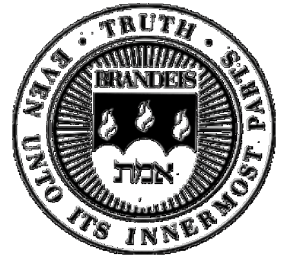




תורת אמת



A Weekly Brandeis Orthodox Organization Publication

23 Elul 5769 / 12 September 2009 Vol. XI Issue 3

PARSHIYOT NITZAVIM/VAYELECH

Candle-lighting: 6:45 pm
Shacharit: 9 am
Sof Kriat Shema: 9:31 am
Sof Zman Tefilla: 10:34 am
Mincha 6:20 pm
Shkia: 6:59 pm
Motzei Shabbat: 7:44 pm

Lo Bashamayim Hi

By Rabbi Kaplowitz

It is hard to believe that this week marks the final Shabbat of the year 5769. As we begin the recitation of *Selichot* this *motzei Shabbat*, our preparations for Rosh Hashanah and the upcoming year 5770 begin in earnest. Our efforts of *teshuvah* (repentance) intensify with each day. This is a time of the year when many of us receive phone calls from friends and acquaintances asking for *mechilah* (forgiveness) for any wrong they might have done to us. It is a period of reflection as we do our own *cheshbon hanefesh* (personal reflection) and think of ways we can improve ourselves in the upcoming year.

With this in mind, the double-*parsha* of *Nitzvaim-Vayelech* is the perfect *parsha* with which to end the year – it is not coincidental that we always read at least one of them on the final Shabbat of the year. In the *parshiyot* we read of Moshe's final speeches to the Jewish people before his death, and of the appointment and confirmation of Yehoshua as Moshe's successor.

At the very end of the first *parsha* is a section known as "*parshat ha-teshuvah*." It is both one of the most beautiful and poetic passages in the Torah and a powerful "*mussar-schmooze*." Moshe tells us: **For this mitzvah which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, 'Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us that we may observe it?' Neither is it beyond the sea that you should say, 'Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?' No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it"** (*Devarim* 30:11-

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The Torah is Not Hidden

By Jules Levenson '10

In this week's *parsha* of *Nitzavim-Vayelech*, there is a relatively well-known passage (30:11-14) regarding the accessibility of the Torah. The *pesukim* state that the Torah is neither hidden, nor far away, nor in the heavens, nor overseas, but rather that it is very close. Accordingly, the *pesukim* state that the claim that we are unable reach learn the Torah due its distance (whether physically and spiritually) from us is not tenable.

The basic understanding of these *pesukim* is generally considered to mean that the *mitzvos* and Torah learning are available to us, provided that we put in the requisite effort. This implies an obligation to study and acquire the knowledge which is found in Torah.

This explanation of the *pesukim* is not the only one however. Seizing on the wording of *pasuk* 11, the Kli Yakar proposes an additional explanation. The *pasuk* states "*Ki hamitzvah hazos asher anochi mitzvachah hayom lo nifleis hi mimcha v'lo richoka hi.*" – Because the *mitzvah* that I command you today is not hidden from you, nor is it far." The Kli Yakar explains that the words "*ki hamitzvah hazos*" (as well as the rest of the *pesukim* 11-14) are referring to *teshuvah* which is mentioned in the previous paragraph. He says that for the Bnei Yisrael it is a revealed secret that Hashem accepts the repentance of sinners and that there is no need to go up to heaven to inquire as to whether the *teshuvah* will be accepted, because the answer is already known.

Continuing in this vein, he extends the above explanation of *teshuvah* not being hidden, even to one who has caused the *shechina* to depart from him – and is therefore despondent that the only way to properly repent is to go up to heaven. Even for

(Jules Levenson continued on page 3)

Parsha in a Box

- Renewal of the *brit*
- What happens when one turns away from Hashem and goes against the *brit*
- We will do *teshuvah* and return to Hashem with all our heart and all our soul and Hashem will bring us back
- The Torah is reachable and accessible to EVERYONE
- Hashem gives us a choice - choose life
- Moshe gives encouragement to Yehoshua who will take over
- *Hakhel*
- Hashem speaks with Moshe and Yehoshua about the future
- Hashem tells Moshe and Yehoshua to write a song as a witness for when Hashem conceals His "face"
- Introduction to *parshat Ha'azinu*

Shabbat Shalom!

Slichot

By Zahvi Glasenberg '11

In *Shaarei Teshuva*, Rabbeinu Yonah brings a list of 24 things that prevent ultimate *teshuva* from being attained. One of these obstacles is the removal of oneself from the *tzibbur*. The *Rambam* discusses this matter in depth in *Perek Daled* of his *Hilchos Teshuva*, but it is very clear that there exists a necessity for one to join with the *tzibbur* to gain access to *mechilah*.

It can be easily understood why such emphasis and value is placed on being part of the community by means of which to ensure one's own forgiveness. The *Baalei Mussar* say that by becoming an integral and indispensable part of a community, the *zechut* of the *tzibbur* will advocate on your behalf. This is an idea that we recall every Shabbos morning in the second and third prayers of "*Y'kum Purkan*", where we say that "...*(v)chol mi sheoskim btzarchei hatzibbur v'emunah*", everyone who voluntarily contributes to the sustainability of the *tzibbur*, should be blessed. There is also an internal benefit to connecting with the *tzibbur*: Rav Soloveitchik in his work *Lonely Man of Faith* describes one of the two sides of *Adam* as one who feels incomplete and lost without companionship. This *Adam* sets out to build a "community of commitment", and by being able to rid himself of his feelings of loneliness is able to define himself as a person.

In *Nitzavim*, one of this week's *parshiyot*, Bnei Yisrael are gathered together at the point of transition to *Eretz Yisrael* before the death of Moshe Rabbeinu for the institution of a new covenant. According to the *Or HaChaim* on *Devarim* 29:9, the *chiddush* of this covenant is the implementation of a mutual responsibility of all Jews for one another. However, as the *Yamim Noraim* approach and we begin the recitation of *Selichot*; we must each ask ourselves: Do I have a responsibility for another's *teshuva*?

The *Gemara* states that *Hakol b'yedei Shamayim chutz miyirat Shamayim*" (*Brachot* 33b). *Yirat Shamayim* is something that is completely based on one's own actions and intentions, and if Hashem cannot impact this, how can another person? In other words, can I impact another's *teshuva*? This is a question posed by the *Maharsha* with regard to a passage in *Masechet Brachot* where the *Gemara* relates the torment of Rabbi Meir by the *biryonim*. While Rabbi Meir prayed for their death, his wife Bruriah asked instead that he pray they do *teshuva*. Ultimately Rabbi Meir takes Bruriah's suggestion and the *biryonim* do *teshuva*. Rabbi Akiva Eiger citing the *Zohar* says that from the outcome of the story of Rabbi Meir and the *biryonim*, it seems that we *paskin* like Bruriah, and that it is a very positive thing for a person to *daven* for another to do *teshuva*. However, Rav Moshe Feinstein holds that one cannot quite *daven* that another should do *teshuva*, but in his *Igrot Moshe* writes that when someone *davens* for the spiritual well-being of another, one should *daven* that Hashem should remove any impediments that prevent proper behavior, or, as in our case, impediments that would prevent this person from doing *teshuva*. While we do not have any control over the *Yirat Shamayim* of another Jew, we can have a positive influence on reducing the number of obstacles faced by this Jew that prevent him from reaching the highest level of *Yirat Shamayim*.

It is very clear why a bond to the *tzibbur* is so vital to our *teshuva* process and the *teshuva* of those around us. In the closing *tefillat Neilah*, on Yom Kippur, we go before Hashem with one final plea for forgiveness, and we do so by going before Hashem as a collective unit, not as individuals: "*Ki anu*

amecha v'Ata Elokeinu...anu kehalecha v'Ata chelkeinu." In *halacha* we see that there are certain things that cannot be done without a *minyan*, a quorum of ten, including the recitation of *kaddish*, *kedusha*, and *Selichot* as well. According to Rav Soloveitchik (*Shiurim leZecher Abba Mori* vol. II) this quorum of ten represents the entire *kahal* of Bnei Yisrael. In order to appropriately publicly sanctify the name of Hashem, the entire nation of *Yisrael* must be present, and because this is almost impossible to achieve, the quorum of ten stands in the place of the entire nation.

When we recite *Selichot* and the prayers for *teshuva* and *mechilah*, we rely on the *zechut* of the entire community, and according to the *Rambam*, this is vital to the attainment of *mechilah*. While involvement and a connection with the community is important to attain this *zechut*, Rav Soloveitchik in "On Repentance" writes that there is an even greater significance to joining with the *tzibbur*, for "a Jew who believes in *Knesset* Israel is a Jew who binds himself with inseparable bonds not only to the People of Israel of his own generation, but to the community of Israel throughout the ages." It is this *zechut* of our present community and of the commitment to the Torah that binds us to the past and present Jewish communities that gives us the key to attaining ultimate *mechilah*.

Zahvi does a great impression of the Yip Yips from Sesame Street

Thank G-d

By Hepzi Rapoport '12

This week, we read the seventh and final *Haftorah* of Consolation. We started reading the *haftorot* of Consolation on the *Shabbat* after *Tisha B'Av* and finish this week, the *Shabbat* before *Rosh Hashanah*. In this *haftorah*, Isaiah prophesizes that G-d will return to Israel as a young bridegroom to his virgin bride. The land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem will be full with both people and G-d's presence once again.

The connection between this *haftorah* and *Rosh Hashanah* is a little hard to discover. One similarity might be that just as the relationship between Bnei Israel and G-d get a new start in this *haftorah*, so too do we get a chance to start over again on *Rosh Hashanah*. But I want to propose something a little different. *Rosh Hashanah* is an opportunity for us to reflect on what is important to us. It is a time to prioritize and decide what we want from our lives. In the *haftorah*, we find G-d doing the same thing:

"For the sake of Zion, I will not be silent, and for the sake of Jerusalem I will not rest, until her righteousness comes out like brilliance, and her salvation burns like a torch" (Isaiah 62:1)

The Radak understands the "I" in the verse to be G-d. According to this understanding, G-d feels that he has an obligation to restore Jerusalem because it is the right thing to do. The language in the verse, especially "I will not be silent" and "I will not rest," reads like a pledge of service. G-d found something that is important to Him and nothing will stop Him from achieving His goal. So too should we find something we are passionate about, like feeding the hungry or ending the slave trade or just helping our friends with homework. When we find our cause, we too should "not be silent."

Hepzi holds by the greatest minhag on Earth. Please let her know if you know any single Dutch men.

MODAOT

- **Ones this Friday night in the girls Ridgewood!** Come explore the new Ridgewood buildings and have fun hanging out with your friends this Friday night. Time TBA. Food, drinks, and fun will be provided so you have no excuse not to come!
- **Rabbi Kaplowitz's Hot Topic Shiur!** Rabbi Kaplowitz is giving his Hot Topic shiur 30 minutes before Mincha on Shabbat in International Lounge. Topic TBA.
- **Hilchot Shabbat Chaburah!** Come join Jules as he learn the Halachot pertaining to Shabbat every Shabbat

afternoon in the Beit Midrash. Time TBA.

- **Pre Selichot Kumzitz & Selichot Saturday Night at 11:20 PM–12:45 AM in Berlin Chapel** Come lift your spirit at the Pre-Selichot Kumzitz this Saturday night, as we begin reciting Selichot. Selichot are special prayers for forgiveness that are said on most fast days, and during the period preceding Yom Kippur. In the Ashkenazic tradition, they begin at a time that allows for ten opportunities for their recitation before and including Yom Kippur. We

begin reciting Selichot on the Saturday night immediately preceding Rosh Hashanah. The proper time to say Selichot is the end of the night, just before the morning, since this time is considered an especially favorable time in terms of the "presence" and "closeness" of G-d. The first night of Selichot, it is customary to say Selichot before going to sleep and after chatzot (relative midnight).

- **Sponsor Kiddush!** Talk to Mimi to sponsor a BOO Kiddush for your very own special event!

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13).

Rashi cites the Gemara from *Eruvin* 55a in which Avdimi bar Chama bar Dosa explains the significance of the lines **it is not in the heavens and neither is it beyond the sea**. He explains: "*It is not in the heavens...* – for if it were in the heavens, you would have to ascend [to the heavens] to get it. And if it were beyond the sea you would have to chase after it." Avdimi offers a piercing insight into our relationship with Torah. Hashem did us a kindness by making Torah something near and dear to our hearts. Two essential questions emerge from Avdimi's comment.

1. To what length **must** we go to achieve greatness in Torah? Are there any limits to what we must do to become versant in Torah and *mitzvot*?
2. What lengths **do** we go to for the Torah? On a very practical level, we must ask ourselves if we are honest in our commitment to keep Hashem's *mitzvot* to the best of our abilities. Would we chase after the Torah if it were in the heavens or across the sea? How do we respond during the times in life when the Torah does not feel **close to our mouth and heart**; when keeping the *mitzvot* feels like more of a burden than a privilege. We must ask ourselves, "How do we respond in those situations?"

As we embark on the process of *teshuvah* and *cheshbon hanefesh*, it is easy to become depressed and overburden by the enormity of the task and our shortcomings. While we must be able to ask ourselves the difficult questions and be self-critical when necessary, we must keep in mind that ultimately the Torah promises us success. For whether we feel it at the beginning of our process, we have the assurance that **the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart to observe it**.

May the upcoming year be one where we all merit to experience G-d's closeness and where we continue to grow religiously, spiritually, and personally. Wishing you and your families a *Shanah Tovah!*

Rabbi Kaplowitz Fun Fact: Rabbi Kaplowitz once had his own designer clothing label called "EKNY"

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such a person, the Kli Yakar says, "the idea of returning to Hashem is not hidden." Rather, when one sets their heart to return to *Hashem Yisborach*, he will return to that person to bring His *shechinah* to them.

This conception of *teshuva* is extremely powerful. It is not a complex and abstract concept that can be only be achieved by those with the greatest knowledge and understanding or those who are predisposed to scrupulousness and piety. Instead it is open and revealed for all who desire to return to Hashem. As long as one is sincere about the *teshuva* process, it is there for them – close and accessible.

While these two explanations offered for the relevant *pesukim* may appear to have little to do with each other – indeed one deals with the whole Torah and another with a very specific concept – nevertheless, there seems to be a connection between these. The process of *teshuva* is not simply repenting for that in which one has erred, but also is a general drawing close to Hashem, a process which is primarily accomplished through an increased studying of Torah and fulfillment of *mitzvos*.

Thus, when we are told that the Torah is easily available to us we are not just being told this in a vacuum. Rather, it is through the increased learning of Torah that we may bring ourselves to a greater understanding of Hashem, and, as such, further promulgate the process of *teshuva*. Thus, it is the accessibility of Torah with furthers our ability to return to Hashem – we just have to put in the effort needed to do so. This topic is particularly appropriate as we approach the *Yamim Noraim* and prepare to return to Hashem through a greater knowledge of Him. A *kesiva v'chesima tovah* to all.

During his free time, Jules has taken up Snickerdoodle making. Ask him to make you a batch!

SHORT VORTS

The Magic Number Seven

By Jen Rawson '09

Seven is one of those numbers that we see all over the *Tanach*. Starting in the very first *sefer* with the seven days of creation, seven *mitzvot Bnei Noach*, seven *Emahot* and *Avot* all the way to seven weeks between *Pesach* and *Shavuot*, seven years in the *Shmita* cycle, seven species which are taken on *Succot*... OK we get the point. Seven is everywhere! But why, what is so special about seven?

Seven is a number found all over our religion. This number is used over and over in order to signify wholeness and completeness of the item for which it is concerned.

In this week's *parsha* in *perek 20 pesukim 2-10* the word "*shuv*" is repeated in different forms seven times. When a word is repeated this many times in a short space we must ask why. There has to be some significance behind this. The word "*shuv*" means return. Here we are talking about the process of *teshuva* and returning to Hashem. Remembering back to the reasoning behind the number seven, it becomes apparent as to why this word is repeated specifically seven times. *Teshuva* cannot be done in one small simple act.

Looking closely at these *pesukim*, there is an interesting contrast between two of the *pesukim* that teach an additional understanding to the process of *teshuva*. In 30:2 it states: "*V'shavta ad Hashem Elockedcha*" in contrast to 30:10, "*V'shavta el Hashem Elockedcha*." While these two *pesukim* seem to be saying the same thing, the one word variation in fact makes an interesting difference. *Malbim* explains that in *pasuk 2* we are talking about the first stage of religious awakening turning toward Hashem, when man directs his attention toward the right path and is ready to listen. *Pasuk 10* refers to consummation of actual repentance, the final stage of turning to Hashem Himself and not just focusing one's self in the correct direction.

There are several stages to *teshuva* and returning to Hashem. *Teshuva* is a process, one which must be worked on over time. With *Rosh Hashana* coming up we must look at the actions in which we are engaged. The next few weeks that we are approaching is not just a time for us to do intense *teshuva* and then drop everything once *Yom Kippur* ends. Rather, we must take it slow, work towards an ultimate true *teshuva* and return to Hashem.

Jen is very serious about bedtime. Don't be late, or else!

The Meaning of Today

By Eitan Mosenkis '13

This week's *parsha* begins אתם ניצבים היום כולכם, לפני ה' אלוהיכם... "לעוברך, בברית ה' אלוהיך... למען הקים-אותך - "You are standing this day, all of you, before the Lord your G-d... to bring you into the covenant of the Lord your G-d... in order to establish you as a nation unto Him and He will be your G-d." The commentators have a surprising amount to say just about the word הַיּוֹם this day. Rashi first offers a simple explanation - this day, the day of Moses's death. Several verses later, Rashi returns to this verse and offers two more readings. The first is "you are standing this day" - though you have done much to anger Hashem, He has not destroyed you, and so you stand here today.

Rashi's last interpretation of the *pasuk* seems to me the most inspiring: just as this day which waxes and wanes as you stand here sheds light upon you, so too should Hashem's covenant always continue to shed light upon you. This touches upon a central idea in Judaism, that of living the Torah like the day that it was given to us by Hashem.

The Slonimer rebbe in his *Netivot Shalom* also brings up this use of the word הַיּוֹם which he takes to be a reference to *Rosh Hashanah* (as in ונתנה תוקף קדושת היום כי - let us give weight to the sanctity of the day, for it is great and awesome). On *Rosh Hashanah*, he says, not only is the creation of the world renewed, but also the covenant that Hashem makes in this week's *parsha* with the Jewish people.

To combine this interpretation with Rashi's, this *Rosh Hashanah* brings us an opportunity to renew our religiosity and service of Hashem so that we may in the coming year be able to experience Torah to be as fresh as it was when it first came into the world. May everyone be successful in seizing that opportunity and have a *Shabbat shalom*.

*"The Kosher Contract sounds like an Olson twins movie" ~
Eitan Mosenkis (the first freshman to write for Torat Emet!)*

TE Staff:

Co-Editors: Ronit Broekman '11 and
Lauren Kirschenbaum '10

Staff Writers: Rabbi Kaplowitz '02,
Zahvi Glasenberg '11, and Aviva Zadoff '10