

of his *shmuess* to the Rambam's reply to a letter sent to him by *Rabbi Yehudah Ibn Tibbon*, the translator of the *Moreh Nevuchim*, Guide to the Perplexed. The *Rosh Yeshivah's* overwhelming devotion to his fellow Jew and his outstanding love of *chesed* and commitment to helping anyone in need were legendary. He infused these wonderful qualities in his *talmidim*, students, and in all those who came in contact with him. Indeed, he was a wellspring of loving kindness that nurtured all of those around him.

When Rabbi Yehudah completed the translation, he asked the *Rambam* for an appointment, so that he could discuss a number of issues that were troubling him. Under normal circumstances, any author whose work is being translated or interpreted by another person would insist on reading the final galley to make sure that they coincide with what he had in mind when he wrote the original work. Surprisingly, the *Rambam* demurred, citing overwhelming responsibilities and a lack of time to fit anything else into his already hectic schedule. It seems that his day would stretch from before dawn until late at night, seeing to the ills of first the sultan's royal family and then the people in his community. His day did not end until very late. *Shabbos* was the day that he addressed the spiritual needs of his community. He simply could not fit anything else into his day.

The *Rambam* was a person who did not live for himself. His entire day was devoted to the physical and spiritual service of others. This was all executed at the expense of his own personal health and comfort. He was not only the embodiment of Torah as the codifier of the law for the generations, but he was also the consummate *ish ha'chesed*, man of lovingkindness.

*Rav Pam* felt that **Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl**, exemplified the dual qualities of the *Rambam*. As the *posek ha'dor*, *halachic* arbiter of the generation, he was the last word in interpreting Torah and *Talmudic* law, addressing some of the most difficult and compelling *halachic* dilemmas of the century. He was also a paragon of humility and exemplar of lovingkindness. No favor was too small, nor was no act of *chesed* too great. *Rav Moshe* always found time and made the effort to help. This was in addition to replying to thousands of *halachic* questions that found their way to him from all over the world. Yet, he still found the time to learn! When people asked him how he maintained the physical stamina to continue along on this super human pace, he responded, *Vi lang mir kenen tuhn, darf min tuhn*, "As

long as we *can* do, we *must* do." These are timely words of wisdom that we should take to mind and to heart.

### Va'ani Tefillah

אנכי ד' אלקיך המעלך מארץ מצרים הרחב פיך ואמלאהו  
*Anochi Hashem Elokecha ha'maalcha mei'erezt Mitzrayim, harchev picha va'amaleihu*

**I am Hashem your G-d, Who took you up from the land of Egypt, open wide your mouth and I will fill it.**

**Horav Avigdor Miller, zl**, notes that the exodus from Egypt entailed two aspects: the going out of Egypt, the going up from Egypt. Leaving the premises, being liberated from the Egyptian bondage, was a major endeavor in its own right. The Jews were finally free from slavery. Another aspect of this freedom is being liberated from the accursed Egyptian influence. The years that the Jews spent in Egypt had a devastating spiritual effect on them. In order to become the *am Hashem*, nation of G-d, a "kingdom of Priests and a holy nation," it was critical that any vestige of Egypt must be expunged from them. They had to be taken up from Egypt, elevated from its spiritual muck. Indeed, the second element has greater significance, because the primary reason for taking us out of Egypt was so that Hashem could be our G-d (*Bamidbar* 15:41). Leaving Egypt will have no lasting value if we end up taking Egypt with us.

Once we achieve this elevation, then the word of Torah will fill our mouths and have meaning. To fill the mouth of an individual who is filled with Egypt will not succeed. He must empty "Egypt" out, before his mouth can become a receptacle for Torah.

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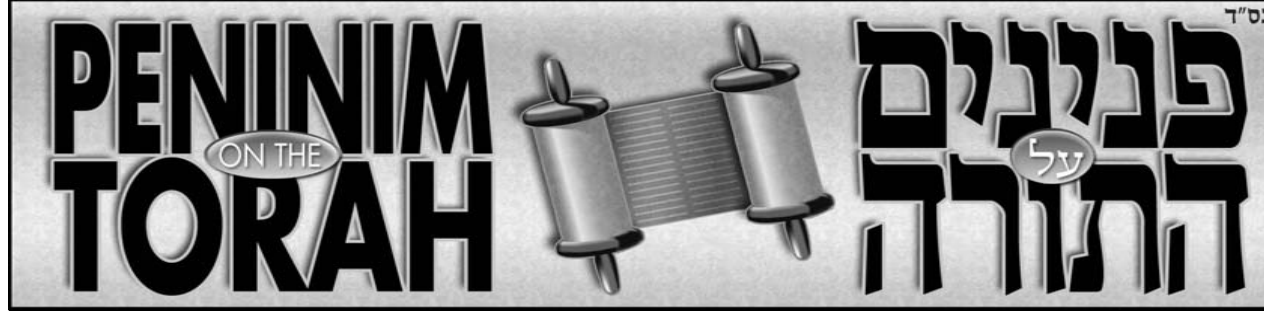
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Parashas Netzavim- Vayeilech תשס"ז

פרשת נצבים- וילך

### TORAH THOUGHTS ON THE PARSHA

**Parashas Netzavim**  
 ושבת עד ד' אלקיך ושמעת בקלו ככל אשר אנכי מצוך היום  
**And you will return unto Hashem, your G-d, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you today. (30:2)**

People repent for a number of reasons. A desire to return to one's source – not to run away from suffering – catalyzes true, long-term repentance. Often one seeks to escape from a difficult situation and start his life over again. While this may be a shadow of repentance, it lacks the element of sincerity. One can achieve true repentance when he understands that he has strayed from Hashem, his Creator, his G-d, his Heavenly Father, and he now wants to return home. Hashem welcomes him, embracing his efforts. The term *teshuvah* conjures up the connotation of repentance from wrongdoing and grievous sin. This image is not necessarily present in the wider pictures, as the following incident demonstrates.

*Rav Saadia Gaon*, leader of Babylonian Jewry in the tenth century, was once seen crying bitterly. He was heard declaring that he must do *teshuvah*; he must repent immediately. Those who observed this spectacle wondered what kind of sin this great sage could have committed. He was an individual of impeccable character who lived life to the fullest extent in accordance with what the Torah dictates. If he was guilty of sin, what can we say? One of the spectators gathered the courage to approach *Rav Saadia* and question him. *Rav Saadia* explained, "It is not only for our sins that we must do *teshuvah*. We must repent for our *mitzvos* as well." He explained that he had once visited a Jewish community in a distant land. Seeking to conceal his identity, he sat in the back of the *shul* and made sure not to call attention to himself. He spent a few days at the home of a very hospitable man who treated him with the same cordiality that he would any other guest. After awhile, his identity was revealed, and people came flocking in droves to his host's home. Everyone clamored to speak and consult

with the *gadol ha'dor*, leader of the generation. Realizing now who his distinguished guest was, his host was extremely apologetic for not having treated *Rav Saadia* with greater reverence. He wept uncontrollably, begging forgiveness for not having displayed greater honor than he did.

Participating in this experience caused *Rav Saadia* to think about his own relationship with Hashem. With time, we develop a deeper recognition of Hashem as we learn to acknowledge the awesomeness of His Presence – more and more. Thus, even if we have meticulously kept all of His commandments, we feel a greater sense of sorrow at not having done more and better. We should have been more diligent. We should have shown greater reverence. Given what we know now, our original actions seem to be but a feeble attempt at serving the Almighty. Consequently, there is no act that cannot be improved by *teshuvah*, because with every *mitzvah*, with every day, our awareness of Hashem becomes more profound. This is especially true of one who has experienced a miracle, such as surviving a grave illness, or emerging from a serious accident without sustaining severe injury. He now knows more, and, therefore, must do more. This obligates him to repent.

The process of *teshuvah* is a generative one as it recreates the individual and transforms him into a new being. **Horav Shlomo Freifeld, zl**, cites the *Rambam* in *Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:4, who posits that a person who does *teshuvah* should give himself a new name. He is a new person. *Teshuvah* cleanses the impurities and corrects the defects in his life. As the generative force of *teshuvah* accelerates, the defects and impurities disappear. *Teshuvah* is more than an act of piety. It is a means of drawing on the incalculable creative power that resides in the wellsprings of the cosmos. To paraphrase *Rav Freifeld*, "If a person can harness the generative force and renew himself instantaneously, then it is never too late. Try, and -- if you fail -- try again. You can always come back."

This spark, this deep-rooted desire to return, exists

in the hearts of all Jews. For some, it is buried deeply; for others, it is buried very deeply, but it exists. This is why, claims **Horav Mosh Shternbuch, Shlita**, that one who repents is - and should be - called a *chozeir biteshuvah*, rather than the popular term, *baal teshuvah*. One who returns is *chozeir*, he comes back through *teshuvah*. He is really only restoring his soul to its true, natural inclination.

The concept of *teshuvah* is comforting and encouraging, for no matter how deep one has descended into the abyss of sin, regardless of how far he has distanced himself from a life of Torah and *mitzvos*, he can return, and, when he does, the Almighty will welcome and forgive him. There is no such thing as having gone too far, since *teshuvah* helps us to erase the past and start over again.

Why do people not take advantage of this unique Heavenly gift? First, when we take the two requisites for *teshuvah* into consideration, we might understand that these two activities may actually be, for some, serious impediments to *teshuvah*. As his first step towards a meaningful way of life, one must renounce a regrettable past. This part of the “turning” process is integral to *teshuvah*. For many people, these two tasks seem impossible. To concede that one is imperfect, that the lifestyle he has previously led, at best, lacks meaning is a difficult pill to swallow. This renunciation, coupled with the need to change -- at times, drastically-- can be a mountain too high to scale. After all is said and done, when that feeling of discomfort with one’s life - regardless whether it is sinful or pious – arises, it is the first step on the road to “turning.”

*Teshuvah* is a lengthy process, because, in effect, it has no clear end. One can always be better. One must always strive for perfection. With each ascension on the spiritual ladder, the individual realizes from where he is leaving and how far he must go. Each subsequent moment of change throughout life becomes another rung on the ladder, part of the unfolding of the initial inner resolve to make a turn. It may not be easy, but standing still is not different than falling downward.

*Rav Shternbuch* addresses another impediment to *teshuvah*: complacency. Some say they understand the need for returning; they recognize that the life they lead leaves much to be desired. They ask, however, what is the rush? Why today? Tomorrow will be just as good. A young person will especially want to push off until tomorrow what he should be doing today. Time does not carry the same level of importance for the young as it does for the old. They do not realize that the dirtier a shirt becomes, the more difficult it is to clean it. One who spends more time immersed in the filth will find it increasingly difficult to wash away the stains.

The individual must take another concept to heart. Every *hirhur teshuvah*, thought of repentance, is a Heavenly message. It is Hashem’s subtle reminder to get his act together, to turn his life around. If he ignores his Heavenly messages, he is wreaking enormous damage upon himself,

which later on may be hard to repair. Therefore, as soon as he finds his conscience gnawing at him, he should seize the moment – while it is there.

Hashem knows that one does not become a *baal teshuvah* overnight. He knows the difficulties encountered in attempting to change habits that have become a way of life. What He does want, however, is for the individual to be *chozeir biteshuvah*, to turn and begin the process. The entire process takes a lifetime, but the actual decision to “turn” takes very little, and it will probably be the most compelling decision of his life.

#### ובחרת בחיים

**And you should choose life. (30:19)**

*Bechirah*, the ability to choose between right and wrong, is a unique gift which Hashem granted to man. While the actual determination remains in our hands, the Torah has “suggested” that we should choose a life of Torah. **Horav Nossan Wachtfogel, zl**, observes that the direction of one’s life is ordained by one’s choices. In a profound understanding of this concept, the venerable *Mashgiach* teaches us that choice is everything. It is all encompassing. One who opts for the path of the righteous, who chooses to do good, is considered a good person. The sins that he commits do not detract from his spiritual standing. He will, of course, pay for his sins, but he is a good person who just happened to sin. One who chooses the path of evil, becomes “registered” as a bad person. The *mitzvos* that he performs certainly earn him a reward, but as long as his choice is for evil, he is an evil person who “just happened” to perform *mitzvos*. It all depends on his choice.

Furthermore, this selection is not a one-time deal. His personal status changes every time that he makes a choice. A person is judged commensurately with his spiritual standing at that time. Hence, one who chose life will be viewed as a *tzaddik*, righteous person, who happened to sin. Woe is he who ignores the *Yom HaDin*, Day of Judgment, and chooses evil, thinking that he can get away with it. The foundation of his judgment is based upon the choices he has made. Therefore, a person should be sure to make the correct selection – each and every time, because we never know when Hashem is judging us.

#### Parashas Vayeilech

ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת ולמדה את בני ישראל שימה בפיהם

**So now, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to Bnei Yisrael, place it in their mouth. (31:19)**

The Torah refers to itself as a song. Why? **Horav Sholom Yosef Elyashiv, Shlita**, explains that the Torah is likened to a song, because it is to be written in a manner that makes it accessible to every member of *Klal Yisrael*. He applies the following analogy to explain this. A

distinguished scholar was coming to town to deliver a lecture. If his specialty was mathematics, medicine or any other scientific, scholarly field, it is highly unlikely that anyone, other than those specifically interested in that field, would attend the lecture. The remainder of the community would have no reason to attend, because the subject matter would not be of interest to them. If, however, a world-renowned singer were to come to town, everybody would show up at his concert. Even those who have no musical talent would be present, because each person, commensurate with his level of musical cognition could appreciate the songs, melodies and musical accompaniment.

In other words, some areas of endeavor that appreciated by everyone, and some are only appreciated by a few individuals who have a special interest in affinity to the subject matter. This is the meaning of the words *simah b’fihem*, “put it in their mouth.” The Torah must be transmitted in such a manner that it is appreciated by all – on their individual intellectual and spiritual plateau. It is only when one teaches Torah as a *shirah*, song, in a manner suitable, palatable and appreciated by all, that he sees a *siman brachah*, sign of blessing, in his work. The students must sense a sweetness in the Torah – even if it is only on the elementary level. By placing it in their mouths, it will enter their hearts and minds and be integrated into their entire beings.

#### והיה כי תמצאן אותו רעות רבות וצרות

**And it shall be when many evils and distresses come upon it. (31:21)**

In the *Talmud Chagigah* 5A, *Chazal* make a startling comment concerning this *pasuk*. According to *Tosfos’* commentary, the cause of the many evils and distresses is a punishment for the person “who makes money available to a poor man when he is in dire need.” What are *Chazal* teaching us? Is not sustaining the poor and down-trodden a staple of Jewish belief? How can supporting the poor man be reason for all the misery and distress that visits a person? Furthermore, this statement is in direct contradiction of another statement in the *Talmud Yevamos* 63A, where it is stated that one who lends money to a poor man merits the reward expressed by *Yeshayah HaNavi*: “Then you will call out and Hashem will respond; you will cry out and He will say; ‘Here I am.’” (*Yeshayah* 58:9). This *pasuk* makes it clear that helping the poor will increase our chances of being helped by Hashem. How do we reconcile these two seemingly disparate statements?

The **Maggid, zl, m’Dubno**, explains that, indeed, reaching out to the poor is an enviable and much needed act of kindness. There are, however, two ways to reach out, and only one is laudable. An individual notices that his friend’s business is not doing well; he sees his friend is struggling with his livelihood, so he makes an attempt to assist him, by

purchasing his products, sending him customers, or by investing in his business. In another instance, he might offer him a job, teach him a trade, or put in a good word with another employer. He does all of this to help, to increase his independence, to preserve his dignity. This is part of the *mitzvah, V’hechezakta bah*, “You shall strengthen him.” (*Vayikra* 25:35)

Sometimes, however, this assistance arrives too late, when a person has waited too long to come to the aid of his friend. His business has already failed; his bank account is already dry; his food pantry is already empty. By that time, his friend is already down and out, going from door to door in utter humiliation, begging for alms – just to eat. This prolonged interval has reduced his friend to an emotional wreck. In some cases, it can even drive a person to do the unthinkable. Why? Because some self-righteous, arrogant individual decided that he would wait until the situation became desperate before offering his assistance.

In the case of the second “benefactor,” Hashem responds *middah k’negged middah*, measure for measure. When this person cries out to Hashem for his personal needs, Hashem asks, “What took you so long when your friend needed assistance? Why did you wait until his dignity was totally destroyed before you decided it was time to help him? Now, you need assistance. It all about you. Well, you will have to wait – the same way you made your friend wait.” Hashem will help him, but it will be in the same manner and with the same compassion that he displayed to the other fellow.

In citing this penetrating exposition, **Horav Avrohom Pam, zl**, in the latest anthology of his *shmuessen*, ethical discourses, by Rabbi Sholom Smith, exhorts us all to be finely attuned to the needs of those around us who are struggling. Let us reach out with assistance, some advice, a good word, even a smile – before it is too late. The manner in which we respond to others, is the same manner in which Hashem will respond to us.

He cites the **Rambam** in *Hilchos Matnas Aniym* (10:1,2) who makes some highly emotional remarks about the centrality of *tzedakah*, charity, in the life of a Jew. Of all of the *mitzvos* of the Torah, *tzedakah* stands out as being the legacy of *Avraham Avinu*. It is his unique characteristic which he bequeathed to his descendants. No person will suffer any loss or harm by giving charity. Indeed, it can only enrich him. Jews are like brothers, and if a Jew cannot turn to his brother for assistance, to whom else can he turn? These are powerful words from an individual that was *naeh doreish u’naeh mekayeim*, preached inspirational words and lived up to his preaching by personally practicing what he asked others to do.

The *Rambam* was a physician as well as a scholar. His devotion to people was consummate, and it gives us a glimpse of the level of *chesed* we must strive to emulate. What inspires me is the fact that *Rav Pam* dedicates a portion