

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat Nitzavim
September 12, 2015

פרשת נצבים
כ"ח באלול תשע"ה

Torah Reading: *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 29:9-30:20

In this *parasha*, Moshe describes the *brit* (Covenant) between Hashem and *Bnei Yisrael*, urging *Bnei Yisrael* to uphold the *brit* and honor the Torah so that they may be rewarded with life in the land of Israel.

The text (30:2-6) makes clear that the relationship between Hashem and *Bnei Yisrael* is bi-directional, a concept both comforting and intimidating at this time of year when we focus on *Teshuva* (Repentance).

ב וּשְׁבַתְּ עַד-ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ, וּשְׁמַעַתְּ בְּקוֹלוֹ, כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-אֶנְכִי מְצַוְךָ, הַיּוֹם : אַתָּה וּבְנֶיךָ, בְּכֹל-לְבָבְךָ וּבְכֹל-נַפְשְׁךָ. ג וְשָׁב ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ אֶת-שְׁבוּתְךָ, וּרְחַמְךָ; וְשָׁב, וְקִבַּצְךָ מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים, אֲשֶׁר הִפִּיצְךָ ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ, שָׁמָּה. ד אִם-יִהְיֶה נִדְחָךָ, בְּקִצֵּה הַשָּׁמַיִם--מִשָּׁם, יִקְבָּצְךָ ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ, וּמִשָּׁם, יִקְחֶךָ. ה וְהִבִּיאְךָ ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-יָרְשׁוּ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ--וּיְרֻשְׁתָּהּ; וְהִיטְבָּךָ וְהִרְבָּךָ, מֵאַבְתָּיִךְ. ו וּמַל ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ אֶת-לְבָבְךָ, וְאֶת-לִבְבִּי זָרְעָךָ : לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ, בְּכֹל-לְבָבְךָ וּבְכֹל-נַפְשְׁךָ--לְמַעַן חֲיֶיךָ.

2 You shall return to Hashem your God, and hearken to Hashem's voice according to all that I command you this day, you and your children, with all your heart, and with all your soul; **3** that then Hashem your God will turn your captivity, and have compassion upon you, and will return and gather you from all the peoples, wherever Hashem your God has scattered you. **4** If any of you are dispersed in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there will Hashem your God gather you, and

from there will Hashem fetch you. **5** And Hashem your God will bring you into the land which your ancestors possessed, and you shall possess it; and Hashem will do you good, and multiply you above your ancestors. **6** And Hashem your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your children, to love Hashem your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live.

As the Jewish people return to God, God simultaneously returns to the Jewish people. The Talmud explains the verse “וְשָׁב ה' אִלֵּינוּ-לְהִיטֵב אֶת-שְׁבוּתֵנוּ” as “Hashem your God will return with your captivity.” When the Jewish people were exiled from the Land of Israel, Hashem, in the Divine Glory, went along and experienced exile with them.

When we sin, we distance ourselves from Hashem. The rabbis point to three reasons for avoiding sin. The most basic reason is יִרְאַת הָעוֹנֵשׁ – *yir'at ha'onesh*, fear of retribution, the punishment associated with sin or the consequence resulting from it. This is a self-oriented reason, one which protects only the self. The second tier reason is יִרְאַת ה' – *yir'at Hashem*, the fear of alienating Hashem, such that God stops taking good care of us. This is somewhat less self-serving than the previous reason, but still less than fully a sign of a close relationship with God or the most commendable reason to avoid sin. The greatest reason not to sin is אַהֲבַת ה' – *ahavat Hashem*, the love of God. We should want to avoid sin out of love for Hashem and a concomitant aversion to disappointing God, which would create distance between ourselves and the Divine Presence.

The paradigm of *ahavat Hashem* is the source for the mutual relationship between God and us outlined in the verses above. We Jews are not always good at reminding ourselves that God loves us, first, last, and always. God went into exile with us out of a sense of love and a desire not to be separated from us.

The idea that Hashem wants to be close to us as we want to be close to God explains the verse from איכה – *Aicha*, Lamentations – that we read every time we put the Torah back in the ארון קודש – *aron kodesh*, the Ark: “הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנָשׁוּבָה” – “Cause us to return to You, Hashem, and we will return, renew our days as of old.”

Shabbat Shalom and an impending Shana Tova!

For Discussion:

- Name some ways in which Hashem shows Divine love for us.
- Name some ways in which we can show Hashem our love.
- Explain, in your own words, why *yir'at ha'onesh* is the lowest-level reason for avoiding sin, and why *ahavat Hashem* is the highest-level reason.