Parsha Halacha - Parshat Nitzavim

Teshuvah and Unity

The Nitzavim - Rosh Hashanah Connection

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Parsha Halacha is underwritten by a grant from Dr. Stephen and Bella Brenner in loving memory of Stephen's father, Shmuel Tzvi ben Pinchas, and Bella's parents, Avraham ben Yitzchak and Leah bas HaRav Sholom Zev HaCohen

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The Torah portion of Nitzavim is alway read before Rosh Hashanah. The early sages (Rishonim) gave the following mnemonic to remember this fact and to remember other important dates for certain Torah portions (O.C. 428:4): "מְנוּ וְעִצְרוּ צוּמוּ וצְולוּ קוּמוּ וְתִקְעוּ, Count and make Shavuot, fast and pray, stand and blow."
This means

- מנו ועצרו - Count, i.e., read Parshat Bamidbar which discusses counting, and celebrate Shavuot (Shavuot is called Atzeret).
- צומו וצולו - Fast (on Tisha Be'Av) and pray, i.e., read Parshat Va'etchanan which means "I prayed".
- קומו ותקעו - Stand up, i.e., read Parshat Nitzavim which means "standing", and blow the Shofar (on Rosh Hashanah).

One of the reasons that Parshat Nitzavim is read at this time is to separate between the *Tochacha* (curses) of Parshat Ki Tavo and Rosh Hashanah (Ri in Tosfot D.H. Vekilelam Bava Batra 88b).

Unity Protects

Rabbi Yitzchak Flakser of blessed memory gave the following explanation as to why this portion specifically is the one that separates between the curses and the new year (Sha'arei Yitzchak, Kuntres Birurei Halachat, page 168):

Parshat Nitzavimn begins with the theme of *Achdut,* unity, as the verse says, "אַתֶּם נִצָּבִים הַיּוֹם כֻּלְּכֶם לִפְנֵי ה׳ You are all standing today in front of G-d." The verse goes on to list various types of Jews beginning with the leaders and ending with the simple people. This teaches us that every single Jew, whether the sophisticated leaders or the simple folk, are essential components of our people, and we must recognize everyone's importance and be united with them.
It is this unity that acts as the protective barrier between the curses and the new year. I.e., in the merit of Jewish unity we will, G-d willing, be protected in the coming year from any negative events.
To illustrate the idea of the importance of every Jew (the realization of which leads to Jewish unity), Rabbi Flakser cites the following story:
The fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, known as the Rebbe Rashab, had a wealthy chassid, a diamond dealer by the name of Reb Monye Monoson. Once, in a private audience with him, the Rebbe Rashab was praising certain people who could be categorized as "simple Jews." Reb Monye asked the Rebbe what he saw that was so special in these people. To this the Rebbe responded that they possess unique qualities. Reb Monye remarked that he does not see any unique qualities in them.

A short time later the Rebbe asked Reb Monye if he could look at the diamonds that he had brought. Reb Monye opened his briefcase and arranged all of his diamonds on a table. He then pointed out one particular diamond to the Rebbe and mentioned how it was of exceptional quality. The Rebbe remarked that he saw nothing unique about it. Reb Monye responded that in order to appreciate the beauty of a diamond, one needed to be a *mayven* (expert).

The Rebbe replied, "When it comes to seeing the special qualities of a Jew's soul, one also has to be a *mayven*."

End of Year Encouragement
The first Rebbe of Ger (the Chidushei HaRim) explained the connection between Rosh Hashanah and the Torah portion of Nitzavim as follows (quoted in Likutei Yehudah at the beginning of the Torah portion):
The Midrash (Tanchuma, cited by Rashi on verse 12) says that whenever the Jewish people were handed over from one leader to the next, the previous leader would assemble them together before his passing and give them encouragement. This was done by Moshe (in this Torah portion), Yehoshua (see Joshua 24:1), and by Shmuel (see Samuel I 12:7).
Similarly, when we go from one year to the next, we must give ourselves encouragement by recalling (and strengthening) our accomplishments of the previous year as we prepare to enter the next year.

The word for year in Hebrew is שנה (*shana*). This has the same root as ,שינוי , change. This means that every year there is a certain change in the Divine energy that comes down to this world. As such, we too, must change and elevate our service of G-d on an annual basis. This is why we must spend the month of Elul taking stock of our spiritual accomplishments. Doing so will allow us to strengthen our positive behaviours, discard the negative behaviors, and rejuvenate our Divine service.

A Good Eye

The Chidushei HaRim explained that on Rosh Hashanah every Jew must see his fellow Jews in a positive light. This is alluded to in the verse (Kohelet 2:14) that says, חָכָם עֵינָיו בְּרֹאשׁוֹ" , A wise man has his eyes in his head [to perceive the result of his actions]." This can also mean, "A wise man uses his [good] eyes on Rosh [Hashanah]." When we look at our fellows with a good eye we are more likely to be kind to them. This lesson is important for every level of Jew as we see that the verse (in the beginning of Parshat Nitzavim) mentions specifically the tribal leaders and exhorts them to have an attitude of כֻּלְּכֶם , togetherness.

The ancient Egyptians had the opposite attitude; they had a bad eye towards their fellows, as the verse (Deut. 10:23) says, " לֹא רָאוּ אִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו , Each man did not see his brother," i.e., they were each engrossed in their own pain (of the plagues) and did not concern themselves with the pain of their fellow.

When we have the attitude of unity as described in the verse (כֻּלְּכֶם , all together), we will merit a judgment for a good year.

The Zohar

The Zohar says (vol. 2 page 32b) that the word "הַיּוֹם , today" refers to Rosh Hashanah. Thus the verse in Iyov (Job 1:6) that says "וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם - It was the day," refers to Rosh Hashanah. In addition, where it says (Kings II, 4:11) "וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם - It was the day," regarding Elisha and the Shunamit woman, that day was Rosh Hashanah.

As such, some say that the הַיּוֹם (today) in our Torah portion is also referring to Rosh Hashanah (Likutei Torah by Rabbi Shneor Zalman of Liady and Keter Shem Tov, Hosafot 31).

Rashi on the verse, however, does not cite this interpretation, although he does so on the Kings II (cited above). It has been suggested (Mimishnatam Shel Chachmei Prague, Vol 2, pg. 14) that because the word נִצָּבִים (standing) can have negative connotations (see Nedarim 64b that this word is used in connection with Datan and Aviram), Rashi does not want to associate the verse with Rosh Hashanah as on this day we hope for only positivity and good judgments.

Teshuvah and Unity

As explained above, the first several verses in the portion emphasize Jewish unity. The next section in the Torah portion talks about teshuvah (repentance) and how, in the future, we will

return to G-d and merit the Messianic redemption, as it says (Deut. 30:20), “And you will return to the L-rd, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul, and you will listen to His voice.”

The Gerer Rebbe explains (Likutei Yehudah ibid) that these two concepts of unity and teshuva are connected. When a person does teshuvah, he must know that he cannot do it in a vacuum. Rather he must be among his people and part of the community. As the Shunamit woman said to Elisha (Kings II 4:13) “בְּתוֹךְ עַמִּי אָנֹכִי יֹשָׁבֶת - I live among my people.” This will give him the spiritual strength necessary to overcome any challenges that will face him.

The Midrash (Tanchuma) on the first verse of the Torah portion expresses the importance of togetherness as follows: “When will ‘G-d be your everlasting light?’ When you all become one group, as stated (Deut. 4:4), ‘You are all alive today.’ To illustrate this: If one takes a group of reeds, he will not be able to break them, but even an infant can break one reed. Thus we find that the Jewish people will not be redeemed until they became one group, as it is stated (Jer. 50:4), ’In those days and at that time, says the L-rd, the children of Israel, they and the children of Judah, shall come together.’ This means that when they are united, they will welcome the face of the Divine Presence.”

On the other hand, unity is not enough, as the verse says, “וְהִתְבָּרֵךְ בִּלְבָבוֹ לֵאמֹר שָׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה לִי כִּי בִּשְׁרִרוּת לִבִּי אֵלֵךְ ... לֹא יֹאבֶה ה׳ סְלֹחַ לוֹ - [If] a person blesses himself in his heart and says, I am at peace [with others], so I can do whatever my heart desires… G-d will not forgive him.” While unity is important, it is only one facet of our Divine service. We must also focus on serving G-d in other ways, through Torah study, prayer, and observing all of the mitzvot.

One should follow the order of the Torah portion, by first unifying himself with the Jewish people and appreciating the uniqueness of every single Jew, for one will consequently find inspiration from other Jews, and this will lead him to do teshuvah and return to G-d. This, in turn, will bring about the ingathering of the exiles, as the verse says (Deut. 30:3-6), “Then, the L-rd, your G-d, will bring back your exiles, and He will have mercy upon you. He will once again gather you from all the nations… Even if your exiles are at the end of the heavens, the L-rd, your G-d, will gather you from there... And He will do good to you, and He will make you more numerous than your forefathers… so that you may love the L-rd, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul, for the sake of your life.”

May this take place speedily in our days!
Wishing you a Shabbat Shalom Umevorach! May you be sealed and inscribed for a good and sweet year!
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