

בְּנִסְתָּרָת לְיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וּמִנְגָּלָת לְנוּ וּלְבָנָינוּ עַד עַזְלָם לְעֹשָׂת אֶת כָּל־דָּבָרִי הַתֹּוֹרָה בָּזָאת:

Concealed acts concern the Lord our God; but with overt acts, it is for us and our children ever to apply all the provisions of this Teaching (Deuteronomy 29:28).

You may recognize these words from the end of the long *Vidui (Al Heyt)* on Yom Kippur.

In the context of confession, we are acknowledging that God knows our hidden sins, those in our heart, but our overt sins are revealed to all. In this week's *parasha*, this phrase follows a passage describing God's enactment of retribution should the children of Israel forsake the covenant. But what are the **נִסְתָּרָת** (*nistarot*) and the **מִגְלָת** (*niglot*) in this context? And why are there *nekudot* (markings) on the words **לְנוּ וּלְבָנָינוּ** (*lanu ul'vaneinu*)? The ambiguity and unique markings ask us to look deeper into the meaning of these words, providing us with a meditation for the upcoming Days of Awe.

The *Arizal* understands the **נִסְתָּרָת** as *yir'ah v'ahava b'lev*, awe and love in the heart, and the **מִגְלָת** as the Torah and *mitzvot*, that are revealed to all. Awe and love, emotions deep in our hearts, are the "concealed" that only God knows. This understanding brings to light the emotional work that needs to be done during the process of *vidui* and *teshuva*. We need to tap into the **נִסְתָּרָת** that are buried deep in our hearts if we want to truly return to ourselves, to God, to Torah and *mitzvot*. During this season of repentance, we can challenge ourselves to embrace an emotional vulnerability that can reveal the hidden to ourselves. We can allow ourselves to fear, to love, and to feel a whole range of emotions that this time period can evoke if we open ourselves up and welcome a raw and authentic emotional experience.

There are multiple interpretations for the markings on the words **לְנוּ וּלְבָנָינוּ**. The *midrash* imagines *Ezra HaSofer* sitting and writing scripture, unsure whether or not to write these letters in the Torah, so he marks them and says, "If Elijah (the prophet) would ask me why I wrote these letters, I would respond, 'I already marked them so if you tell me I did well by writing them

(תבטח – *yafeh kavta*), I will remove the markings' " (Avot D'Rabbi Natan A, Chapter 34).

The midrash highlights Ezra's doubt and uncertainty, which, in a sense, epitomizes the state that we are in during this time period – we are uncertain of our fate, we do not know if we are doing good in the eyes of God, doing right by each other. We mark ourselves by acknowledging our failures and flaws during the *Vidui* service but also our achievements as human beings, and we await confirmation from *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* that what we are doing is " **יפה** " (*yafeh*).

We journey from this passive state of vulnerability and uncertainty to an active state of repenting, returning, doing *teshuva*. Chapter 29 closes and we transition to Chapter 30 of *Devarim*, known as *Perek HaTeshuva*. It is no coincidence that we read *Parashat Nitzavim* right before *Rosh HaShana* and the beginning of the *Aseret Yemei Teshuva*. In this chapter, the root word **"shuv"** is repeated 7 times. Let us consider these verses – who is doing the action and what are the varying interpretations of the word.

וְכִי־בָּאוּ עַלְיָקְבָּרִים כָּל־הָדָבָרִים הַאֲלָה הַבָּרָקָה וַהֲקָלָתָה אֲשֶׁר נִתְּתִי לְפָנֶיךָ וַהֲשִׁבָּתָן אֲלִילְבָּבָךְ בְּכָל־

פָּגָם אֲשֶׁר הַדִּיחָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שָׁמָה:

"...**Return** to your heart..."

וַשְׁבָתָן עַד־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְשָׁמַעַת בְּקָלָנוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר־אָנוּ מִצְוָה הַיּוֹם אַתָּה וְבָנֶיךָ בְּכָל־לִבְבָּךְ וּבְכָל־

נֶפֶשֶׁךָ:

"...**Return** to your God..."

וַשְׁבָתָן יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֶת־שְׁבּוֹתְךָ וְרִחְמָךָ

"...God will **restore** your fortunes and take you back with love..."

וַשְׁבָתָן וְקִבְצָךְ מִכָּל־הָעָמִים אֲשֶׁר הַפִּיאָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שָׁמָה:

"...God will **restore** and gather you..."

(Deuteronomy 30:1-3)

אַתָּה מְשׁׁוֹבֵן וְשָׁמַעַת בְּקָול יְהוָה וְשִׁיחַת אֶת־כָּל־מִצְוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר אָנוּ מִצְוָה הַיּוֹם:

“...You, **once again**, will listen to God’s voice and do all of God’s commandments...”

וְהִזִּירָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּכָל | מְעַשָּׂה יְזִירָה בְּפָרִי בְּטַנְגָּר וּבְפָרִי בְּהַמְתָּה וּבְפָרִי אֲדָמָתְךָ לְטוֹבֶה כִּי | יְשֻׁב יְהוָה
לְשֹׁשׁ עַלְיָךְ לְטוֹב כְּאַשְׁר-שָׁשׁ עַל-אַבְתָּיכֶם:

“...God, **once again**, will delight in your well-being...”

כִּי תִשְׁמַע בְּקֹול יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לְשֹׁמֶר מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֲקָתָיו הַכְּתוּבָה בְּסֶפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה כִּי **תִשְׁׁוּב** אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
בְּכָל-לְבָבֶךָ וּבְכָל-נֶפֶשֶׁךָ:

“...When you **return** to God with all your heart and soul...”

(Deuteronomy 30:8-10)

To do *teshuva*, we need to take the first step. That step is returning to ourselves, to our hearts, to our goals, to our vision of where our lives should be. We repent, we introspect, we ask forgiveness. Only when we come back to ourselves can we then return to God, to Torah and *mitzvot*. When we have fully done *teshuva*, God takes action, bringing us back to our land, to our people. God’s restorative actions come from a place of love and mercy only when we turn to God with all of our heart and soul.

Towards the end of the 7th *aliyah* in *Parashat Nitzavim*, we are told:

הָעֵדָתִי בְּכָם הַיּוֹם אַתְּ הַשְׁמִינִים וְאַתְּ הָאָרֶץ הַמִּינִים וְהַמּוֹתֵת נִתְתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְלָלָה וּבְמִרְתָּפָת
בְּחִיִּים לְמַעַן תְּחִיה אַתָּה וִזְרָעָךְ:
לְאַהֲבָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לְשֹׁמֶר בְּכָל־וְלִדְבָּרָה־בָּו כִּי הַזָּעֵר סְפִירָה אֲנָרוֹת יְמִיר לְשִׁבְתָּה עַל־הַאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר
נְשִׁבְעָה יְהוָה לְאַבְתָּיכֶם לְאַבְרָהָם לִיצְמָק וְלִיעַקְבָּר לְתָתָת לְהֶם:

“...life and death, I have placed before you ... **choose life** ... to love your God, to listen to God’s voice and to cleave to God...” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

The Torah demands of us that we walk in this world with a sense of responsibility – to heed the call and engage with others and with God with love and respect. But it is our choice –

only we can do this for ourselves. It is in our hands to return to our hearts, to each other, to God...to choose life.

As we enter these ten days of repentance and judgement, we can be comforted by the words of this week's *haftara*, Isaiah 61:10-63:9. The final of the "shiva de-nehemta", the seven comforting portions, the *haftara* opens with joyous words of salvation invoking wedding imagery, triumph and love. With the new year upon us, I bless us that we enter the High Holidays perhaps more emotionally vulnerable, connected on a deeper, more hidden level than we have in previous years but also equipped with a sense of comfort and joy that it is in our power to fix, to grow, to change, and that God wants us to return. *Kesiva v'Chasima Tova, Shana Tova*, and *Shabbat Shalom*.