

Torah Weekly



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Parshas Nitzavim

For the week ending 28 Elul 5755
22 & 23 September 1995

Summary

On the last day of his life, Moshe gathers together all the people, both young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations yet unborn. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship, because in spite of having witnessed the abominations of Egypt, there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality. Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel which will be a result of the failure to heed Hashem's *mitzvos*. Both their descendants and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desolation of the Land and its apparent inability to be sown or to produce crops. The conclusion will be apparent to all — the Jewish People have forsaken the One who protects them, in favor of idols which can do nothing. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled. However assimilated they will have become among the nations, eventually Hashem will bring them back to Eretz Yisrael. Moshe tells the people to remember that the Torah is not a remote impossibility; rather its fulfillment is within the grasp of every Jew. The Parsha concludes with a dramatic choice between life and death. Moshe exhorts the people to choose life.

'Are you Jewish?'

'Really? So am I!'

Commentaries

"You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d" (29:9).

"Standing" means — with your head held high. A person can hold his head high for two reasons: one — he thinks a lot of himself and stands tall with self-important smugness. Or he can hold his head high for a different reason... Man is set between the animals and the angels. If he fills his life with vanity and the empty frenetic rush to fulfill his own desires, then he falls to the level of an animal. Really, however, he is worse than an animal, because an animal is supposed to behave like an animal — a man isn't. On the other hand if he conquers his negative instincts, and he sanctifies and purifies his thoughts, words and actions, Man raises himself to the level of an angel. Really, however, he has raised himself higher, for angels have no negative drives to overcome, and so Man's ascent is so much the greater. That's the other meaning of *standing with your head held high*: The whole year round a person is constricted by the pressures of the material world, his head and his thoughts are bent downwards like an animal, dealing with all the petty nonsense that is part of survival. But on Rosh Hashanah, (it's no coincidence that *rosh* in Hebrew means 'head') his head — the head of the angel — is held high — over his body — the animal. And necessarily if he is an angel — then he must be even higher than an angel. *'Today you are all standing' — with your heads high!*

(Adapted from Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin)

Publication

Due to the High Holidays, Ohr Somayach will not be distributing its publications in paper form. The publications *will be available* via Internet and Fax as usual. Look for the return of Ohr Somayach publications early in *Sefer Bereishis*.

Advisory:

We wish all of our readers a *Kesiva v'Chasima Tova*.

“You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d” (29:9).

After the ninety-eight curses that *Bnei Yisrael* heard at the end of last week's Parsha — *Ki Savo*, they were devastated and questioned whether they could possibly survive such terrible punishments. Moshe encouraged them with the opening words of this week's Parsha: *“Today you are all standing.”* Although you have sinned many times, all of you still stand before Hashem. The punishments were not to wreak vengeance on you, but to ensure your survival as a nation. Thus the emphasis, *“all of you,”* for after all the sins and all the punishments, the Jewish People as an entity is eternal. The concept of death does not exist with respect to its community. Those who perished, died not as individuals, but as a part of the Jewish People, which is eternal, and therefore they still survive.

(Rabbi Zev Leff - Outlooks and Insights)

“And you will return it to your heart among all the nations where Hashem has dispersed you; and you will return to Hashem your G-d” (30:1).

‘Are you Jewish?’

‘Really? So am I!’

Every Jew, however far he may have wandered from the faith and traditions of his people, always has a lingering feeling of affinity when he meets another Jew. This is really rather strange, because what could a secular Jew born in Russia, France, and Yemen all have in common? Certainly, it's not a cultural affinity...and yet there is that unmistakable feeling of warmth and kinship! When the Jewish People stood together at the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, there was engraved on the heart of every Jew an ineradicable love for his fellow, and even when all other connection to Judaism has withered, this love, hewn in the heart, stands firm like a rock. In the process of returning to Judaism, the first step is a return to the Jewish People, to the heart and the message of common love engraved there; and then, inevitably, after this comes a return to Hashem. That is the meaning of this verse: *“And you will return it to your heart among all the nations where Hashem has dispersed you; and you will return to Hashem your G-d”*

(Adapted from Meshech Chochmah)

Haftorah: Yishaya 61:10-63:9

In this last of the seven *Haftorahs of Consolation* the prophet describes how, just as in the time of the Mashiach the Land of Israel will suddenly bloom and flourish without any prior cultivation, so too Hashem will redeem His people without any prior instigation on their part. The Jewish People will be redeemed not because they will deserve it, rather Hashem will bestow on them His Kindness through His infinite Generosity. The Targum Yonason translates *“For Zion's sake, I will not be silent”* meaning that there will never be peace in the world while the Jewish People are scattered in exile, as indeed History has witnessed. In the final days, Hashem will come *“stained with blood”* from the battle with *Esau/Edom/Rome* and its current spiritual heirs, liberating His people, and revealing that He has been with them in every exile, frustrating at every turn the designs of those who wished to obliterate them.

Pirkei Avos

Chapters #5 & 6

For the Sake of Privacy

“Ten miracles took place for our forefathers in the Beis Hamikdash...they stood pressed together (in the Temple courtyard on Festivals) and bowed with plenty of space between them.”

(Avos 5:5)

They were so crowded together that they were actually lifted off the floor and were suspended in air. But when it came time to prostrate themselves on the floor to confess their sins a miracle took place and there was enough room for everyone to do so at a distance of four cubits from his neighbor so that he would not suffer the embarrassment of having others hear his confession.

Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura

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