

# STANDING STILL AND MOVING UP

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

## Friday Night:

### Parashas Nitzavim: Standing Still, and Moving Up

All of you stand here today before G-d, your G-d -- with leaders of your tribes, your elders, your law enforcers, all the men of Israel, your children, your wives, and the proselyte that is part of your camp, from the hewer of wood to the drawer of water -- about to enter into the covenant with G-d, your G-d, and into His oath, which G-d, your G-d makes with you today. (Devarim 29:9-11)

I don't know if the rabbis had this in mind when they established the yearly-Torah cycle, but, nothing happens by accident. The fact that we conclude a cycle of public Torah readings at the same time Moshe Rabbeinu's life comes, at the same time that another year of life comes to an end, for me, seems to add drama to drama.

Parashas Ki Savo always represents a watershed of sorts. With the except of its opening aliyos, it is a long and frightening parshah. It is the proverbial "fire and brimstone" -- the threat for those whom reason does not make a lasting impact, for those who cannot generate enough ongoing enthusiasm to keep the Torah and mitzvos just for the sake of keeping them.

It is the darndest thing. Every parent is baffled by the way children just can't seem to understand that their parents want the best for them. Healthy, loving parents derive pleasure and satisfaction from pleasing their children, from making them smile. It is no different with G-d, for Whom, had it not been for the fact that He made us as we are, we would be equally baffling.

It is insane to sin. This is what the Talmud teaches, that no person does a sin unless a spirit of insanity enters him (Sotah 3a). Would you cut your right arm for no good reason? Would you pull your hair out for the fun of it? Would you ram your fist into a solid metal door just to hear what knuckles sound like when they crack in unison?

Assuming you said no, then, why would you sin? It's insane, right? Right -- but we do it just the same. It's the darndest thing.

You know, as I write this essay, I sit at my dining room table, which has a wonderful view of our garden, from which I get much pleasure. The grass is green, and the trees are full. There is even a little gazebo under which to sit on lawn chairs at the lawn table, and enjoy the awesome view. For

me, it is a quiet, but dramatic little piece of the Garden of Eden.

All the children are at school, and no main thoroughfares pass by my house. It is VERY peaceful. Beyond my little courtyard and garden are some of the beautiful Judean Hills, which have a mystical way of acting like a spiritual corridor to the days of our Fathers. I feel history all around me; I feel like a tiny part of something very big, Biblically big.

It is very inspirational. It is also an illusion. Beyond my garden, and, beyond my own special portion of the Judean Hills, lies about 150,000,000 people who want my hills, want my garden, and maybe even me, not in friendship either. Knowing this chases every last sensation of peace and tranquility out of every pore of my body.

Beyond my little idyllic community lies a country that has had enough with Orthodox Jews, at whom it is aiming its secular arrow. There is hatred in them thar hills, and, if not defused soon, it is bound to blow up in all directions, some obvious, some completely unexpected.

And, if that is not enough, then there are the physically unwell. So much suffering, so much sickness, anguish, and mourning. Marriages are falling apart, and, some that are happening are against the Torah. Halachah is being misconstrued all over the place, by those who use it and by those who abuse it. It is a very confusing world, very confusing.

Then there is the youth of today. Drugs are rampant, even in circles that should not even know they exist! But they know about them, and they use them, and they are affected by them, and it is tearing families apart, and preventing some from being built. We have only scratched the surface of this problem, which splinters into many directions.

But, that is not the world of my eyes, no, not at this moment. The world of my eyes includes a wonderfully, completely blue sky, filled with life-giving sunlight. The birds have congregated on my front lawn to peacefully eat the remains of left-over Shabbos Challah. There isn't even a slight breeze moving a single leaf.

The world of my mind is different. In spite of the message my eyes keep sending it, my mind is working on a different track. Sometimes it becomes a battle between the world of my eyes and the world of my mind, because, after all, visual reality carries a lot of weight in our minds and hearts.

Someone, not too long ago, sent me this article of interest, which I found fascinating. Titled, "Emotions Vs. Reason" (Sandi Kohn, Shelton, "Working Mother," February 2000), it is a small article with a big message:

Ever wonder why your daughter goes ballistic over an unwashed pair of blue jeans? Researchers at McLean Hospital Brain Imaging Center at Harvard Medical School found that adolescents process emotions much more intensely than adults do -- and even use their brains differently to handle what they are told. Scientists examined how 16 kids between the ages of nine and 17 handled mental tasks involving emotion and language. Then they compared these results to those of 24 adults.

While adults showed activity in the frontal lobe of the brain -- long believed to be the center of reasoning -- adolescents processed information through an older part of the brain that handles impulses and instinct. The finding confirms what parents have long suspected: Adolescents don't think like adults. "Adolescents are more prone to react with gut instinct when they process emotions," says Deborah Yurgelun-Todd, MD., director of neuropsychology and cognitive neuro-imaging at the Brain Imaging Center. "But, as they mature into early adulthood, they are more able to temper their gut reactions with reasoned responses." The implications for parents are huge, say researchers. Instead of seeing adolescents as hot-tempered or spacey, we need to realize they may not be developmentally able to react calmly or to remember instructions. "It's not that our kids don't hear us," says Dr. Yurgelen-Todd. "It's that their brains aren't yet developed enough to encode what we're saying and hold on to it."

The implications of this research are huge, not just for parents, but, for all of mankind. For, the world of our eyes is based, primarily, upon instinct; the world of our minds is not. The world of the true believer is within reason; that of the disbeliever, is emotional. Just watch what happens to a disbeliever when his lack of faith is questioned, and, his ignorance is called into question. He goes ballistic.

There is a famous story of the Brisker Rav, who was once confronted by a Jew on the "way out."

"I have questions," the man told the Brisker Rav, wanting to sound as if his confusion and rejection of G-d and Torah was intellectually justified. However, he chose the wrong rabbi to delude; the Brisker Rav sized the man up and answered,

"No, you don't. You have answers " the Rav quipped accusingly. "If you had questions," he continued, "I could answer them for you. But, you have already made up your mind, and now you are looking for excuses to rationalize your position."

It's a very emotional and instinctual world out there. Reason, today, does not prevail. But we have a bris -- a covenant with G-d. It is an extension of the bris, THE Bris made between the Master of the Universe and our great ancestor, Avraham Avinu, and spoken about in this week's parshah. It is a covenant to rise above instinct, like Avraham Avinu did, and to access the reason-section of our minds. It is a bris to rise above emotion, and to work out the difficulties in life that impede the path of moral behavior.

And, it comes around each year at this time, just in advance of Rosh Hashanah, when we stand before G-d once again, on that awesome Day of Judgment. It is at this time of year that we are asked to size up where and when our emotions overcame our sense of reason, and made us commit the insane. We do this in order to reverse the trend and put ourselves back on track, the track of the mind, the track of reason. And, perhaps, eventually, all of mankind as well.

## Shabbos Day:

Observe: I have set before you today, life and good, death and evil. I command you today to love G-d, your G-d, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His ordinances, and His judgments, so you may live and thrive, and so G-d, your G-d can bless you in the land you will possess. (Devarim 30:15-16)

Of the many tracks on which mankind operates, perhaps the most predominant is the idea of one "having his cake and eating it too," or, phrased differently, "having the best of both worlds." But, alas, we all know that "you can't dance at two weddings at once," and, at some point, "you have to pay the piper."

The yetzer hara doesn't care for such negativity. It is his job to make us believe that there IS a way to beat the system, and he laughs hardest when he watches new people make old mistakes. He laughs because he knows that he will be but an ancient memory when each individual stands before G-d on the ultimate Day of Judgment and tries to justify their foolish, misguided behavior in Olam HaZeh -- This World.

There is no reward in This World for performing mitzvos. (Kiddushin 39b)

So, where is there reward for walking in the ways of the A'lmighty?

"In order that it should go good for you." (Devarim 5:16): In the world that is completely good; "In order to lengthen your days": In the world that is completely long (i.e., eternal). (Kiddushin 39b)

In other words, though one can and will receive "blessing" in This World for performing a mitzvah, he will not receive reward. The point of the blessing is to facilitate the future performance of more mitzvos, not to pay the mitzvah-doer off in This World (unless such a person has done so little good in This World that it doesn't pay for G-d to hold off and wait until the Next World to compensate him).

One of the reasons why we are not "paid" in This World for our mitzvos is, because, in most cases, the reward is too fantastic for This World to handle. It is like pouring 2,000 gallons of water into a crystal glass all at once; the container cannot contain the contents. Therefore, G-d stores away our eternal reward in a place into which we will "move" at the right time, after we have been judged for our life in This World.

How fantastic? The Talmud states:

All the prophets foretold only regarding the Days of Moshiach. However, regarding the World-to-Come, "No eye has seen, G-d, except for Yours" (Yeshayahu 64:3). (Brochos 34b)

However, true as all this may be.

"In any case, one can merit, while still in This World, what is taught, 'your world you will see in your lifetime' (Brochos 17a), and, what is written, 'for the good man, they let him taste from the fruits of his deeds' (Kiddushin 41a), just as The Holy One, Blessed is He, gave the Forefathers a taste of the World-to-Come in This World (Bava Basra 17a). In Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu, it says, 'It happens for some tzaddikim that they merit a life with no suffering and without a yetzer hara in This World, like what The Holy One, Blessed is He, will give to tzaddikim in the Time-to-Come.'" (Pri Tzaddik, Massei, 1)

The Talmud says it even more clearly:

The Holy One, Blessed is He, gave a taste in This World of the World-to-Come to three, and they were: Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. With respect to Avraham, it says, "In everything" (Bereishis 24:1); with respect to Yitzchak, it says, "From everything" (Bereishis 27:33); with respect to Ya'akov, it says, "All" (Bereishis 33:11). Over three people, the yetzer hara had no control, and they were: Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. And, some say Dovid as well. (Bava Basra 17a)

While we're at it, the Talmud continues and says:

The Angel of Death had no power over six people: Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam. Seven people were unaffected by worms (in the grave), and they were: Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, Moshe, Aharon, Miriam, and, Binyomin son of Ya'akov. And, some say even Dovid as well.

Are there people today still alive who are tasting a little sample of their eternal pleasure in the World-to-Come? Probably yes. In fact, while so many billions of people run around trying to have their cake and eat it too, only to end up with neither, there are those who will get their true "cake" in the World to Come, and enjoy it then. And, there are some who are having the best of both worlds, because, they have earned it the real, and, G-d has given it to them.

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## **SEUDAH SHLISHI:**

### **Parashas Vayailech: Going, Going, But Never Quite Gone**

And Moses went and told all of these statements to all of Israel. He told them, "I am a 120 years old today. I can no longer come and go. G-d has told me that I will not cross over the Jordan" (Devarim 31:1-2)

In this lifetime, perhaps. However, according to the Arizal, in Sefer HaGilgulim, the archetypal book on the topic, undisputed by Kabbalists throughout history, Moshe was due to return in full force:

"Moshe reincarnates into every generation to free the neshamos from the unholy parts. When he finishes, then Moshiach will come, and 'death will be swallowed forever' (Yeshayahu 25:8) Š For, in

the future Moshe himself will return in a gilgul in the last generation. As well, the entire generation of the desert will also reincarnate with the Erev Rav. There is not a single generation that Moshe Rabbeinu is not within, which is the underlying meaning of the verses, 'the sun rise and the sun sets' (Koheles 1:5), and, 'a generation goes and a generation comes' (ibid. 4), in order to rectify that generation, and, the Generation of Desert itself. And, this is what is written (in this week's parshah as well):

G-d told Moshe, 'After you lie with your fathers, this people will act immorally and pursue the gods of the strangers of the land, to which they are going there (shin-mem-heh)' (Devarim 31:16)

-- which has the letters of 'Moshe,' because, Moshe will reincarnate with each generation" (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, p. 54)

Many people do take note of how the patterns repeat themselves in subsequent generations, but, not necessary of how the characters themselves come back, over and over again. There are the Torah leaders in every generation who remain steadfast in their devotion to Torah, and, their faithful followers. Then, there are those from the "other side," the rejecters of Torah, who, not only challenge Torah authority, but, disgrace it with imprudent confidence. And, of course, there are their followers as well.

Just like it was in the desert. There was Moshe and his Bais Din, and those who never left their camp. Then, there were those who questioned Moshe's authority and his decisions, and, often made a mockery of them. And, of course, we can't forget the Erev Rav, the portion of the Jewish people (according to the Arizal), whose whole purpose in life, it seemed, was to instigate against Torah and its authority.

Just like it was in that generation, or this generation, and so on.

A never ending pattern of Jewish behavior? On one level, yes, but, on a much deeper level, it is the same show being acted out by the same souls in each generation, who will keep acting it out until they get it right! This is why, says the Midrash Ne'elam (Zohar, Parashas Toldos), the combined period of Kibbutz Golios (Ingathering of the Exiles) and Yemos HaMoshiach, will last a total of FORTY years -- corresponding to the forty years the Jewish people wandered in the desert for rejecting Eretz Yisroel.

And, who will lead the Jewish people once and for all back to the Promised Land and usher in the Final Redemption? The same soul that almost did it the first time, but, who was prevented from doing so due to the inability of his generation to adequately prepare themselves: Moshe Rabbeinu.

Today, we have the Bais Din, and, we have their followers. Seemingly, we have the Erev Rav, their instigations, and, their followers. America has been called a "desert," and, ALL of us might contain the souls of the Dor HaDayah, the Generation of the Desert. All the pieces are in place from the "grand finale."

The only piece of the puzzle missing is the gilgul of Moshe Rabbeinu -- the soul that will drive the body of Moshiach to do his holy work. Or is it? Let's not forget that it wasn't until Moshe Rabbeinu reached the age of eighty year that he was told he was destined to redeem the Jewish people from Egypt. Maybe all that is REALLY missing is the Divine tap on the shoulder.

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## **MELAVE MALKAH:**

A Song of Ascents, by Dovid. I rejoiced when they said to me, 'Let us go the House of G-d.' (Tehillim 122:1)

Let us return back to the "Shabbos Tehillim," the fifteen consecutive Shir HaMa'alos we began speaking about a few weeks back.

The opening words sound nice, Jews enthusiastic to go up to G-d's Temple for a supernatural encounter with the Master of the Universe. There's only one problem: the Temple wasn't built yet. Hence, it turns out that such nice words about G-d's Temple were a direct insult for Dovid HaMelech (Yerushalmi, Brochos 2:1). But, did he take it that way? Says the Talmud:

Dovid said to The Holy One, Blessed is He, "Master of the Universe! I overheard people asking, 'When will the old man (Dovid) die, so that his son, Shlomo, can build the Temple and let us go up on the festivals to the House of G-d?' When I heard this, I rejoiced"

In spite of the fact that Dovid's life held up the construction of the Temple, and this caused people to yearn for his death, still, Dovid understood their longing, and took joy from it. G-d felt differently, though, and said:

"Far better a day in your courtyard than a thousand" (Tehillim 84:11): Dovid, a single day of your Torah study in My Presence far surpasses the thousand Burnt-Offerings which Shlomo is destined to sacrifice before Me on the Temple altar." (Makkos 10a)

Self-sacrifice is the issue in the Torah world, and Dovid's sacrifice of himself for the service of G-d is clear once again, this time by the way he looked right through personal insult and saw devotion to G-d's service.

Stationary were our feet, within your gates, O Jerusalem. The built up Jerusalem is like a city that is united together. For, there the tribes ascended -- the Shivtei-Kah, who are testimony for Israel -- to give thanks to the Name of G-d. (2-4)

So many people were "oleh-l'regel" (made the festival pilgrimage) that it became impossible to move about. But, that brought little frustration; the purpose of their being there, to stand in the Presence of G-d, instead brought a sense of national "achdus" (unity), and feelings of Jewish pride and love for one another. This itself becomes testimony to G-d's own unity, and the centrality of His

Torah in creation.

This is part of Jerusalem's power and mystery: it can unify the Jewish people when we seek the Presence of G-d, or, tear us apart when we run from It. Ultimately, though, because it is aligned with the "Jerusalem Above" -- the Heavenly Jerusalem -- it will rid the world of impure elements, and unite what remains behind in purity.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; those who love you will be tranquil Š (6)

These words have adorned many a street sign in Jerusalem over the last few decades, but, never have they had more meaning in recent history than today. It is not coincidence that history is coming down to the political, and, hence, spiritual fate of the Holy City -- the Center of the Universe. This is a VERY strong message from Heaven about events to come, for, according to the Zohar, "Eisav and Yishmael will team up against the Jewish people and go up to Jerusalem."

Might we be witnessing this prophetic event today. Must we not pray fervently for the peace of Jerusalem?

May there be peace within your wall, serenity within your palaces. For the sake of my brothers and companions, I shall speak of peace in your midst. For the sake of the House of G-d, our G-d, I will request your good. (7-9)

Here was a man who loved Jerusalem, and appreciated its centrality within world history, and, particularly, Jewish history. This Rosh Hashanah pray for the peace of the Holy City of G-d, and, especially for the return of the third and final Temple. Especially if you live outside of Israel, think of your brothers in Eretz Yisroel, and your "companions" there, and pray on their behalf, which is really on behalf of all of us, the tribes of G-d.

L'Shannah Tova: Sikasayvu v'saychasaymu l'alter, l'chaim tovim u'l'shalom. Have a Great Shabbos  
Pinchas Winston

L'Shannah Tovah ...

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