

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	RENEWED
Nitzavim	28 Sept. 2019	28 Elul 5779	Deut. 29:10-30:20	Isa. 61:10-63:9	John 12:41-50

The parashat Ki Tavo (When you come) discusses the consequences of honoring and violating the terms of the covenant. Now, Moshe focuses on its essential nature in the following two parashot, Nitzavim and Vayeilech. Usually, these two portions are read together. The common theme of Nitzavim (You are standing) focuses on Hashem's side of this covenant, while parashat Vayeilech focuses on the Yisraelite's side.

Moshe continues in Devarim 29:15, "But with him who stands here with us today before YHWH our Elohim, as well as with him who is not here with us today." The people standing before Moshe today applies to the generations after the first generation who died after the sin of the Golden Calf. And the generation "who is not here with us" applies to the future generations as the Torah transcends the limitations of time and space. Therefore, even today, affirming our covenant with Hashem by resolving to study the Torah and perform its commandments unites with every Yisraelite in the world and every generations of past, present, and future. Thus, even though, we are "the smallest of nations," in observance of the Torah, our mission is to transform the world into Hashem's home. Therefore, we need not fear being outnumbered. We stand together with the merits of all the generations of the Yisraelites.

We have discussed the negative aspect of "to add drunkenness to thirst" (ibid, v. 19) in last year's teaching. It explained that our nefesh (physical soul) craves for the pleasures of this world. Thus, our challenge is not to listen to the voice of nefesh. Like nefesh, the Divine soul's thirst can never be quenched as long as it is clothed in the physical body and faced with the concealment of this world. So, we are to listen to the inner voice of our Divine soul and order our priorities in accordance with both our and Hashem's true interests.¹

Therefore, we are to "cleave to" (Devarim 30:20) Hashem. The vast majority of souls undergo "a multi-stage diminution of Divine consciousness, that is 'induced spiritual amnesia', in the preparation to enter the physical world. For example, Hashem shows the soul of its physical life. Once the soul agrees, it is then sent to the physical world. The baby, in his mother's womb studies the Torah. As he exits the womb, an angel touches the baby's forehead to forget all the Torah he learned. This is called 'induced spiritual amnesia.' As he walks on this physical world, his mission is to seek what he has lost due to his 'amnesia,' rather recover what has been forgotten.

The souls that have undergone the least "processing" or "forgotten" will be the most predisposed toward spirituality. And with given proper conditions, these individuals will naturally develop their innate spiritual genius, becoming the devout Torah scholars of their generation.² We see such examples when our children, at young age have a bright disposition. We also see Shmuel (Samuel) from Sefer Shmuel.

Each generation of souls descends into this world roughly as a unit or a collective body. As a collective "individual," the specific souls make up the whole with various "limbs" of this collective body. The head is the souls that has most of their pre-descent Divine consciousness, and the body is made up of limbs with various level of consciousness that becomes a collective body linked to their unique soul-roots in Hashem's essence via the head-souls of that generation.

The Midrash explains that when the Scripture says "the matter is...in your mouth and in your heart," it refers to the two divisions of the Torah, one written and one oral. The Written Law contains the Torah's wisdom in a condensed and relatively inaccessible form, parallels the concentrated spark of holiness and Torah wisdom that Hashem has sealed into the heart of every man. To gain or to access to this potential spiritual growth, one must unlock his heart with the revelatory power of the Oral Law, the part of the Torah that is "in your mouth." Opening the seal is something every man can accomplish, for the Torah says, "the commandment...is not hidden from you."

¹ Or HaTorah, Devarim, p. 1193

² The Torah, Devarim, Nitzavim, p. 179

We can illuminate our life with the radiance of the Torah and attach ourselves to the Divine Presence by studying the Oral Law and by fanning that “spark” into a blazing fire of love for Hashem. A caution is necessary as such fiery enthusiasm can easily spread outside the bounds of the sacred and proper as it gives rise to misplaced zealotry and misapplications of Torah ideas. So, a care must be taken to rein it in, meaning occasionally close the opening of one’s heart, as it were. We have the ability to avoid wandering too far from its path as the commandments are not too far away from us.

The Torah reading correspond to the alternate tasks of opening and closing one’s heart. That is, by reading the Torah, it is to draw out the warmth and light from deep inside by “opening” his heart. And upon accomplishing that, it is to “close” by control the emerging flames. Thus, one must realize that this ability to “open” and “close” is Hashem given. And that to “open” his heart and “close” it when necessary he will be dependent on Divine assistance at all times.

The Midrash uses the wise man and the fool disagree as to whether it is feasible for a person to learn the entire Torah. The wise man says it is; the fool says it is not. Their dispute is hard to understand as they can calculate the time required versus the time available and the answer will be at hand.

Yizpeneini BeSucco resolves this difficult issue: He says that the more one learns, the faster he will progress. For example, let’s say a person has ten years to study the Torah. With due diligence, he can achieve that goal. So, we can say that he has achieved 10% of his goal per year. But in reality, that is not true as his understanding of the Torah may be slow the first year. However, as he diligently studies the Torah and his knowledge and understanding would grow exponentially. By the end of the ten-year period, he would readily grasp the most profound ideas that originally would have taken him months to comprehend.

The fool was ignorant of this reality that led him to despair. In a sense, he is right based on his current aptitude, there is no way for him to succeed in completing the Torah. He did not realize that his aptitude will change as each verse and each chapter would become an aid to further study. Thus, the Midrash concludes that each verse is a rung on a ladder that can stretch to unimagined heights.

The Talmud³ contrasts the laws of the mundane world with those of the spiritual world. In the mundane world, the rule is that an empty vessel can hold what is poured into it, while a full vessel cannot. But in spiritual realm, the opposite true: A full vessel (a mind filled with Torah knowledge) always has the capacity for greater spiritual attainments, while an empty vessel (a mind devoid of Torah knowledge) hardly has the capacity for anything spiritual at all. An allusion to this concept is found in the verse, “And...if listen, you will listen to the voice of Hashem, your Elohim.” (Shemot 15:26) The Talmud explains that the redundancy of “listen” that if you will listen at first, you will be capable of listening another time, always being able to add to your store of Torah knowledge. But, if you do not listen to begin with, you will not listen later either, for you will be unable to comprehend.

Therefore, we can now understand “[The Torah] is not hidden, and if you believe that it is hidden, it is from you, for you are not involved in [studying] it.” This statement allows for two possibilities for two different groups of people. The Torah is accessible to those willing to study it persistently. With each day of such devotion, one brings the Torah closer to him, until it is virtually in his “heart and mouth.” But for those who are not so willing, it remains truly inaccessible, as though it were “in heaven” or “across the sea.”

³ Berachos 40a