



TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Parshas Nitzavim-Vayelech

September 11, 2020

A Taste of Torah

Rooting for Change

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

How many psychologists does it take to change a light bulb?

Just one. But the light bulb has to want to change.

Real change is very difficult, but this week's parsha teaches us that we dare not shrug off the daunting task. Moshe warns the Jewish People of the danger of being seduced by idolatry. He tells them that he must administer the oath and the curses (discussed at length in the previous parsha) to the entire nation that they will be loyal to Hashem, because "perhaps there is among you a man or woman, or a family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from being with Hashem, our G-d, to go and serve the gods of those nations; perhaps there is among you a root flourishing with gall and wormwood." (Nitzavim 29:17)

The Ramban notes that there are two different types of people discussed in the verse. The first person is one "whose heart turns away today from being with Hashem, our G-d, to go and serve the gods of those nations," while the second person is one with "a root flourishing with gall and wormwood." What does the second category add that is not included in the first description?

The Ramban explains that it is entirely possible that there were people who did not overtly believe in idols or had any real desire to worship them. However, the possibility of a "root," of a deeply-buried inclination toward idolatry, barely discernible even to the bearer of this thought, was a real concern. While this subconscious disposition would not express itself now, it could develop from a hidden root into a full-blown weed that could wreak havoc years, even generations, later.

Rabbi Aharon Kotler (1891-1962) sees

this passage in the Torah as a directive for true, lasting change in a person's life. It is not sufficient, he explains, for a person to simply adjust external actions for the better. True *teshuva* (repentance), says Rabbi Kotler, is achieved when one changes the "roots" – the deep-seated traits a person possesses which drive one's motivations and actions.

A passage in the *mussaf* prayer of Rosh Hashana makes the importance of this form of *teshuva* and change clear, says Rabbi Kotler. The section of *Zichronos* (Remembrances) discusses the focus of Hashem's judgment on Rosh Hashana, and includes "the deeds of a person, and his mission, and the motivations of a person's steps; the thoughts of Man and his devices, and the inclinations of a person's actions." The underlying causes of a person's deeds are clearly illustrated in this passage. Hashem does not focus merely on one's actions, but also on what brought those actions about.

Changing these "roots," continues Rabbi Kotler, is no small task, but even a small change is worth a great deal. Nor can a person simply dig down to the ultimate base of his being and make adjustments. Rather, it is a gradual process of examining, one layer at a time, one's inner drives and emotions, and slowly but surely altering the inner psychological structure, gradually moving deeper and deeper into one's psyche.

While this is no easy task, failure to acknowledge the need for true change is disastrous. After describing the person possessing these bitter roots, Moshe continues that such a person may react to the oath and the curses by saying, "Peace will be with me, though I walk as my heart sees fit." (ibid.:18) However,

continued on back

Stories for the Soul

Is That All?

Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach (c. 1899-2001) was famous for his great toil in Torah, exerting enormous effort to arrive at a conclusion that he felt was correct. Nowhere was his commitment more evident than in his weekly *shiur klali*, a lecture he delivered every Tuesday in the Ponovezh Yeshiva where he served as the Rosh Yeshiva.

Stories of what went on at the *shiur klali* abound. A student related that one time, Rabbi Shach posed a question on a passage of the Rambam. After the usual din and tumult of students discussing the question, Rabbi Shach opened the famed work of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik on the Rambam and proceeded to present Rav Chaim's brilliant solution to the question.

Rav Shach concluded the answer looked around the room at the satisfied faces of his students. He snapped the *sefer* shut and declared, "Everything is resolved!" and began to walk away from the lectern from where he spoke, as if there was no need for further discussion.

A few moments later, he returned to the lectern and proceeded to point out the difficulties with Rav Chaim's approach. He then offered an alternative approach of his own that dealt with these issues.

Rav Shach's dramatic actions highlighted the point he strove to drive home: Every person must toil in Torah and think through the material on his own. Simply reading someone else's approach and not thinking it through thoroughly was insufficient.

In this week's parsha, Moshe tells the Jewish People that "the matter is very

continued on back

Kollel Happenings

KOLLEL CLASSES CONTINUE VIA ZOOM MEETING

The Kollel is continuing many of its classes and offering new classes via Zoom Meeting. You can tune in to live classes online or call in on a phone. For a full schedule and the links and phone numbers to access this treasure trove of Torah, visit www.denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

BUILD YOUR LEGACY AND SECURE THE FUTURE OF TORAH WITH LIVE ON/LIFE & LEGACY

The Kollel is one of 28 local organizations selected to be part of Rose Community Foundation's Live On/LIFE & LEGACY program, which focuses on creating financial stability for the future through planned giving. Think it's not for you? Think again! Anyone can make a planned gift, no matter the amount. Visit www.denverkollel.org, email rmh@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855 for more information.

HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Parsha Quizzers

The six items below can be found in Rashi's commentary to this week's parsha. Can you figure out where they are? (Answers on bottom)

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| 1) Path to a covenant | 4) Eternal witnesses |
| 2) Idol theft | 5) Full strength |
| 3) Dots for delay | 6) Royal reading |

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Menashe ben Yisrael - Part XXI

Despite the realization that there was no law blockign Jewish entry to England, Parliament and Cromwell declined to issue an official law allowing the Jews into England, something which Rabbi

Menashe advocated strongly for. While this allowed Cromwell to walk a political tightrope among the different factions in England, it left Rabbi Menashe feeling that he had failed.

A Taste of Torah

continued from front

says Moshe, "Hashem will not be willing to forgive him, for then Hashem's anger and jealousy will smoke against that man..." (ibid.:19) A person cannot simply reassure himself that he is fine, and he needn't worry about any deep-seated negativity present in himself. Rather, he must make the effort to slowly but surely change himself.

How to accomplish real change successfully is the subject of an enormous amount of discussion. In the 1800s, a great Torah scholar and leader by the name of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter founded a revolutionary movement known as *mussar*. His novel approach contains many aspects and nuances, among them many ideas of the subconscious later propounded by so-called modern psychology (decades before those ideas were discovered by the secular world). One major piece of the *mussar*

movement is the intense and repeated study of ideas that a person wishes to imbibe into oneself. Through this process, one can begin to bring these ideas beyond the superficial part of one's existence and allow them to actually trickle into one's subconscious, gradually effecting change. Today, we are blessed with many Torah works, both in Hebrew, English, and many other languages, that enable a person to begin the long and arduous, but extremely rewarding, journey toward self-perfection.

As we prepare for the Day of Judgment, we have the opportunity to decide that this year will be different, because this year, we want to change - not just through adjusting our actions and deeds, but by taking steps to change our inner core for the better.

Stories for the Soul

continued from front

near to you - in your mouth and in your heart - to perform it." Rashi explains that Moshe is referring to Torah. Every

Jew must study, toil and understand the Torah to the best of his ability.

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| 1) Path to a covenant 29:10 s.v. li'avricha | 2) Idol theft 29:16 s.v. kesef | 3) Dots for delay 29:28 s.v. hamiglos |
| 4) Eternal witnesses 30:19 s.v. ha'idos | 5) Full strength 31:2 s.v. lo uchal | 6) Royal reading 31:11 s.v. tikra |

Parsha Quizzers - Answers