

# NOT HIDING, BUT SEEK

by Shlomo Katz

## Parshios Netzavim & Vayeilech

### Not Hiding, But Seek

The Midrash Rabbah on this week's parashah asks: When one wants to read from the Torah, how does he recite a blessing? Our Sages teach: He should recite a berachah before and after. Before--because we read (Tehilim 119:12), "Baruch attah Hashem, teach me Your laws." First, "Baruch attah Hashem"--a blessing, then, "teach me Your laws." After--because Moshe Rabbeinu uttered a blessing at the end of the Torah. [According to the commentary Tiferet Zion, this refers to Devarim 33:2.]

The midrash continues: If you recite a berachah on the Torah, I too will bless you, as it is written (Shmot 20:21), "In every place where I will mention My Name, I will come to you and bless you." [Tiferet Zion explains: This refers to a person who is called for an aliyah, so that he is reciting the berachah involuntarily. Because this circumstance was not brought about by the person himself, but by G-d, who caused him to be called, the verse refers to it as "every place where I will mention My Name.]

The midrash continues: The angels desired the Torah, but it was hidden from them. But from you it is not hidden, as it is written (in our parashah-30:11), "For this commandment that I command you today--it is not hidden from you." [Until here from the midrash]

R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Yadler z"l (1843-1917; Yerushalayim) explains: The midrash was bothered by the verse's reference to the entire Torah as a single commandment. Therefore the midrash explains that while the Torah has many separate mitzvot--the purpose of each of which is to subdue or purify a different trait or attribute of a person--their inner significance is only one thing--to raise mankind above the level of the angels where they can appreciate what the Zohar refers to as the Oneness of G-d and the Torah. (Tiferet Zion)

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"It will be when all these things come upon you--the blessing and the curse that I have

presented before you--then you will take it to your heart among all the nations where Hashem, your Elokim, has dispersed you. You will return to Hashem, your Elokim, and listen to His voice . . ." (30:1-2)

R' Yisrael Meir Kagan z"l (approx. 1838-1933; the Chafetz Chaim) asks: It seems from these verses that the generation in which mashiach comes will have done teshuvah. In contrast, there are many statements of our Sages which imply that the generation in which mashiach comes will be a very lowly one!

He answers: Both are true. The generation in which mashiach comes will be a generation of extreme opposites. On the one hand, there will be Jews who will make every possible sacrifice to ensure their children's Torah educations. Among that part of the nation, there will be a thirst for knowledge, and their hearts will be pained by their own ignorance and lack of mitzvah performance. On the other hand, there will be Jews who will do whatever seems right in their eyes, so far removed from Judaism that any rebuke would be hopeless.

One might ask, continues the Chafetz Chaim, why would mashiach come in such a generation, when he did not come to redeem past generations that were entirely religious and seemingly more worthy? He answers: In early generations, the redemption was less necessary, since their faith was strong and there was no question that Judaism would be preserved. Indeed, the longer mashiach delayed, the more merits the Jewish People as a whole accumulated because of their adherence to the Torah. Now, however, when a significant part of the Jewish People is becoming lost, further delay is counter-productive. Thus, mashiach's arrival is closer. (Kuntreis Tzipita Li'shuah ch.1)

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"You will return unto Hashem, your Elokim, and listen to His voice . . ." (30:1-2)

Why, in this verse which speaks of teshuvah, is Hashem referred to as "your" Elokim? Similarly, we read in the haftarah for Shabbat Shuvah (Hoshea 14:2), "Return, Yisrael to Hashem, your Elokim, for you have stumbled through your iniquity." Why?

R' Moshe ben Yosef M'Trani z"l (the Mabit; Greece and Eretz Yisrael; 1505-1585) explains: Why has Hashem promised to accept our teshuvah, a promise that was not made to any other nation in the world? Because, as our Elokim, He has placed so many mitzvot upon us that it is inevitable that a person will stumble now and then. Thus, it is only fair that we be allowed to repent. (Beit Elokim: Sha'ar Ha'teshuvah ch.1)

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"For this commandment that I command you today, it is not hidden from you and it is not

distant . . . Rather, the matter is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to perform it."  
(30:11-14)

R' Yehoshua Rokeach z"l (1825-1894; Belzer Rebbe) asks: Why does the verse say, "in your mouth and [then] in your heart, to perform it"? Usually, thought ("in your heart") precedes action ("in your mouth")!

He explains: The ideal way to perform a mitzvah is to combine the required action with the proper intent. Having the proper concentration and focus are not always easy, however, and one might think that he should not perform a mitzvah if he cannot have the proper thoughts. Therefore our verse comes to teach: Place the action before the thought, if necessary. Perform the mitzvah to the best of your ability now, and the proper thoughts will come later. (Quoted in Mesilot B'ohr Ha'chassidut p.20)

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"I have placed chaim / life and death before you, blessing and curse; and you shall choose chaim." (30:19)

R' Aharon Roth z"l (1894-1947; the Toldos Aharon Rebbe) asks: Why does the verse say, "Choose life," rather than, "Choose good"? He answers:

The Torah cannot command us to choose good because one can never be sure that the choices he makes are good. Instead, the Torah commands us to follow in the path that is blazed by those whom our Sages call "chaim / living," i.e., the righteous, about whom it is said, "Even in death, they are called living." (In contrast, our Sages say that the wicked are called "dead" even when they are alive.)

This verse contains another lesson as well. Life is made up of one challenge after another, but no one is given a challenge that he cannot overcome. Were this not so, i.e., were a person faced with a challenge that was beyond his ability to manage, his free will would effectively have been taken from him. The Torah assures us that this cannot happen; we will always have the option to \*choose\*. (Shomer Emunim p. 225b)

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"Hashem, your Elokim--He will cross before you; He will destroy these nations from before you . . ." (31:3)

In light of this promise, why did Bnei Yisrael carry weapons in their war against the Seven Canaanite Nation? R' Dov Berish Gottlieb z"l (Sieniawa, Poland; died 1801) explains:

Sometimes there is a state of "hester panim" (literally, "concealing of the face") in which, because of a

sin, man is abandoned to the forces of nature and chance. Therefore, one who goes to battle without weapons is endangering his life and is called a fool. We find similarly that Yaakov Avinu was afraid lest a sin cause him to fall into the hands of Esav (see Rashi to Bereishit 32:10). Accordingly, one must guard himself against accidental injury lest at that moment G-d is hiding from him because of some sin. Even the smallest sin can cause Hashem to hide Himself and, if at the moment that a person is distant from G-d, some misfortune occurs, a person can be in danger. The remedy is that in every time of trouble, a person should repent to remove the hester panim from himself. (Quoted in Shomer Ha'pardes: Yesodei Ha'Torah V'ikarei Ha'dat p.113)

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## Selichot

According to the Ashkenazic custom, the recitation of selichot will begin this motzei Shabbat. (According to the Sephardic custom, it began on Rosh Chodesh Elul.) Poskim / halachic authorities state that one should devote extra time to prayer during Elul even at the expense of one's Torah study (see Sha'arei Teshuvah 581:1).

This requires explanation, for isn't Torah study at the very top in the hierarchy of mitzvot? R' Yaakov Yerucham Wreschner shlita (Bnei Brak, Israel) suggests the following answer:

We learn in Pirkei Avot (1:2), "The world stands on three things: on Torah, on avodah / the Temple service and prayer, and on gemilut chassadim / acts of kindness." R' Eliyahu z"l (the Vilna Gaon; 1720-1797) writes in his Torah commentary Aderet Eliyahu (Parashat Ha'azinu) that each of these three stands in opposition to one of the three cardinal sins: idolatry, adultery and murder. He explains that there are three types of perfection for which a person must strive: 1) perfection of his soul; 2) perfection of his relationship with G-d; and 3) perfection of his relationship with his fellow men. These correspond respectively to: 1) Torah, 2) prayer, and 3) acts of kindness. Likewise, they correspond to: 1) not committing adultery; 2) not worshiping idols; and 3) not committing murder.

R' Wreschner continues: The month of Elul is noted in Jewish history as the time when Bnei Yisrael repented for the sin of the golden calf. This is one reason why we blow the shofar all month-- because our ancestors blew the shofar as a reminder that Moshe would return from Har Sinai and they should not give up hope and make an idol as they had the first time. [Moshe ascended to Har Sinai for the third time on Rosh Chodesh Elul and returned with the second Tablets on Yom Kippur.] Therefore, since prayer stands in contrast to idolatry (and related sins, such as anger), we recite extra prayers during this month, even at the expense of Torah study. (Seder Yaakov: Introduction)

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