



NITZAVIM-VAYEILECH 5785 - RH 5786

May I take this opportunity on behalf of Yocheved, myself and our entire family to wish you and all your loved ones a happy and healthy New Year. May HaShem grant each of you the fulfillment of your most cherished dreams. K'TIVA VACHATIMA TOVA.

The Magnificent Message of Nitzavim

Rabbeinu Nissim, referenced by Tosafot (Megila 31b) is the source of our custom to have a buffer Shabbat between the Tochacha of Ki Tavo and Rosh HaShana. And that Shabbat is always our Parsha of Nitzavim. Rashi (29:12), quoting the Midrash (Tanchuma 1), offers a reason why this Parsha was chosen to cushion the horrific punishments of the Tochacha: "Because when Israel heard these ninety-eight curses besides the forty-nine that are contained in Torat Kohanim (Vayikra 26:14 ff.), their faces turned pale, and they exclaimed, 'Who can possibly stand against these?!' Therefore, Moshe began to console them: 'See, you are standing today before HaShem' - many a time have you

provoked the Omnipresent to anger and yet He has not made an end to you, and behold, you exist before Him."

If Rosh HaShana holds out the promise of new beginnings and opportunities, we need some assurance after hearing the Tochacha that, notwithstanding our past misdeeds, we can still merit the blessings of a New Year.

There is, however, another reason for Nitzavim's inclusion before Rosh HaShana, and this, based upon Rav Soloveitchik's analysis of the nexus of t'shuva and redemption. He begins by noting the disagreement between R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua as to whether repentance is necessary for redemption and the coming of Mashiach (Sanhedrin 97b). R. Eliezer contends that there cannot be redemption without t'shuva, while R. Yehoshua argues that they are not at all linked. In this dispute, Rambam rules (Hilchot T'shuva 7:5) in accordance with R. Eliezer. To which the Rav asks: "But it's not that simple, as this postulation threatens to topple our faith in the coming of the Mashiach... which Rambam himself laid down as the next to the last rule in his Thirteen Principles [of Faith] ...

"Rambam was not oblivious to this contradiction and he went on to say (ad loc): 'The Torah has already

assured us that Israel will finally repent at the end of their exile and immediately be redeemed." And the proof text that Rambam references remarkably are the verses in our Parsha (30:1-3) which clearly offer this astonishing assurance: "And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you will consider in your heart, among all the nations, where HaShem your Gd has banished you, and you will return to HaShem your Gd, with all your heart, and with all your soul and you will listen to his voice according to all that I am commanding you this day, you and your children, then HaShem your Gd will bring back your exiles, and He will have mercy upon you, and He will once again gather you from all the nations, where the Lord your Gd had dispersed you."

Based upon this insight of the Rav, we may suggest that our Parsha provides a valuable and necessary message prior to the Day of Judgment. When we attend to the maledictions recorded in Ki Tavo, we cannot but be reminded of our own many foibles and sins that have sullied our lives during the past year. For most of us, we are innocent of the major transgressions. We are, B"H, not thieves or criminals. But what about unprovoked anger and other toxic emotional outbursts; what

about the little lies, the lashon hara, the stinginess of time and money, the insensitivities to those we love, our lack of gratitude, and so on. Who can claim to be blameless of these failings. Our mood is gloomy, filled with a despondency that cannot anticipate the joy of a New Year. We say to ourselves: "Nothing can really change; I am who I am. It'll just be another year, and that's that!"

Comes our Parsha of Nitzavim, precisely before Rosh HaShana, with its uplifting message and declares (30:11-13) "For this mitzva [which according to Ramban, Ohr HaChayim, and others refers to t'shuva] which I command you this day, is not concealed from you, nor is it far away. It is not in Heaven... Nor is it beyond the sea... Rather this [mitzva of t'shuva] is very close to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can fulfill it." In other words, HaShem has given us a precious gift - the possibility of repentance, and has promised us that it is actually in our power to change and become better. We are not talking about major transformations. It all begins with just a few small actions which can demonstrate our willingness to improve our emotional demeanor and ethical behavior: a bit more kindness, more patience, a few more "thank yous", a little less badmouthing, etc.

In one of Rav Soloveitchik's extra-

ordinary shiurim on t'shuva, he eloquently asserts that during this heightened spiritual period, HaShem actually desires to come to us. He, as it were, knocks on our door, and all we have to do is be hospitable, fulfill the mitzva of Hachnasat Orchim and invite Him in, which, of course, means to repent! And Parshat Nitzavim is that magnificent invitation!

The Call of the Shofar

The Psalmist declares, "How fortunate is the nation who knows the T'RU'A..." (T'hilim 89:16). What exactly do our people know about the shofar T'ru'a sound that "enables us to walk in the light of HaShem's countenance?" One answer, offered by the Rav is to interpret the word T'ru'a as meaning endearment and affection, as in, "and he [the Jew] has Gd's friendship." (Bamidbar 23:21)

In this sense, the shofar becomes an instrument which facilitates an intimate fellowship with Gd. True, Rosh HaShana begins with strict din, judgment, but culminates in RACHAMIM, mercy.

Another answer is offered by Ramban (Vayikra 23:24) and the Sh'lah (Rosh HaShana, Torah Ohr 55). The broken sound of the T'ru'a, signifying a sobbing and wailing cry, is symbolic of the shattered and splintered life that a person experiences in the wake of sin. How could he have engaged in

such shameful behavior; how is it even possible to go on after having been so coarse and vulgar, so callous and selfish? Is it possible to restore and reclaim my former good self? Yes, indeed; for the Jew knows the secret of the T'ru'a, which is, that we are aware of the halacha that before and after each T'RU'A is a T'KI'A, a straight, clear sound. The first T'ki'a reminds us of our pure and pristine nature, our essential default character. And then... we mess up. We feel broken and miserable, and experience genuine remorse and shame. This is the T'ru'a of which no one is immune from, each at their own level of waywardness. But then comes a T'ki'a after the T'ru'a which tells the sinner that he can regain and retrieve his former self, that first T'ki'a. He can rehabilitate himself, and in the process, become even greater than he was prior.

Both of these reasons may explain why on Rosh HaShana, there are no penitential prayers (Slichot) or confessions (Vidui). Those supplications can wait for Yom Kippur. The New Year, however, is a time to focus upon man's essential goodness and virtue, his potential for great things. It is not a time to let his past weigh him down like an albatross, preventing him, frustrating him, from advancing forward into beckoning horizons of new beginnings and adventures.

In August of 2013, on the first night of S'lichot, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks delivered his final sermon as Britain's Chief Rabbi. Inter alia, he made a fascinating and quite impactful point when he saw in his move from the Chief Rabbi's official residence to a much smaller dwelling, a powerful message about moving on in general, and, in particular, how to prepare for the New Year. A person accumulates all sorts of stuff while living in a place for a considerable period of time. When it comes time to changing dwellings, a decision has to be made about what possessions are unnecessary and need to be discarded, especially when you're downsizing. Rabbi Sacks had an enormous library and huge number of belongings squirreled away in his former dwelling. What to cast off and throw away? He claims it was a traumatic experience. But the lesson he derived from that experience proved immeasurably valuable when applied to transitioning from an old year to a new one.

There is so much trash that accumulates over the year. "Trash" as a metaphor for grudges, abnormal fears and anxieties, personal hurts and gripes, petty grievances, and all sorts of unwanted emotional stresses. Welcoming a new year and moving on means to muster the courage and just let it all go; to take the "garbage" out, and keep only

what is necessary and important. Rabbi Sacks speaks about mutual forgivingness. Of course. But it also refers to a scouring, a purging of all that tends to contaminate and clutter up our souls. The toxic trash that must be thrown out. If, as Chazal state, that the word KAPEIR, as in Yom Kippur, means to remove, to wipe and wash away, then may we suggest that if we initiate a KAPARA upon our own lives and clean out the messes - in a word, to do teshuva - then we can justly call upon the Almighty to do the same and cleanse us of our many sins.

When we reflect upon this past year, the atmosphere of T'ru'a has enveloped us with a frightful gloom and foreboding. We've endured so much pain and suffering, both here in Israel, and for Jews worldwide who have had to confront the alarming reality of the normalization of antisemitism. So much toxic trash. And this in addition to our own personal "garbage".

But that reality notwithstanding, it'll soon be the beginning of a new year, and we must believe that just as the Almighty creates the world anew each year, every day - HAM'CHADEISH B'CHOL YOM TAMID..., so can we! We can clean house, and the world can repair its blunders and remedy its ills. A T'KI'A of hope precedes and follows every T'RU'A no

matter how alarming that T'ru'a blast may be. If we honestly believe that each of us, in our own small way, can make a real difference, then together who knows what we can accomplish to make the coming year one of blessing and success!

Shabbat Shalom and to one and all,
K'TIVA VACHATIMA TOVA!