

PARSHIOS NETZAVIM & VAYEILECH

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Parshios Netzavim & Vayeilech

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Our parashah promises, "He will return and gather you in from all the peoples to whom Hashem, your G-d, has scattered you." Chazal observe that the Torah does not say, "He will return *you*." Rather it says, "**He* will return." It seems that Hashem, Himself, will, so-to-speak, do teshuvah.

R' Yochanan Luria z"l (died 1577) explains: Hashem will repent for exiling us, even though He (obviously) committed no sin. The lesson in this is that we, too, should not be ashamed to repent. Indeed, if He who was not on the wrong path promises to change His ways, then certainly we can and should leave a path which is wrong.

To what may Hashem's promise be compared? asks R' Luria. To a doctor whose patient is afraid to take the medicine that has been prescribed for him. In order to show the patient that the pills are not harmful, the doctor may himself swallow some. So, too, a person may be afraid to change for the better because such a change is an implicit admission that his old ways were misguided. Such an admission can be embarrassing and painful. Hashem therefore says, "I will change My ways first (i.e., gather your scattered people); then you can follow Me."

R' Luria adds: I used to disapprove of tzaddikim who constantly fast and afflict their bodies. I reasoned, "Hashem has created the human body in an ideal fashion, and a person who protects that body enhances his ability to obtain knowledge." Later, however, I realized that these tzaddikim, who fast to obtain atonement although they have barely sinned, make it possible for those who really have sinned to repent without standing out or being noticed. Regarding these tzaddikim it is said (Daniel 12:3), "Those who bring merit to the public will shine like the stars forever." (Meshivat Nefesh)

"It is not in heaven, [for you] to say, 'Who can ascend to the heaven for us and take it for us, so that

we can listen to it and perform it?" (30:12)

This verse teaches that G-d has given control over future decision-making regarding the Torah's laws to mankind. Even if a prophet would inform the bet din that G-d disagreed with the judges' ruling, that prophecy would be given no weight because "The Torah is not in Heaven."

R' Shmuel Zvi Danziger z"l (1856-1923; the Alexanderer Rebbe) writes that this is what we allude to when we say in the Pesach Haggadah, "If only He had brought us to Har Sinai, and not given us the Torah--that would have been sufficient for us." Of course, the only reason He brought us to Har Sinai was to give us the Torah. What we mean is: if He had commanded us to keep the mitzvot but had not made us masters of future decision-making--that would have been sufficient for us. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Tiferet Shmuel p.63)

"See--I have placed before you today the life and the good, and the death and the bad." (30:15)

R' Dov Ber z"l (the Maggid of Mezeritch; successor to the Ba'al Shem Tov z"l as leader of the chassidic movement; died 1772) asks: We read (Bereishit 1:31), "G-d saw all that He had made, and behold it is very good." If all that G-d made is "very good," then what is the source of the "bad" that He places before us, as mentioned in our verse?

The Maggid explains: The verse is not referring to absolute bad as we use the term. Rather, G-d created different levels of good and, in relation to a higher level of good, a lower level of good is "bad."

For example, the Maggid continues, a broom is "good" because it can be used to clean the house. [Nevertheless, if one were asked to associate an object with the adjective "good," he would be unlikely to respond, "broom."] Compared to true good, a broom is only a little bit good. [Thus, what our verse is teaching is that G-d has given us a choice between choosing a higher level of "good"--i.e., Torah and mitzvot--and a lower level of good--i.e., mundane physical good. In relation to the higher good, mundane good is "bad" and, our verse tells us, is equivalent to death.]

The Maggid concludes: We can create absolute bad [as opposed to something less good, which is only relatively bad, as noted above]. Specifically, if one sins, he creates evil. For example, if one would use the same broom that is inherently a good tool to hit another person, the broom would then be bad. (Ohr Torah No.7)

"Hashem said to Moshe, 'Behold, you will lie with your forefathers, but this people will rise up and stray after the gods of the foreigners of the Land, in whose midst it is coming, and it will forsake Me and annul My covenant that I have sealed with it.' (31:16)

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam; 1135-1204) writes: There are many verses in the Torah which some people read as implying that G-d decrees that man will rebel against Him and that G-d thereby forces man to rebel. This is falsehood, Rambam writes, and it must be explained, because many people have been confused by such verses.

For example, Rambam continues, G-d decreed that Egypt would persecute the descendants of Avraham Avinu. However, this decree had no more effect on individual Egyptians than if G-d would say, "In the future, sinners will be born and also righteous people." No *individual* is thereby forced to be wicked or righteous; rather, each person can utilize his free will to decide which to become. Similarly, each individual Egyptian had free will to persecute Bnei Yisrael or not to persecute them.

Rambam continues: The same thing can be said of our verse, which states, "This people will rise up . . ." This verse, and the punishments in the verses that follow ("My anger will flare against [the nation] on that day and I will forsake them . . ."), no more obligate a person to commit idolatry than a person is forced to transgress the laws Shabbat by the fact that the Torah specifies the death penalty for one who does so. (Shemoneh Perakim ch.8)

R' Yaakov Emden z"l (Germany; died 1776) explains further: We read a few verses later in our parashah (31:21), "For I know [the nations's] inclination, what it does today, before I bring them to the Land that I have sworn." In this verse, G-d is explaining *why* He says in our verse, "This people will rise up and stray after the gods of the foreigners." It is not a decree, but merely a statement of probability based on His knowledge of their nature. If Bnei Yisrael rebelled against G-d in the desert, when they were entirely dependent on Him, how much more so are they likely to rebel when living amidst the goodness of the land of milk and honey. This, writes R' Emden, is an example of the Torah speaking in colloquial terms, no different than Moshe Rabbeinu saying (31:27), "For I know your rebelliousness and your stiff neck; behold! while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebels against G-d--and surely after my death." (Hagahot Maharyavetz)

Teshuvah

"Teshuvah" literally means "return." However, writes R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (Yerushalayim; 1910-1995), this does not mean returning to one's previous state for, if that were the case, a person who had never in his life been righteous would not be called upon to "do teshuvah." Rather, teshuvah means bringing oneself close to G-d and not to remain far from Him.

R' Auerbach continues: True, the fundamentals of teshuvah are abandoning the sin, sincere regret for the past, and accepting on oneself not to commit the same sin in the future. However, these are only the tools. The essence of teshuvah is the act of coming closer to G-d. This is alluded to by the Gemara (Chagigah 4b), "Rav Huna said, 'If the master pines to see his servant, should the servant distance himself from the master?'" [Similarly, Hashem pines, so-to-speak, for us to come close to

Him; will we fail to do so?] (Quoted in Minchat Avot p.133)

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) writes: One must have a deep faith in the power of teshuvah and must be confident that a mere hirhur / passing thought of teshuvah [even if it is not followed by all the steps mentioned above] can have a significant positive effect on the person himself and on the world as a whole. Necessarily, after a hirhur of teshuvah, one will be happier with himself and more pleased with his soul than he was before. How much more so will this be true if the hirhur of teshuvah has led to a firm resolution of teshuvah, if it is joined with Torah, wisdom and fear of Heaven, if the trait of love of G-d rings within a person's soul. This thought can provide great consolation to one who has committed sins against his fellow man and is unable obtain forgiveness for whatever reason, R' Kook adds, for at least he has repaired as much as he is able. (Orot Ha'teshuvah 7:6)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Torah.org](https://www.torah.org) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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