

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by **Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman** of the **New West End United Synagogue** in conjunction with **Shapell's/Darché Noam***

PARSHAT NITZAVIM

DVAR TORAH: DESCENDING FROM HEAVEN

“For this commandment that I command you this day,” says the Torah, “is not beyond you ... is not far away from you ... is not in Heaven ... is not beyond the sea ...” (Devarim 30:11). What is “this commandment”?

A number of commentators say that it refers to teshuvah (repentance). According to this approach, this section is a natural continuation of the previous paragraph that ended, “When you return to Hashem your G-d with all of your heart and soul.”

But, according to this, what does the Torah mean when it says that repentance is “not in Heaven”?

The Kli Yakar (Harav Shlomo Efraim of Luntschitz, 1550-1619 זצ"ל) explains: Sin has two ill effects. One is that sin affects the person, distancing him from G-dliness. But sin also has an effect on the Divine Presence in the world, causing It to leave the earth and rise up to the Heavens. A man might work at moving in the direction of the Divine, but will the Divine Presence return to the person?

The penitent is worried. Even though he mends his ways, he is unsure of the status of his relationship with G-d. “Maybe,” he says, “even though I desire to return to G-d, who says that He desires to return to me? I am the one who caused the distancing in the first place. Who says I can bring back the Divine Presence to earth?”

G-d responds to the penitent’s worry and says, “You need not rise up to the Heavens to do teshuvah. When you repent and start to move in the direction of G-dliness, I will descend from the Heavens towards you.”

The Kli Yakar’s idea might be behind the following Midrash (Pesikta Rabbati 44), that opens with “שובה ישראל – עד ה' אלקיך – Return, Israel, until Hashem your G-d,” (Hoshea 14:2). How can man ever succeed in returning “until Hashem”? The Midrash likens this to a son who has distanced himself a hundred days away from his father. The son’s friends urge him to return to his father, but he tells them, “I cannot.” His father then sends him a message: “Go as far as you are able to, and I will travel the rest of the distance to meet you.

Thus Hashem said to the People of Israel, “שובו אלי ואשובה אליכם אמר ה' צבאות – Return to Me and I will return to you, said Hashem of hosts” (Malachi 3:7). One hears the Kli Yakar’s explanation between the lines of this Midrash. You bring yourself closer to Me, says Hashem, and I will come down from Heaven to meet you.

Humans are limited. Our ability to do teshuvah is limited; and we need special Divine assistance to mend that which we harmed through sin – especially the distance we put between ourselves and Hashem. We must move as far as we can toward Him, but we need Him to meet us. Sin distances the Divine Presence from the world; and it is teshuvah itself that returns it. Because we are not able to reach the Heavens, the Divine Presence must come back down to this world to meet us. This is our daily prayer: “והזירנו בתשובה – שלימה לפניך – Hashem, help us return to You in complete repentance – before You.”

SOURCE GUIDE: WHERE IS THE TORAH?

“Where is the Torah?” The Torah itself answers in this week’s Parshah: It is not up in Heaven, nor beyond the sea; rather, it is extremely close. The Midrash helps us understand what the Torah means by drawing on two other verses: one that the Torah is “hidden from all living beings” and another that Hashem “told His words to Yaakov.” The Sfat Emet’s comment on that Midrash – where he provides a new way of formulating the Torah’s answer to “Where is the Torah?” – is the focus of this source guide.

A. Where Is the Torah?

The Torah responds to the contention that “the commandment” is too distant and unaccessible:

<p>1. Devarim 30:11-14 (11) For this commandment that I command you today is not concealed from you, nor is it distant. (12) It is not in Heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to Heaven and have us hear it and we will do it?” (13) It is also not on the other side of the sea, that you should say, “Who will pass over to the other side of the sea for us and take it for, and have us hear it and we will do it?” (14) For it is extremely close to you, in your mouth and heart, to do it.</p>	<p>דברים ל:יא-יד (יא) כִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֶנְכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם לֹא נִפְלְאת הוּא מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא רְחֹקָה הוּא. (יב) לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא לֵאמֹר מִי יַעֲלֶה לָנוּ הַשְּׁמַיִמָה וַיִּקְחֶהָ לָנוּ וַיִּשְׁמְעֵנוּ אֹתָהּ וַיַּנְעִשְׂנָהּ. (יג) וְלֹא מֵעֵבֶר לַיָּם הוּא לֵאמֹר מִי יַעֲבֹר לָנוּ אֶל עֵבֶר הַיָּם וַיִּקְחֶהָ לָנוּ וַיִּשְׁמְעֵנוּ אֹתָהּ וַיַּנְעִשְׂנָהּ. (יד) כִּי קְרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדְּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ.</p>
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The following Midrash assumes that “the commandment” refers either to the general command to live by the Torah or to the specific mitzvah of learning Torah. It seems to answer the question “Where is the Torah” with “She is hidden in the King’s palace.” It opens with a parable:

<p>2. Devarim Rabbah 8:7 “It is close to you” – Rav Shmuel son of Rav Nachman said: What is this likened to? It is like the daughter of a king that no one knew. The king had one beloved friend who would always visit the king, and the king’s daughter would stand before him. Said the king to him, “See how much I love you. For no one knows my daughter, yet she stands before you.”</p>	<p>דברים רבה ח:ז ד"א "כי קרוב אליך" – א"ר שמואל בר רב נחמן: למה הדבר דומה? לבת מלך שלא היה אדם מכירה, והיה למלך אהוב אחד והיה נכנס למלך בכל שעה והיתה בתו של מלך עומדת לפניו. אמר לו המלך, "ראה היאך אני מחבב אותך, שאין בריה מכיר את בתי ועומדת לפניך."</p>
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The Midrash explains the parable:

<p>3. Devarim Rabbah 8:7 Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel, “See how beloved you are to Me. For there is no one in My palace who knows the Torah, and I gave it to you.” For it says, “It is concealed from all living beings” (Iyov 28:21). But as for you – “It is not concealed from you ... Rather, it is extremely close to you.” The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: “My sons, if the words of Torah will be close to you I will also call you close ones.” For thus it is written, “To the Children of Israel His close nation – praise G-d” (Tehillim 148:14).</p>	<p>דברים רבה ח:ז כך אמר הקב"ה לישראל, "ראו מה אתם חביבים עלי שאין בריה בפלטין שלי מכיר את התורה, ולכם נתתיה." שנאמר, "ונעלמה מעיני כל חי" (איוב כח:כא). אבל אתם – "לא נפלאת היא ממך ... אלא קרוב אליך הדבר מאד." אמר להן הקב"ה: "בני אם יהיו דברי תורה קרובים לכם אף אני קורא אתכם קרובים." "שכן כתיב, "לבני ישראל עם קרובו הללויה" (תהלים קמח:יד).</p>
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The parable seems to make it more difficult to understand verse 12 above. Since the Torah is likened to the King’s daughter in His palace, isn’t it really in Heaven? Isn’t the King’s beloved friend Israel only able to see the daughter-Torah only because he is always around the King in His palace?

On the other hand, the parable makes it easier to understand the end of the verse, “It is extremely close to you ...”. Because the King’s friend is so close to the King, he is also close to the King’s daughter. She is concealed from all others – “ונעלמה מעיני כל חי” – but they are not in the palace like the friend is.

B. The Torah is Everywhere

The following passage, that appears in the Sfat Emet on our Parshah (by Harav Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, זצ”ל, the Gerrer Rebbe, 1847-1905), adds an additional piece to the puzzle:

<p>4. Sfat Emet – Parshat Nitzavim – 5654 On the verse, “For this commandment ...” and on the Midrash “It is concealed from the eyes of all living beings ...” – For in truth the Torah is in every place and every time, for all was created through the Torah. But it is only revealed to the Children of Israel, as it says, “He tells His words to Yaakov.” This is similar to what the Midrash says, “All have the status of blind people until the Holy One, blessed be He, opens their eyes” (Bereishit Rabbah 53:14).</p>	<p>שפת אמת – פרשת נצבים - שנת תרנ"ד בפסוק "כי המצוה הזאת ... ובמד' ונעלמה מעיני כל חי כו'." כי באמת התורה היא בכל מקום וכל זמן, כי הכל נברא בתורה. אך אינו מתגלה רק לבנ"י כמ"ש "מגיד דבריו ליעקב." וכמ"ש במד': הכל בחזקת סומין עד שהקב"ה מאיר עיניהם (בראשית רבה נג:יד).</p>
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Because Hashem “looked into the Torah and created the world” (Bereishit Rabbah 1:1), the Torah is found everywhere in the world. That is the answer to “Where is the Torah?”

Why, then, does the Torah seem inaccessible? Why is the questioner the Chumash relates to convinced that the Torah is “up in the Heavens” or “beyond the sea”? It is only because the Torah is hidden from view, as the verse in Iyov says. We are blind to the Torah that is staring us in the face.

We are really in the King’s palace with the King’s daughter wherever we are. But because Hashem “told His words to Yaakov,” Israel knows they are in the King’s palace. The Torah is really close to us wherever we are, but invisible unless Hashem gives us the ability to see it.

This passage in the Sfat Emet is reminiscent of the following comment that appears in the Ruach Chaim commentary on Pirkei Avot (written by Harav Chaim Volozhin, זצ”ל, 1749-1821):

<p>5. Ruach Chaim on Avot 6:1 [To one who learns Torah לשמה (for its own sake)] they reveal the secrets of the Torah” – For in truth all of the secrets and mysteries of the Torah are explicit and really revealed; but our eyes are covered up from being able to see them. And even in the revealed portions of Torah, sometimes a person toils over a little thing that is easy. Then, after he understands it, he stands amazed and wonders about himself. Why did he go to such trouble over something that is so simple? However, this is because a person is sometimes smitten with blindness. But if a person learns for its own sake, Hashem will uncover his eyes and remove from him the screen of blindness. This is what David meant when he said, “Open up my eyes and I will see wonderful things from Your Torah” (Tehillim 119:18). This is what we pray (in the blessing preceding Kriat Shema), “Illuminate our eyes in Your Torah.” This is what is meant by, “They reveal to him the secrets of the Torah.”</p>	<p>רוח חיים על אבות ו:א "ומגלין לו רזי תורה" – כי באמת כל הרזין וסודות התורה המה מפורשין ונגלין ממש, אבל טח מראות עינינו. וגם בנגלות התורה לפעמים אדם יגע על דבר קטן וקל מה שלאחר שהוא מבין הוא עומד ומשתאה ומתמה על עצמו על מה זה טרח הרבה בזה והלא דבר פשוט הוא. אך האדם לפעמים מוכה בסנורים. ואם יעסוק בה לשמה יגל ה' עיניו ויסיר ממנו מסך העורון. וכמ"ש דוד "גל עיני ואביטה נפלאות מתורתך" (תהילים קיט:יח), וכמ"ש "והאר עינינו בתורתך." וזה שאמר "ומגלין לו רזי תורה."</p>
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We pray that Hashem should open our eyes and enable us to see the wonders of His Torah.

YOM TERUAH BY RABBI YISROEL CHOLEVA

As we approach Rosh Hashanah we must first clarify what is the central purpose of this special day in the year. There are many names for Rosh Hashanah: Yom Hazikaron (The Day of Remembrance), Yom Hadin (The Day of Judgment), Rosh Hashanah (The Beginning of the Year). However, the Torah only refers to this holiday with one term: Yom Teruah, the Day of Blowing the Shofar. Let us explore the deeper meaning behind the name Yom Teruah, and ask why the Torah chooses this name when it refers to Rosh Hashanah.

In his recent sefer, Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Harav Itamar Schwartz writes that the world was created with a central point on which the entire world must focus. What is that central point? The author offers two possibilities. First, it is possible that Man is the central point of the world, viewing his life as "I eat," "I pray," "I learn." The second possibility, of course, is that Hashem is that central point. Most certainly, the second possibility is the correct one. Hashem is the center point of the world and it is to Him that we must direct all of our efforts.

Let us turn to Rosh Hashanah. What is the central purpose of the day? There are two possibilities. One is that it is Yom Hadin, the Day of Judgment when Hashem will decide whether or not in the previous year we used our time appropriately, and He will determine what will be in store for us in the upcoming year. The second central point of Rosh Hashanah is the appointing of Hashem as our King. How do these two possibilities manifest themselves?

A person approaches Rosh Hashanah full of fear and trepidation. Will I get a good judgement this year? Did I do too many sins last year? What can I do to prevent a bad judgement? At first glance this person seems to have the right attitude entering the holiday. However, though he prepared for Yom Hadin and Yom Hazikaron, this person has not even begun to address Yom Teruah. His entire focus is on himself: I, I, I. Yom Teruah requires us to focus on Hashem. The day of coronation is not about the subjects, but about the King. Recognizing the greatness of Hashem, how He creates the entire universe, directs all of history, and is personally involved in the lives of every single Jew is how we can prepare for Yom Teruah.

What does this have to do with the Teruah, the sound of the shofar? The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 16a) states: You shall say before Me on Rosh Hashanah [verses of] Malchios, Zichronos, and Shofaros. Say Malchios in order that you will appoint Me as King over you ... And how? With the shofar." The shofar is the method by which we declare that Hashem is our King. That is the same shofar that blows throughout Elul, beckoning us to do teshuvah; for what is teshuvah but a return to Hashem, our King. The shofar is therefore the central point of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Teruah.

As we hear the shofar now for the last few days before Rosh Hashanah, let us all redirect our efforts towards Hashem, our Father, our King. While not forgetting that it is a Day of Judgment, we must also remember that on Rosh Hashanah our primary focus must be on Hashem and His sovereignty. Let us reach the point that we speak about in the Rosh Hashanah prayers: "Rule over the entire world in Your Glory ... and everything which has a soul will declare Hashem the G-d of Israel is King, and his Domain is over everything".

שבת שלום ומבורך

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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