality, it applies to every experience in life. However, since the *Torah* reiterates this point a number of times, it is clear that the aspect of “being seen as new and unique” is not being emphasized.

It is interesting to note that the *Sifri* cited by *Rashi* adds, “It should be as if your were commanded to observe them this day by G-d.” Not only should one see the *mitzvos* and the *Torah* as being “newly presented” one should also feel that he was commanded by G-d Himself to observe them “today.” Meaning, the Sinai experience should not be seen as something of the past, but rather one must value it as if the directive of G-d is being continuously transmitted to oneself.

The *Torah* itself, that was given to the Jewish people at Sinai is the medium through which G-d speaks to every Jew on a daily and ongoing basis. If one appreciates and internalizes that the Creator is commanding him to study the *Torah* and observe its *mitzvos*, he will not approach his obligation as something trivial. Being seen as unique and special is a result of seeing G-d Himself issuing the directive. The objective and purpose of existence is to fulfill the *Torah*. If one does not internalize this fact, he will gloss over many opportunities to utilize existence for this purpose.

In the morning blessing that precedes the *Shema*: “He renews, in His Goodness daily, perpetually, the work of creation.” Meaning, the world continues to exist not because it existed a moment ago; but rather, it is because G-d continuously Will’s its existence every moment. If G-d needs to continuously renew His Willing of existence as if it were a new creation, then one can understand that He will only do so if the objective of Creation is being addressed. If it is not, then He will cease willing its existence. It is of the utmost importance for one to appreciate this reality in order to continue to be dedicated to the fulfillment of the *Torah* and its *mitzvos*.

Jeremiah the Prophet: “If not for My Covenant being in affect day and night, the extent of heaven and earth would not exist.”

Gemara in Tractate *Nidarim*: The verse is referring to the continuous study of *Torah*. If there should be a moment during which the *Torah* is not being studied or fulfilled, existence will cease to be. Thus, the process of creation is contingent on the ongoing study of *Torah* and its fulfillment. Therefore, it is essential that one must see it as “new” because G-d Himself is presently commanding him to see it as such.



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