

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Nitzavim
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פרשת נצבים
כ"ח באלול תשע"ו

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.

An uplifting, encouraging section appears in chapter 30, verses 11-14:

כִּי הַמְצִוָּה הַזֹּאת, אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצִוֶּה הַיּוֹם--לֹא-נִפְלֵאת הוּא מִמֶּנּוּ, וְלֹא רְחֹקָה הוּא. לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם, הִיא: לֵאמֹר, מִי יַעֲלֶה-לָנוּ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְיִקְחֶהָ לָנוּ, וְיִשְׁמְעֵנוּ אֹתָהּ, וְנַעֲשֶׂנָּה. וְלֹא-מֵעֵבֶר לַיָּם, הִיא: לֵאמֹר, מִי יַעֲבֹר-לָנוּ אֶל-עֵבֶר הַיָּם וְיִקְחֶהָ לָנוּ, וְיִשְׁמְעֵנוּ אֹתָהּ, וְנַעֲשֶׂנָּה כִּי-קָרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר, מֵאֵד: בְּפִיךָ וּבְלִבְבְּךָ, לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ.

For this commandment which I command you this day, it is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say: 'Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, and make us hear it, that we may do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say: 'Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, and make us hear it, that we may do it?' But the word is very near to you, in your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it.

These verses give us an interesting perspective as well as a positive message. They tell us that Judaism is not solely a religion of revelation. We do not believe that God gave us the Divine word and nothing will ever evolve or change – “It is not in heaven.” At the same time, the verses tell us that ours is also not solely a religion of reason. We have a basis for what we do and what we believe known as the Torah

– “...this commandment which I command you today...” Our culture embraces both revelation and reason.

The Revelation at Mount Sinai – the giving of the *Aseret HaDibrot* (the Ten Commandments) – whatever you believe that to be, whether literal or figurative, is the foundation for Jewish civilization. Then the rational human being took those early mandates and developed them to meet our moral and ritual needs in the continuously evolving world, a process that continues to this day. This is one of the beauties of Judaism.

The verses also tell us that anything is possible. As we enter the season of *teshuva* (repentance), we are reminded that the internal changes inherent in *teshuva* are achievable. They are “not too hard for you,” but “very near to you.” No matter if we try unsuccessfully to improve on the same things year after year, we should not lose hope. This year, we can figure out a new approach; we can enlist different assistance; we can do it! It is not far off; it is feasible.

My best wishes for a happy, healthy, peaceful 5777 for all of us in the JPDS-NC family, for the wider Jewish community, and for the world. May this be the year in which each of us achieves those heights that we set our sights on.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Think of something in Jewish life that we do differently than the Jews did in the time of Moshe.
- Why do we need both revelation and reason? Wouldn't one or the other be sufficient?
- What do you want to change about yourself this year? How will you go about it?