



TORAH WEEKLY

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Parshas Nitzavim

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A Taste of Torah

Do Not Despair!

by Rabbi Chaim Gross

In just a few days, we will all be standing together in shul, beginning a special season of *yamim tovim* (holidays), as well as the New Year at large. This week's parsha, Nitzavim, is the last to be read before we enter that time of judgment, and surely it must contain some message that we are meant to take with us, to guide us through those awesome days. Let us attempt to better understand what it is that we find so challenging about this time period and shed new light on how to strengthen ourselves through the verses we will read this week.

Being that the days of judgment are almost upon us, we are all walking around in terror, shaking with trepidation as to what the final verdict will be - right? Wrong. Unfortunately, the sad reality seems to be that most of us feel just plain regular, and are not having night terrors or waking up in a cold sweat. Why is that so? Do we simply lack the belief that our very lives hang in the balance and depend on that verdict?

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1892-1953) explains with a powerful psychological insight: A soldier who is sent to the battlefield, a place of utmost danger, will indeed be consumed with fear for his life, and that fear will accompany him constantly. But only up until a point - and that is when he has been cornered and knows beyond a doubt that there is absolutely no chance that he will make it out alive. At that moment, when death is a foregone conclusion, he is calm. Why? Because there is nothing he can do to change the outcome. Fear exists only inasmuch as there is a possibility of hope, and in this soldier's mind, there is no hope.

Of course we believe that there is a judgment, says Rabbi Dessler, and yes, we know that if we don't change our ways, the results will be disastrous. What we don't believe, though, is that it is possible to change. In our minds, we have despaired over becoming that person who will merit a favorable verdict - for we have already passed judgment on ourselves.

How do we combat this? From where do we draw the strength to say, "No! There's still hope for me!" when we look at ourselves in the

mirror and know full well that we have many shortcomings we still need to overcome?

On Erev Rosh Hashanah, in the midst of the lengthy *selichos* (additional penitential prayers recited during the period of the Days of Awe), a verse is recited which seems somewhat out of place. We recite the verse (Bereishis 18:25), "It would be sacrilege for You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous along with the wicked, letting the righteous be like the wicked; it would be sacrilege for You; shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" This is the defense that was recited by Avraham as he advocated to save the wicked city of Sodom. The difficulty is that the Talmud tells us (Rosh Hashana 18a) that on Rosh Hashana, each person passes before Hashem to be scrutinized individually. If so, how can we use Avraham's plea to save the entire city due to a righteous few to our advantage during Judgment Day, when each person is judged individually? To solve this puzzle, we must first understand what the intention of Avraham himself was as he pleaded before the Almighty. Why, indeed, should the wicked be saved if there happen to be a few righteous individuals among them? Rabbi Aharon Leib Shteinman (1914-2017) explains Avraham's claim: True - the majority are evil. But there are some pure members among them, great people who can, little by little, hold sway over the rest, eventually succeeding in changing the entire city for the good!

This, too, is our defense. We cry before G-d that yes, it's true that I may have shortcomings and evil within me. But mixed in there is also some righteousness, a degree of purity - and, if allowed the chance, this good can succeed in winning over my persona so that, one day, I will be entirely good. This is what we tell Hashem, but even more so, we tell it to ourselves - that all is not lost, there is still hope for that change to occur.

Perhaps this is the message that we are meant to take with us from the last parsha of the year. Rashi says that after hearing (in last week's parsha) all the terrible curses that are rained

Stories for the Soul

Sooner or Later....

The Nazis entered the small European town of Telz (Telšiai) in the summer of 1941, during the Jewish month of Tammuz. Though the Telz Yeshiva that had existed there had already been disbanded by the Russians in 1940, many of the students still studied in various locations in the city.

For three weeks, the Nazis tortured the Jewish residents of the town. On the 20th day of the Jewish month of Tammuz, the Nazis murdered all the remaining Jewish residents of Telz.

Rabbi Avrohom Yitzchak Bloch, the Telzer Rov, more much of the brunt of the Nazis' wrath. At one point, a Nazi officer was beating Rabbi Bloch, delivering repeated blows to his head. As he struck him, he gleefully demanded, "Herr Rabbiner, where is your G-d?"

Fearlessly and boldly, the great rabbi replied, "He is not only my G-d, He is your G-d as well, and the entire world will yet see this!"

Rashi in this week's parsha tells us that the Jewish People turned were terrified upon hearing the 98 curses from Moshe, wondering how a nation could withstand such tribulations. Moshe reassured them, however, telling them that the punishments were a means of ensuring their survival, and that they would continue to thrive as a nation for all time.

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Kollel Happenings

RABBI YOSSI EPHRATHI NOW TEACHING LEARN 2 LEARN GESHMAK

You may have limited experience learning Talmud. You may think that you don't enjoy serious Talmud study, that it's just not for you. But you haven't tried Learn 2 Learn Geshmak. A gemara program crafted to give you the satisfaction and joy of learning, Learn 2 Learn Geshmak is now being taught by Kollel Scholar Rabbi Yossi Ephrathi, and is beginning a new topic. Contact Rabbi Nesanel Kipper at rnk@denverkollel.org for further details.

THE BOOK OF KOHELES & SUKKOS ON SEPTEMBER 13 IN-PERSON AND ON ZOOM

Join Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher and explore the connection between the Book of Koheles and Sukkos on Monday, 9/13 at 8 pm. In-person class at the Kaufman home and on Zoom. Visit www.denverkollel.org for more details.

TALMUDO BIYADO GEMARA CLUB FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS

Learn, review, and acquire a masechta! Boys in grades 6-8 are invited to join Rabbi Chaim Gross at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center/Ohel Yissochor weeknights Mon.-Thu. from 8-8:30 pm for a Gemara shiur followed by review. Contact Rabbi Nesanel Kipper at rnk@denverkollel.org for further details.

Halacha Riddles

Last week's question: Why would the laws of *brachos* render it necessary to keep certain foods off the table on Rosh Hashana?

Answer: There are a number of laws associated with precedence in *brachos*, including upon which food the blessing should be recited when different foods with a common blessing are about to be eaten. In the case of different fruits, a food of the *Shivas Haminim* (Seven Species of Eretz Yisrael) takes precedence (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 211:1), and there is an order of precedence within the *Shivas Haminim*, as well (see *ibid.*:4).

On Rosh Hashana night, it is customary to eat different foods that symbolize a sweet

new year. The most widespread custom among Ashkenazim is to dip an apple in honey (Rema Orach Chaim 583:1), and this is usually the first food of the symbolic foods to be eaten. Since it is not actually part of the meal, a separate blessing is recited. However, many have the custom to also eat pomegranates and dates (see Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 583:1), which are members of the *Shivas Haminim* and should thus have the blessing recited upon them (with the dates preceding the pomegranate). To avoid the issue, it is advisable to keep the other symbolic foods off the table until after one has recited a *ha'eitz* upon the apple.

This week's question: Why would one potentially not make a blessing upon drinking water on Erev Yom Kippur?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Meir Shapiro - Part XV

Rabbi Shapiro would come to play a key role in a number of the Agudah's initiatives, as will be discussed later.

World War I, however, would rear its ugly head, drastically changing the entire world.

A Taste of Torah

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down upon those who transgress the will of Hashem, the Nation was terrified - for who can endure such tribulations? To that, Moshe responded, "Behold, you have angered Hashem many times, yet you stand here today... you must never despair."

The story is told that in Lithuania there lived a couple. The husband studied Torah, and the wife would sell fabric as a source of income. It once happened that the wife took a great deal of money and brought it to the town fair to purchase new bolts of fabric for the upcoming year. Unfortunately, she lost the entire sum, and was quite heartbroken.

Sometime later, there was a great commotion. Someone had found the money! She excitedly approached the finder, only to discover that he had no intention of giving it back. The man argued that the poor woman had already despaired of finding the money, and according to halacha, if one finds a lost item after the owner has despaired of recovering it, the finder may keep it for himself. The case was brought before the Kovno Rav, Rabbi Yitzchok Elchonon Spektor (1817-1896), one of the great halachic authorities of the latter half

of the 19th century. After hearing both sides, Rabbi Spektor rendered his ruling: the money should be returned! However, his reason was a surprise to everyone. He explained that since, according to halacha, money earned by the wife actually belongs to the husband (the husband must provide her with food in exchange, and the woman has the right to opt out of the arrangement), the money did not actually belong to the woman, but to her husband, and she thus is not halachically empowered to despair of finding the lost money.

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz (1873-1936), the famed *mashgiach* (spiritual supervisor) of the Mir Yeshiva, recounted this story to teach a powerful lesson: A person is entrusted with a most precious item - a *neshama* (soul). Very often, a person wishes to give up hope on it, being that he has sullied it with so many misdeeds. However, said Rabbi Levovitz, "The soul is not truly ours, as it belongs to Hashem, Who has given it to us. There is one lesson we learn from this story - that a person has no right to give up hope on that which is not his!" This is the lesson we must take to heart - that we should never, ever despair.

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