

RAV CHAIM SAW IN THE PASUK WHAT WE SEE WITH OUR EYES

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand On Parshas Netzavim and Vayeilech

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 517, What Exactly Is The Mitzva of Shofar. Good Shabbos!

Rav Chaim Saw In The Pasuk What We See With Our Eyes

There is a pasuk [verse] in Parshas Netzavim that warns us of a destruction in the Land of Israel, one that will cause amazement among the people who will witness its aftermath: "The later generation will say your children who will arise after you, and the foreigner who will come from a distant land, - when they will see the plagues of that land and its illnesses with which Hashem afflicted it..." [Devorim 29:21]

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik noted a connection in this verse that contains a very bitter prediction about the "last generation." The pasuk mentions two categories of people who will be amazed by the destruction: (1) the foreigner who comes from a distant land and (2) your children who will arise after you. The children are connected to the foreigners, the nations of the world). Why does the verse make this connection?

Rav Chaim stated that this foretells a frightening time in the "last generation," when the children of Israel will know as much about Judaism and Jewish history as foreigners from distant lands. Rav Chaim Soloveitchik died in 1918 (at age 65). Even though he witnessed the Haskalah ("Enlightenment") and the beginning of the disintegration of European Jewry in his lifetime, he rarely saw people who did not know the shape of the letter Aleph or who never heard of Moshe Rabbeinu.

Even the non-Religious people of his time were very knowledgeable regarding the basics of

Judaism. Some of the expressions of the early "Yiddish poets" (who saw Judaism as a culture rather than a religion) are so saturated with religious expression and symbolism that we might mistakenly think that a Rosh Yeshiva [Dean of a Rabbinical Seminary] wrote them. Their "secular conversation" was so permeated with Jewish thought and values that even without them being religious people, it is evident that they at least knew what they were leaving.

Rav Chaim could hardly contemplate a generation that would not know "Shema Yisrael," would not know of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and would not recognize the letters of the Aleph-Bais. Rav Chaim never personally witnessed a Jew who knew as little about Judaism as the "foreigner from a distant land." But he did see that the above quoted verse alludes to this phenomenon.

Unfortunately, we are all too familiar with the realization of this verse.

It Is Easy To Re-Unite With A Long Lost Parent

Parshas Netzavim is always read the last Shabbos before Rosh HaShannah. There is a famous set of pasukim in this parsha: "For this commandment that I command you today is not hidden from you and is not distant. It is not in the heavens for you to say 'Who can ascend to the heavens for us and take it for us and let us hear it, so that we can perform it?' Nor is it across the sea for you to say, 'Who can cross to the other side of the sea for us and take it for us, and let us hear it, so that we can perform it?' Rather, the matter is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart to achieve it. [Devorim 30:11-14]

The Ramban states that the mitzvah referred to in this section ('This commandment') is the mitzvah of Teshuvah [Repentance].

The Netziv [Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin 1817-1893] says that the mitzvah refers specifically to "Repentance out of love" (Teshuvah m'ahavah). However, the Netziv asks how the Torah could be describing the Mitzvah of Teshuvah as an "easy" mitzvah. Achieving "Repentance out of love" would appear to be one of man's most difficult spiritual tasks. How can the Torah suggest that a person may accomplish this with ease?

To buttress his question, the Netziv says that the way one comes to love a person is to get to know them. This is implicit in the expression "to know him is to love him." When a person loves another person, it is because the first person knows what the second person is all about. People appreciate and understand each other to the point that they develop a strong attachment.

Understanding the Almighty is beyond our ability. So how do we come to love Him? How can we

come back to him out of "love?" What does it mean, "it is very easy" to achieve this kind of return to Him?

The Netziv answers by referring to the mystical idea that Israel and the Holy One, Blessed Be He, are one. A father can love a son even if he does not know him and even if he never sees him. The first time that they meet, they will be immediately drawn to one another, after even the slightest introduction. The natural connection between parent and child bridges any gap that may exist.

There was a 49-year-old adopted woman in California, whose adoptive parents told her that she originally came from Israel. The woman had always noticed she looked different than her parents. It was obvious that they were not her natural parents. She began to investigate her background. At about the same time, an Israeli journalist was doing an investigative article on a scandal involving Moroccan Jews who first arrived in Israel in the early 1950s. Many Moroccan mothers, who could not speak the language well and did not have any connections in the country, were told that their children died during childbirth. In actuality, these children were stolen and sold for adoption, both in Israel and overseas.

The woman from California traveled to Israel and met with the investigative reporter. They uncovered certain documents, and went back to the hospital where she was born. To make a very long story short, DNA testing enabled the woman to find her Moroccan mother -- who had been told that her child had died shortly after delivery, 49 years earlier.

These were two women who came from completely different cultures. They had nothing to do with each other for nearly five decades, for almost the entire lifetime of the daughter. When they met for the first time, they fell into each other's arms and began kissing each other and crying uncontrollably.

The mother did not know the daughter, and the daughter did not know the mother. They did not know each other's language and could not even communicate except through their tears and their kisses and their hugs. Why did they react this way? They reacted this way because this was a mother and her daughter.

Listen again to the words of the Netziv: A father and son - even if they never met one another - nevertheless, when they do meet, are drawn to one another after the slightest introduction, because nature helps out.

The Netziv then adds that what we observe among a flesh and blood parent and child is also true of the reunion (Teshuvah) between our Father in Heaven and His wayward children. The matter is not distant from us. Despite the fact that I am human and He is Eternal. Despite the fact that I haven't had

anything to do with Him for decades, He is our Father and we are His children. Therefore it is "within the power of your mouth and the power of your heart to achieve it."

The matter is readily accomplished. The bond between parent and child is easily repaired and can never be permanently broken.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. The halachic topics dealt with in the portion of Nitzavim - Vayelech in the Commuter Chavrusah Series are the following:

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