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# Shabbat Nitzavim/Vayelech

## September 4, 2010

### 25 Ellul 5770

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Parasha

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Newsletter n° 389

## News

### IMMERSION IN ISRAEL

The last Shabbat of August was a new Shabbat of Joy for the congregation of Haifa and Kiryat Yam. Two more people have given their lives to G-d and have accepted tevilah in the Jordan River. The Jordan River is the perfect mikveh, that's why we always perform the immersion service in the Jordan River.



### MIRACLE AT THE JORDAN RIVER

Right after my sermon a member of the congregation called Oleg, the pastor, and said to him that there is something he does not understand. This man lost his capacities of hearing with his left ear since many years, and during the sermon, something strange happened, he started to hear from his dead ear a small signal and few minutes after he felt that his ear was hearing normally, and when the sermon was finished there was no doubt he was able to listen to from both his ears, the right and the left one. The pastor called me and told me the story, I was amazed and I immediately said, let's praise the Lord for this miracle and we prayed. After the coming back of the two people who were baptized, this man gave his testimony and everyone was happy to praise the L-rd for what He has done for his child, in the very same spot where Yeshua

### SEPTEMBER IN THE JEWISH CALENDAR

September is the month of the autumn biblical feasts. G-d gave to the Jewish people Rosh Hashana, which was originally the starting point of the Judgment which ends on Yom Kippur, but later, after the people of Israel were deported to Babylon Rosh Hashana became the Jewish New Year. You have noticed that on the top of this newsletter we give the universal date and the Jewish date. On the 9th of September it will be for Israel the 1st of Tishri of the year 5771.

Rosh Hashana lasts two days in Israel, the 9th and the 10th of September. Right now, during the month of Ellul, the Jewish people prepare themselves for the ten days of judgment which will start with Rosh Hashana and finishes on the day of Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur is the most solemn day of the year, everyone is in the synagogue, fasting and praying to be sure that they will get the right signature on the heavenly book at the end of the day. This year Yom Kippur will be on Shabbat 18th of September. It is the only one Shabbat Jews are allowed to fast.

Then five days after Yom Kippur it is time to rejoice in front of the L-rd, it is the feast of the Tabernacle, Succoth. This year it will be from September 23 to 30, October 1, will be Simcha Torah, the celebration of the last reading of the Torah portion. The day after, October 2, we read the first Parasha, Bereshit in the book of Genesis.



# OVERVIEW

## NITSAVIM - נִצְבִּים

### DEUTERONOMY 29:9-30:20

**O**n the last day of his life, Moshe gathers together all the people, both young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations yet unborn. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship, because in spite of having witnessed the abominations of Egypt, there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality. Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel which will be a result of the failure to heed G-d's mitzvos. Both their descendants and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desolation of the Land and its apparent inability to be sown or to produce crops.

The conclusion will be apparent to all - the Jewish People have forsaken the One who protects them, in favor of idols which can do nothing. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled. However assimilated they will have become among the nations, eventually G-d will bring them back to Eretz Yisrael. Moshe tells the people to remember that the Torah is not a remote impossibility; rather its fulfillment is within the grasp of every Jew. The Parsha concludes with a dramatic choice between life and death. Moshe exhorts the people to choose life

## VAYELECH - וַיֵּלֶךְ

### DEUTERONOMY 31:1-31:30

**O**n this, the last day of his life, Moshe goes from tent to tent throughout the camp, bidding farewell to his beloved people, encouraging them to keep the faith. Moshe tells them that whether he is among them or not, G-d is with them, and will vanquish their enemies.

Then he summons Yehoshua, and in front of all the people, exhorts him to be strong and courageous as the leader of the Jewish People. In this manner, he strengthens Yehoshua's status as the new leader.

Moshe teaches them the mitzvah of Hakhel: That every seven years on the first day of the intermediate days of Succos, the entire nation, including small children, is to gather together at the Temple to hear the King read from the Book of Devarim. The sections that he reads deal with faithfulness to G-d, the covenant, and reward and punishment. G-d tells

Moshe that his end is near, and he should therefore summon Yehoshua to stand with him in the Mishkan, where G-d will teach Yehoshua. G-d then tells Moshe and Yehoshua that after entering the Land, the people will be unfaithful to Him, and begin to worship other gods. G-d will then completely hide his face, so that it will seem that the Jewish People are at the mercy of fate, and that they will be hunted by all. G-d instructs Moshe and Yehoshua to write down a song -Ha'azinu - which will serve as a witness against the Jewish People when they sin. Moshe records the song in writing and teaches it to Bnei Yisrael. Moshe completes his transcription of the Torah, and instructs the Levi'im to place it to the side of the Aron (Holy Ark), so that no one will ever write a new Torah scroll that is different from the original—for there will always be a reference copy.

## ALL OF US WERE IN SINAI...

**T**he Torah states, "You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your God: your leaders, your tribes, your elders, your officers . . . for you to enter into a covenant with Hashem, your God . . . in order to establish you today as a people to Him and He will be a Lord to you . . . and He spoke to you and as He swore to your forefathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. **NOT WITH YOU ALONE do I forge this covenant and oath but with whoever is here, standing with us today, before Hashem, your God, AND WITH WHOEVER IS NOT HERE WITH US TODAY.**" (Deut 29:9-14)

Rashi comments: " 'Whoever is not here' means also to include the generations that will exist in the future."

Rashi's comments are based on Midrash Tanchuma, Nitzavim: "The souls of all believers were present at the making of the covenant even before their physical bodies were created. This is why the verse says 'with us today' and not 'standing' with us today."

The concept of the community is very strong in the Jewish tradition. Rambam writes: "Whoever separates himself from the community, even though he does

not commit transgressions, but merely divides himself from the congregation of believers, does not perform the commandments with them, doesn't feel their pain, doesn't fast when they face tragedies, but lives his life in his own individual way as if he were not part of the nation, loses his portion in the World to Come." (Laws of Repentance 3:11)

## MOSHE AND YEHOSHUA, ISSUE OF SUCCESSION

**S**adly, Moshe prepares to leave the stage in this week's Parasha, Vayelech. He declares that he will not be leading the people of Israel into the Land of Israel, his lifetime wish and goal.

He calls Yehoshua to take over for him after he is gone and he strengthens Yehoshua with inspiring words in the sight of all Israel: **"Be strong and of good courage; for you shall go with this people into the land that God has sworn to their fathers to give them; and you shall cause them to inherit it. And it God Himself goes before you; He will be with you, He will not fail you or forsake you. Have no fear or trepidation."** (Deut 31:7-8).

There was no sense of bitterness displayed by Moshe, despite the fact that he must have been envious of Yehoshua's role.

Had Moshe not sinned in Parashat Chukat with the rock, he, not Yehoshua, would be fulfilling his dream of entering Israel as leader of the Jewish people. In fact, Moshe gave his leadership to Yehoshua with a 'good eye,' with even more enthusiasm than he had been commanded to give (Rashi Bamidbar 27:23).

## WHAT TO DO ON YOUR 120TH BIRTHDAY?

**T**here aren't many people these days (if any) who hit the great age of 120, but for argument's sake, let's imagine that you would be celebrating your 120th birthday today, with your body in full function. What would you do? Would you go skydiving? Would you finally try out some illegal substances, or do some immoral act which you never permitted yourself earlier in your life? Would you sit and count the minutes until the end? Would you spend some quality time with your kids (if they are still living)? Would you spend some quality time with your kids (if they are

still living), grandchild, great-grandchild, great-great-grandchildren, great-great-great-grandchildren?

Would you hire a film crew to capture your last day on earth? Would you cry your eyes out in repentance?

Towards the end of Deuteronomy, the Torah describes the last day of Moses' life: **"And Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. And he said to them: 'I am a hundred and twenty years old this day...'"**

What did Moses do on his 120th birthday? He went! He moved! He grew. He inspired. He taught. He blessed. He accomplished.

There are 86,400 seconds in a day. That is 86,400 opportunities to fulfill the will of G-d in mind, speech, and action. Moses, who knew the meaning of life, and who appreciated every minute of it, filled up his last day with as much action as possible. He had one more day to grow, and he maximized it."

## SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

**A**nd G-d said to Moshe: **'Behold, the day of your death is approaching; call Yehoshua, and present yourselves in the Tent of Meeting, that I may charge him.'** And Moshe and Yehoshua went, and presented themselves in the Tent of Meeting. And God appeared in the Tent in a pillar of cloud; and the pillar of cloud stood over the door of the Tent. (Deut 31:14-15) The narrative seems natural, logical: Moshe's life, and his mission, are coming to an end, and God is about to fulfill Moshe's own request that a successor be appointed so that the nation will not be **"like a flock with no shepherd."** But then, the narrative is interrupted and a new law is transmitted: a law called hakhel, which states that at the end of the sabbatical year the nation should be gathered and the Torah read to them by the king (see Devarim 31:9-13.) The Rambam explains that the essence of hakhel is experiential: When the entire nation gathers together and hears the Torah read by their leader, the experience is reminiscent of the Revelation at Sinai. The new generation that will be led by Yehoshua, and all subsequent generations who will not have Moshe as their leader, will feel disadvantaged, empty and distant from those great events that their fathers experienced and that forged them into a nation. They, too, will feel the need for a revelation, or at least a quasi-revelation. This is precisely the function of hakhel: the gathering of the entire nation to hear the Word of God will be the "revelation experience" for each subsequent generation.

## BODY AND SOUL

**T**almud Sanhedrin 91b states that the relationship of body and soul can be compared to a relationship between a blind man and a lame man who are partners in crime. An orchard owner hired them to watch his orchard but forbade them from eating any fruit. Shortly thereafter, the watchmen couldn't resist. The blind man put the lame man on his shoulders and together they were able to take some fruit. The owner returned furious that they had taken his fruit. The blind man said, "It couldn't have been me. I can't see!" The lame man said, "It couldn't have been me. I can't walk!" Whereupon the smart orchard owner placed the lame man on the blind man's shoulders and punished them together. The body and the soul cannot live alone, they need one another. The body without the soul is dead and the soul without the body cannot exist.

## HIDE AND SEEK

**I** shall hide my face from them... (31:17) Rabbi Avraham 'the Angel' was the only son of Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezeritch. When Rabbi Avraham was a young child, he once came weeping to his father: He had been playing hide and seek with a friend, sobbed the child, but the friend had lost interest and had run off to some new amusement, leaving little Avraham all alone in his hiding place, waiting in vain to be searched out.

Rabbi DovBer lifted his eyes to heaven and cried: "You, too, have hidden Your face from us only because You want us to seek You. But Your children have tired of the game and have run off..."

## MOSES AN UNPARALLELED LEADER

As leader of the people, Moshe wore many hats:

- **Diplomat:** who negotiated with Pharaoh,
- **Freedom fighter:** who aroused the Jewish People to seek their own spiritual and physical liberation.
- **Legislator:** the giver and enforcer of the law.
- **Prophet:** he was the one who had an unparalleled relationship with God, the one who transmitted God's words to his people

- **Spiritual leader:** it was he who climbed Sinai and procured the Tablets of Testimony and brought them down to earth. Moshe taught the law, judged wrongdoers and exacted punishment.

- **Priest:** he ordained Aaron and his sons for the ministry

- **Protector:** He protected the people from God's anger when they transgressed.

- **Political leader:** He took them into the Promised Land and secured the nation's inheritance"

## PURITY AND HOLINESS

**A**n old man developed a propensity for alcohol in his old age. During his binges, he would stagger drunkenly through the marketplace and often fall asleep in the gutter. His son, a respected member of the community, was mortified. Something had to be done. The son decided to take his father to the marketplace on one of his sober days. Together, they walked past the stalls until they found a drunk lying in the gutter in a state of stupefaction.

"Look at him," said the son. "Do you see what drinking does?" The old man stared intently at the snoring drunk.

"Indeed, I do," he said. "I wonder what kind of wine he is drinking. It seems to be wonderful stuff."

In our own lives, we need to recognize the seductive power of forbidden fruit. "Never trust yourself," the Talmud advises. Just because we frown on the deprivations and abominations of modern society does not mean that we are impervious to moral subversion. What seems disgusting to us today may seem interesting tomorrow. Only by insulating our families from unnecessary exposure to the degeneracy of the street can we preserve the purity and holiness that are inherently ours.

## EDITOR

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## HAFTARA

### Isaiah 61:10-63:9

**T**his Shabbat is the seventh and last Shabbat after Tisha B'Av. We are ending the period called *Shiva D'nechemta*—"Seven weeks of comfort" reading seven prophesies of comfort and hope for Israel and God's people at large.

**HAFTARA:** This last text of comfort is an exultation of Israel for God's salvation. "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." (Is. 61:10). This text is wonderful, because it is an affirmation of the free gift of salvation from God. "for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation," these garments are free, there is no need for any payment. In the same way, God is ready to cover our sins and transgressions freely, just because he loves us and wants to save us. God does not love only Israel but all the nations, his love and his righteousness are available for every nation. "so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations." (Is. 61:11). However, the nations will see and benefit of God's salvation, only if they recognize God's love for Israel "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory" (Is 62:1-2). We have seen in Isaiah 54, that the Lord has forsaken Israel for a while, in this chapter, the Lord wants to marry again his people "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you" (Is 60:5) Even the land of Israel will come back to her "your land shall be married." Whatever could happen, Israel is seen as holy "They shall be called, "The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD" (Is 62:12). The lord sees what the nations are doing to Israel, each persecution is recorded in heaven, "in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old" (Is 60:9a). What a wonderful promise. Israel is assured of God's love. Israel can enter the fall feast with certitude, God loves and will forgive them.

## BESORAT YESHUA

### Mark 8:14-26

**T**he disciples are worried, they have just experienced a wonderful miracle, but they still have no confidence...

**BESORAH:** "Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat." (14) Yeshua cautioned them, not to have the same spirit as the pharisees who did not believe in Yeshua. "And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod." Yeshua reminds them what happened by asking them some questions "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?" (17) His questions demonstrate to his disciples his mission and who he is. "Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" They said to him, "Twelve." "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" And they said to him, "Seven." Then he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?" . (18-21) To give confidence to his disciples, Yeshua is going to perform a new miracle. Coming back to Capernaum, Yeshua and his disciples walk through the village of Bethsaida. Passing through the village, the people bring to him a blind man "Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him." (22). Yeshua accepts to do something for this man. "He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?" (23). It is strange that Yeshua asks the blind man if his application was successful, The man starts to see something but not clearly "'I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.'" (24). Yeshua comes back to the blind man for a second time "Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly," What a wonderful savior.

