

# CLASS 18 - NETZAVIM

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

*"You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your Lord, your leaders, your tribes, your elders, your officers, every Jew.....to bring you into the covenant of Hashem, your Lord, and His curse, that Hashem, your Lord, decrees with you, today." (Devarim 29, 9 -11)*

This is not the first covenant established with the Jewish people. The Rishonim explain that a Bris had been previously instituted with the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Yet, the sin of the Golden Calf was a violation of that pact, hence the need for a new agreement, a Bris that can never be broken.

What is unique about this new covenant, and why can it never be broken?

*"...and similarly, the Bris of Arvos Mo'av, they accepted upon themselves the Torah, with the Alos and curses, and this is the Bris....." (Ramban, VaYikra, 25, 2)*

The covenant of Sefer Devarim includes stern warnings, rebuke of a nation destined to stray. This rebuke, indeed, the impending suffering itself, is an integral element of the covenant, assurance that our relationship with Hashem is eternal.

In our shiur this week we will define the nature of this bond, the binding force of the Torah, Sefer HaBris.

## 1

The Ramban explains that the word 'Bris' is related to 'Brias', for each Bris is the hallmark of a new creation.

Let us explain.

The prophet Malachi admonishes the B'nai Yisrael.

*"And this is the second thing you do: you cover the altar of G-d with tears, weeping, and groaning, for He does not turn towards your offering any longer, or willingly take it from your hands. And you say: Why is this?"*

*"It is because Hashem is witness between you and the wife of your youth, whom you have betrayed....V'Hee Chavertecha V'Eishes Brisecha....And she is your companion, the wife of your covenant." (Malachi 2, 13 -14)*

The connection of man and wife is also a covenant, one that should not be denied. Their bond is an

earthly allusion to the Bris that sustains our existence, the covenant between G-d and His people.

Let us analyze the particular characteristic of a marriage relationship.

For a happy couple, having solidified their relationship and working together to raise their children, the possibility of dissolving their marriage is unthinkable. Each partner views their spouse as an integral element of their own identity, a sudden separation would tear their life asunder.

While a single person looking for a mate chooses from the varied romantic relationships in his life the one person whom he wishes to wed, one already married sees himself in a different domain, removed from the marketplace of happiness seekers.

In a sense, he is a new person, and the permanence of his relationship reflects this new reality. More than an option, the bond between husband and wife is an existential framework serving as basis for the family unit, a universe unto itself.

Similarly, the covenant between G-d and His people exists in a separate dimension. Their relationship is not subject to the whims and caprice of fickle-minded man. The establishment of the Bris leaves no room for escape, no hope of divorce. It defined anew the status of the Jewish people, G-d's partner in creation.

Betrayal of this bond is the ultimate treachery, a sin that cannot be forgiven. Much as a woman who strays has made a mockery of herself, and a wreck of her family, so too, the meanderings of the B'nai Yisrael destroy the foundation of existence.

When the Bris is violated, life itself cannot go on.

## 2

The Ramban implies that the new Bris is the curse itself; the second covenant being the very punishment of those who stray from G-d's command .

The revelation at Har Sinai announced to the world the details of G-d's will, the distinction between good and evil. The Jewish people were crowned as bearers of this message, destined to actualize G-d's presence in the physical world.

But what if this responsibility is forsaken, and the covenant ignored? How is G-d's will to be revealed?

A mere punishment for sin will not suffice, for the existence of evil is then permanently ensconced as a natural feature of a wayward world, denying the G-dly unity that is the only basis of existence.

So long as evil can be entertained as a viable option, unpleasant as it may be, the covenant that creates an unshakable bond is an empty promise. If even the righteous understand the possibility of sin, they share the same faulty world as those who would deny G-d's law. The Bris must transport the Jew to a different dimension, one where the will of G-d reigns alone.

Consider then the destiny of a people gone astray:

"And the last generation will say, your children that arise after you, and the alien that comes from a faraway land, when they see the plagues of that land, and the sicknesses that G-d has imposed upon it. Brimstone, salt, and burning, is the whole land, it cannot be sown, nor produce, no grass will grow upon it..." (Devarim 29, 21-22)

This is not mere punishment. It is life made unbearable. Impossible.

Yes, man may choose evil. He has complete and total freedom to do whatever he desires.

But where does this freedom lead?

Much as he has the possibility of running off a cliff, the pursuit of wickedness is his road to oblivion.

A world without G-d translates into total desolation.

The Tochacha is more than retribution. It is this punishment that serves as revelation of a new dimension, the creation of a world where Klal Yisrael stands alone, witnesses to a reality larger than life.

The Tochacha reveals that a life without Torah cannot exist.

### 3

This covenant is a pact that can never be broken. With every act invoking a Divine response, each deed carries cosmic significance. It follows that man must bear in mind the consequence of his behavior, conscious of the goal and purpose of Heaven's design.

Success then, is measured by the extent to which man is loyal to the original plan. No deed or thought can escape the Bris which is the basis of our existence, each violation bringing the scent of death a little bit closer.

Only one man in the Torah is referred to as successful - "And G-d was with Yosef, and he was a successful man." (Breishis 39, 2)

It is Yosef and his descendants who are known as Shomrei HaBris, keepers of the covenant. It is this covenant that ultimately guides and protects them, insuring the fulfillment of Heaven's promise - "Va'Ani, Zos Brisi Amar Hashem, Ruchi Asher Alecha, U'Dvarai Asher Samti B'Ficha, Lo Yamushu MiPicha, U'MiPi Zaracha, U'MiPi Zera Zaracha, MaiAtah V'Ad Olam"

It is our complete commitment, the constancy and consistency of true faith, that guarantees eternity. Connecting the past to our future, our children become part of a better tomorrow, a world that stands together before G-d.

"Atem Nitzavim HaYom, Kulchem, Lifnei Hashem Elokeichem"

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