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פרשת נצבים
Parshat Nitzavim

Ashreinu | אשרינו

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

Mrs. Allie Goldenberg
Daveed Winograd ('24)
Shoshana Weinstock ('24)
Aron Rosenhouse ('25)
Talia Leubitz ('25)

Parsha Summary

This is one of Moshe's last speeches to Bnei Yisrael, so he tells them the key, most important things he hopes to impart to them before he is gone. *Teshuva* and free choice are major themes of this parsha.

1- Moshe gathers all of Bnei Yisrael to bring them into a covenant with Hashem on the last day of his life.
2- The covenant that they enter establishes them as Hashem's only nation for the rest of the generations.
3- Moshe warns Bnei Yisrael about becoming idol worshippers and warns them about the punishments that come with that sin. The aliyah ends discussing the concept of communal responsibility for one another's actions
4- Moshe warns that they will be exiled from Eretz Yisrael for disobeying the mitzvot, but also says that they will be brought back from all corners of the world when they do *teshuva*.
5- Once they are brought back to Eretz Yisrael, the curses that Bnei Yisrael endured in *galut* will befall their enemies instead. The Jews will be blessed again once they are back in Israel.
6- Moshe reminds them that the mitzvot are not too difficult and they can do them if they put in the effort.
7- Finally, Moshe reminds Bnei Yisrael that whether they get the blessings or curses comes down to the free choice that they have, and Moshe begs them to choose life.

Not Every Man for Himself

Mrs. Allie Goldenberg

Our Parsha begins with Moshe addressing B'nei Yisrael with the words אַתֶּם נִצָּבִים הַיּוֹם כֻּלְּכֶם לִפְנֵי ה׳ - *You stand this day, all of you, before Gd.* Moshe then conveys various ideas to the Jewish people, such as the future redemption, the practicality of Torah, the mitzvah of *teshuva*, etc. But clearly Moshe is speaking to the people. If so, why the need to address them with the opening אַתֶּם נִצָּבִים הַיּוֹם כֻּלְּכֶם לִפְנֵי ה׳ - *You stand this day, all of you, before Gd*? Who else would Moshe be speaking to?

Many suggestions are offered as to why Moshe chooses these words. Very famous among them is the concept that every Jew was standing there listening to Moshe's words. No matter how important, or how seemingly regular, each Jew was there to teach us the value of every person, the uniqueness of each Jew. However, the Ohr HaChaim believes Moshe was teaching another valuable

lesson before his speech even began. By stating:

אַתֶּם נִצָּבִים הַיּוֹם כֻּלְּכֶם לִפְנֵי ה׳

- *You stand this day, all of you, before God*, Moshe was imparting the commandment for each Jew to take responsibility for their fellow man, to look out for them and to make sure their needs are met. In what would be called a team building exercise nowadays, Moshe is in essence telling Bnei Yisrael, before I begin to teach you the rules of the game, ie the *mitzvot*, first look around at each other, no matter who you are or what your status may be, look to your fellow man and take responsibility for them, help them, look out for them. Only then will the lessons that follow have any value.

As we reach Rosh Hashana and beg Hashem to take care of us this year, perhaps we can resolve to look to someone who might benefit from our attention. In that merit may we all have a *shana tova umetuka*.

Head Start

Daveed Winograd ('24)

"Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love"
– Martin Luther King Jr.

The first pasuk of Parshat Nitzavim starts off by saying:

אַתֶּם נִצָּבִים הַיּוֹם כֻּלְּכֶם לִפְנֵי ה׳ אֱלֹקֵיכֶם רָאשֵׁיכֶם שִׁבְטֵיכֶם זִקְנֵיכֶם וְשֹׁטְרֵיכֶם כֹּל אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל

"You are all standing this day before Hashem, your God, the leaders of your tribes, your elders and your officers, every man of Israel" (Devarim 29:9).

Rashi is bothered by the grammatically incorrect formulation of רָאשֵׁיכֶם שִׁבְטֵיכֶם, which means "your heads, your tribes". He points out that it should instead say: רָאשֵׁיכֶם לְשִׁבְטֵיכֶם which means "heads *of* your tribes". Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that Moshe Rabbeinu is is specifically making no distinction between the "heads" and the "tribes" because he is trying to communicate that each and every member of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael has the potential to be a ראש, a head. Additionally, if you strive to be a ראש you will be successful. As the Mishna Avot (4:5) says:

וְהַלּוֹמֵד עַל מְנָת לַעֲשׂוֹת, מַסְפִּיקִין בְּיָדוֹ לִלְמֹד וּלְלַמֵּד לִשְׁמֹר וְלַעֲשׂוֹת

"Someone who learns in order to do, they are provided the ability to learn, teach, guard, and to do."

In addition, Moshe Rabbeinu is communicating to Bnei Yisrael that even a "head" must view himself as one of שִׁבְטֵיכֶם, a member of the tribes. Moshe is teaching us that one of the necessary qualities of a leader is that he must view himself as a regular person, and not as particularly better or more special than others. The message for all of us is that we are all capable of great things; however, great people don't view themselves as better than others.

To Hashem and Beyond

Shoshana Weinstock ('24)

Parshat Nitzavim is always read before Rosh Hashanah, the perfect time for reflection and repentance. Often, we want to change things in our lives. We might want to be better siblings, better friends, and better people. We want to be greater spiritually, spend more time on Torah study, and be more thoughtful in our interpersonal relationships. Yet, circumstances can make these goals feel hard to reach. We feel stuck and our goals can seem unattainable. The Torah describes the national *teshuva* of the Jews as they enter into their homeland and nationhood. This week's parsha says:

וְהָיָה כִּי יָבֹאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ וַהֲשֵׁבֹתָ אֶל לְבָבֶךָ בְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר הִדִּיחֲךָ ה׳ אֱלֹקֶיךָ שָׁמָּה. וְשַׁבְתָּ עַד ה׳ אֱלֹקֶיךָ...וְשָׁב ה׳ אֱלֹקֶיךָ אֶת שְׁבוּתְךָ...כִּי תָשׁוּב אֶל ה׳...

"And it will be, when all these things come upon you the blessing and the curse which I have set before you that you will consider in your heart, among all the nations where Hashem, your God, has banished you. And you will return until Hashem, your God…And Hashem your God will

return you…And when you return to Hashem" (Devarim 30:1-3,10).

Twice the pasuk states that "you will return to God." Why does the Torah have to say this twice?

There is a slight difference between the two phrases. One phrase refers to the fact that after spending time in exile and reflecting, the Jewish people will return to their land. Here the text says, וְשַׁבְתָּ עַד ה', meaning "return up until Hashem". After they return to Israel and Hashem removes the barriers of their hearts, they will learn to fully love Hashem and keep His mitzvot. The second phrase says, כִּי תָשׁוּב אֶל ה' meaning "when you will return to Hashem", using the word אֶל.

What is the difference between returning אֶל and עַד Hashem? The first is to return to their physical home and to reunite as a nation. They are returning up until Hashem but not fully to the point that it includes Him. This is genuine, but still incomplete *teshuva*. After returning to Israel physically, Hashem will "remove the barriers from their hearts", meaning they will be able to reach a complete *teshuva* all the way up to and embracing God.

This teaches us that we should value even small efforts to change and improve, even if we can't immediately fulfill our spiritual goals. Our desire to change is the key tool necessary to achieve spiritual growth.

Stay on Track

Aron Rosenhouse ('25)

This week's parsha discusses blessings and curses. The generations who left Egypt and were physically present at Matan Torah understood and followed Hashem's halachot; but as for their children, who were born in the desert, Moshe Rabbeinu repeated the laws as they were about to enter Eretz Yisrael (which was read in Parshat Ki Tavo). Now, Moshe Rabbeinu explains to them that if you follow Hashem's ways you will receive blessings. But, if *chas v'shalom*, you stray from the mitzvot, our connection to Hashem, you will receive curses.

If you want Hashem to bless you, you must follow His decrees, and His only, because He is the only God. Hashem commands this and instructs:

לָלֶכֶת בִּדְרָכָיו וְלִשְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וְחָיִיתָ וְרָבִיתָ וּבֵרַכְךָ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ

"Walk in His ways, and observe His commandments, His statutes, and His ordinances, so that you will live and increase, and Hashem, your God, will bless you" (Devarim 30:16).

וְאִם יִפְנֶה לְבָבְךָ וְלֹא תִשְׁמָע…כִּי אָבֹד תֹּאבֵדוּן לֹא תַאֲרִיכֻן יָמִים עַל הָאֲדָמָה

"But if your heart deviates and you do not listen…that you will surely perish, and that you will not live long days on the land" (Devarim 30:17-18).

These pesukim are basically saying, if you don't listen to Hashem's commandments you will not make it into the land which has been promised to you.

In all, you should always try your best to live your life according to Hashem's commandments. But if you do happen to sin and don't want to be cursed by Hashem, you must do *teshuva*. That is the only way to rectify your wrongdoings before Hashem. If this seems difficult, don't worry. Hashem assures us that it is "very close to you". The Alter Rebbe in Chapter 17 of Tanya explains in detail that even when we stray, the path to redemption is already waiting for us. Moshe assures us that with the coming of Mashiach, we will return and reclaim our land. May it be speedily in our days. Good Shabbos!

Make the Connection

Talia Leubitz ('25)

Moshe's concluding speech to the people makes up the majority of the weekly Torah portion leading up to Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. In his speech, Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael that if they do not follow Hashem's commandments, He will punish them, and exile them to the four corners of the Earth. Moshe then continues to explain that, while we sit in exile, we will remember Hashem and repent. If we do *teshuva* and return

sincerely to Hashem with all of our hearts, then Hashem will return us to the land of Israel.

The Torah tells us:

לָלֶכֶת בִּדְרָכָיו וְלִשְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וְחָיִיתָ
וְרָבִיתָ וּבֵרַכְךָ ה׳ אֱלֹקיךָ

– that if we return to Hashem, "He will return us from captivity" (Devarim 30:3). Rashi notices that the pasuk uses the word "*shav*" (which grammatically indicates the simple, direct form of the word "return") instead of "*heishiv*" (which would mean that He caused something else to return).

Rashi explains that our rabbis learn two things from this: While we are exiled, the *Shechinah*, God's presence, is also exiled, and in addition to returning us, Hashem returns with us. During this time of year, especially leading up to Rosh Hashanah, Hashem wants to have a relationship with us, as long as we put in a little effort. If we show that we are interested and want to become closer to Hashem, He will help us grow our connection with Him and give us the chance to start over. Hashem is with us in *galut* and at our side when we return. He just needs to know that we are ready to come closer to Him and He will guide us as we head toward *teshuva*.



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ravh@yeshivahs.org