

Parashat Nitzavim 5782, 2022:

Teshuvah and Torah

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, Shayndel bat Mordechai Yehudah, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Parashat Nitzavim, the concluding *parasha* of 5782 and the prelude to Rosh Hashanah, promises that Hashem will gather us unto Him, regardless of how far away we may be: “Even if your exiles are at the end of the heavens, Hashem, your G-d, will gather you from there, and He will take you from there.” (*Sefer Devarim* 30:4, this and all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach* with my emendations) The reason Hashem will bestow this kindness upon us is presented earlier in Parashat Va’etchanan:

And from there you will seek Hashem your G-d, and you will find Him, if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are distressed, and all these things happen upon you in the end of days, then you will return to Hashem, your G-d, and obey Him.” (4:29-30)

This theme of *teshuvah* is reiterated in our *parasha*, as well: “And you will return to Hashem, your G-d (v’shavta od Hashem Elokecha), 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.” (30:2) In his *Commentary on the Torah*, the Ramban *zatzal* (Nachmanides, 1194-1270) suggests the following explanation of this *pasuk*:

The meaning thereof is that you will return “with all your heart, and with all your soul,” and you will take it upon yourself and upon your children throughout their generations to do “according to all that I command you this day,” just as they did at the second redemption [that is, the redemption from Babylon], as it is written, “They joined with their brethren, their noblemen, and entered the curse and the oath to follow the Law of G-d, which was given through Moshe, the servant of G-d, and to keep and perform all the commandments of Hashem our L-rd, and His ordinances and His

statutes.” (*Sefer Nechemiah* 10:30, Ramban translation, Rabbi Dr. Charles B. Chavel, with my emendations)

In sum, for the Ramban, the essence of *teshuvah* consists in fealty to the Torah: “to keep and perform all the commandments of Hashem our L-rd, and His ordinances and His statutes.”

Another way to understand the connection that obtains between *teshuvah* and the Torah is to focus on the incredible power of returning to Hashem. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sudlikov *zatzal* (1748-1800), grandson of the holy Bal Shem Tov *zatzal* (d. 1760) and author of *Degel Machane Ephraim*, cites a “game changing” interpretation of the phrase, “*v’shavta od Hashem Elokecha*” from his saintly grandfather:

“And you will return to Hashem, your G-d...” I heard from my master, my grandfather, may he be remembered for a blessing and life in the World to Come, that this is similar in kind to an individual who brings a light to a place of darkness. [At that point,] the darkness goes completely away, and it is no longer recognized at all. So, too, is it the case when one returns in *teshuvah*, even though he was originally in a place of darkness. For when one kindles the light of Torah, then the darkness [of who he once was] goes completely away. (*Likutim Parashat Nitzavim*, translation and brackets my own)

This is the time of the year when we long for the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu the prophet’s stirring words: “*Hashiveinu Hashem alecha v’nashuvah*— Cause us to return unto You, Hashem, and we will return!” (*Megillat Eichah* 5:21) With the Almighty’s help, may the light of the Torah we kindle drive the darkness from our lives, and bring the Mashiach soon and in our days. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom *v’Kativah v’Chatimah Tovah*

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*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav](#)