

RED ALERT!

NITZAVIM

*by Rabbi Eddie Davis (RED)
of the Young Israel of Hollywood -
Ft. Lauderdale (Florida)*

DIVREI TORAH

- Rashi comments that the parsha of Nitzavim is dedicated to appeasing the Jewish people. After hearing the curses (the Admonition/Tochacha), the list is quite lengthy and can be quite overwhelming, Moshe understood that the people probably were depressed over hearing a gloom and doom portrait of their future. Rashi echoes the words of our Sages at the attempt now for Moshe to appease Bnei Yisrael and remind them: “You are standing today in front of Hashem...” With all doom and gloom that will befall the people, Bnei Yisrael will be able to withstand all the punishment and maintain Jewish identity and existence in the face of Hashem. This is an amazing promise when you come to think about it as we note that all the ancient nations of the world are gone. Ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia – they all disappeared and are mere stories in ancient history. The Jewish people participated in those stories and continue today. We do survive and Nitzavim is supposed to make us see a better future.
- With all that is said about this

appeasement, the first three aliyot of this Shabbat’s parsha is more of the doom and gloom. What kind of an appeasement is there in again stating that the future will be one of disobedience and punishment in the relationship that Bnei Yisrael has with the Almighty. The reality of the appeasement comes within the second half of the parsha. At the beginning of the second half comes the real appeasement that the Jewish people will return to Hashem and listen to His voice and the response will be Hashem will return to us. This is the greatest form of motivation and support that Moshe gives the Jewish people. In actuality the Torah portion becomes quite Messianic. The word Mashiach, or the son of David, is not mentioned. These terms do not come about this early in Jewish history. But when you see what is being promised to the Jewish people later in history it includes the ingathering of the Jewish exiles back to Eretz Yisrael. It includes proper justice being meted out to the enemies of Israel. It also includes a massive Teshuva, return to Hashem, a complete national rejuvenation of dedication to Hashem, His Torah, and the performance of mitzvot.

- The statement that “the hidden [sins] are for Hashem, ...but the revealed [sins] are for us and our children forever, to carry out the words of this Torah” (29:28). Much is

said in commentary on this particular verse. Primary is the sense of responsibility that one Jew must have for his fellow Jew (AREIVUT), as noted by Rashi. Rashi in Psalms (87:6) adds something else in terms of our understanding of this verse. The Torah is telling us that many Jewish people will become so assimilated among the nations of the world that their Jewish origins have become forgotten. When the final redemption will come, these hidden Jewish people who are known as Jews only to God will be reunited with the rest of the nation and be restored to the status of their ancestors. There is a book that was authored some years ago about Jews who found out their Jewish origins only later in life. Some of them were quite prominent, as in the case of former Secretary of State Madeline Albright. She is included as a chapter in the book. The book is a remarkable testimony to the individuals but it is a clear statement of Jewish history that is not just modern but actually alluded to by Rashi in Psalms in this concept. The best part of this entry is that when those hidden Jewish identities are revealed it is an indication that the Redemption is upon us!

- On the topic of hidden identities, the reverse is also true. Cecil Roth (famous British Jewish historian, 1899-1970) wrote that all Jews have non-Jewish blood in them, from

somewhere in their background. It sounds like an astounding statement, but it isn't when we think about it. Think of the Mashiach, a descendant of King David, who has a personal background of a Moabite, non-Jewish bloodline. Moav himself was a result of an incestuous relationship. In his Jewish bloodline he had Tamar and Yehuda, a less than sanctified union at its outset. Yet, the Machiach will emanate from this family line. Maybe the upshot is not the bloodline, but who we are, have become, and who we will be in the future. More important than our family line is who we are: a good lesson for this time of year.

- Moshe tells us that not only did the covenant with Hashem include all of those who stood at Sinai, but it extends to all future descendants of those who experienced the Revelation at Sinai (29:14). This would indicate that the covenant was binding upon all future generations who were not even there. This poses an obvious logical problem. The Midrash indicates to us that all Jewish souls were present at the time of the beginning of the Torah, even those who had not been placed in physical bodies at that time. Therefore all of us were actually there because our souls were in existence back at that time (Rabbeinu Bachya). I personally feel that it is possible to understand a bond to the Almighty

and not require this Midrashic view as presented above. The covenant was established not with individuals but with the nation of Israel, and just as the nation of Israel is eternal, so, too, the covenantal relationship with the Almighty is eternal. Anybody who is part of the nation of Israel is part of Knesset Yisrael, which means that that individual is automatically included within the covenantal relationship. It is the eternality of the nation of Israel that in turn obligates every future Jewish soul who comes into this world to obey and adhere to the binding relationship with Hashem.

- At the very end of Nitzavim it, the Torah tells us to love Hashem. The Maharal writes that our Sages teach us that you should learn Torah without any ulterior motive. It is not to gain honor as a prestigious Talmid Chacham, or to receive sustenance as a rabbinic scholar or teacher. Loving Hashem means you want to be attached to the object of your love without any selfish concerns. The way we love Hashem is to learn Torah. I would add also in the words of our Sages that loving God is to emulate His compassion, mercy and kindness. We do not learn Torah because of any personal benefit. There is difficulty to do something for what we call “the sake of Heaven” but learning Torah is supposed to be exactly that. No other motive, just a love of Torah, and through that I become closer to Hashem.

- This Torah portion began with the expression “You are standing TODAY in front of God...” What is today? Rashi gives an interpretation and so do others. What is your interpretation of today? (Rashi: It was the day that Moshe died.) (How about Rosh HaShana.)

- MIDRASH. D'VARIM RABBA (8:6). What is the meaning of “It is not in Heaven?” Shmuel said: The Torah is not to be found among astrologers whose work is to gaze at the heavens. People said to Shmuel: You are an astrologer, and yet you are great in Torah. Whereupon he responded: I only engage in astrology when I am free from studying the Torah. When is that? When I am in the bath.

Questions by RED

From the text

1. For what purpose did Moshe gather all the people? (29:11)
2. What will happen as a result of Israel repenting to Hashem? (30:3,4)
3. What does it mean when the Torah says: “Hashem will circumcise your heart...” (30:6)
4. If the Torah is not in Heaven, and is not far from you, where is it? (30:14)
5. When you choose life (Torah), who will benefit besides yourself? (30:19)

From Rashi

6. "You are standing today..." (29:9).
On what day was it?
7. This new Covenant will include even those who are not there (29:14).
Who else is included?
8. Who were the woodchoppers?
(29:10)
9. Where did idolaters keep their idols made out of gold and silver? (29:16)
10. Why did Moshe call upon the Heaven and Earth to bear witness to the Covenant? (30:19)

From the Rabbis

11. Why were we required to bring the children to the renewal of the Covenant? (29:10, S'forno)
12. To repent to Hashem is not motivated by avoiding suffering. What motivates penitence? (S'forno)
13. How do we achieve love for Hashem? (Rav Moshe Feinstein)

Midrash

14. Before the sale of Yosef, Yehuda had the attention of the brothers. He said: Let's sell him. What punishment did Yehuda suffer for not saying: Let's return him to our father?

Haftara - Yishayahu

15. What new name will be given to Israel by Hashem?

Relationships

- a) Sheim - Aram
- b) Ammon - Moav
- c) Yosef - Chupim
- d) Kehat - Merari
- e) Moshe - Kalev

ANSWERS

1. To enter into a Covenant with Hashem.
2. Then Hashem will return the Exiled Jews to Eretz Yisrael.
3. Hashem will remove any barrier that the Evil Inclination has placed to prevent Bnei Yisrael from repenting.
4. In your mouth and in your heart.
5. Your children.
6. On the day Moshe died (7 Adar).
7. All those souls who will be born in the future.
8. Canaanites, who were not permitted to convert, but they were allowed to travel with Bnei Yisrael.
9. They hid them, lest they be stolen.
10. Heaven and Earth are eternal and will be here to testify. Furthermore we should learn from them. They do their job without being rewarded or punished. So should we.
11. To teach us that parents are always responsible for the upbringing and education of their children.

12. A desire to be close to Hashem.
13. By learning Torah without any ulterior motive.
14. He suffered the death of his wife and his two sons.
15. CHEFTZI-BAH, my desire is in her.

Relationships

- a) Father & Son
- b) Half Brothers
(same father, different mothers)
- c) Uncle & Nephew
- d) Brothers
- e) Brothers-in-law