

PARSHAS NITZAVIM-VAYEILECH

תשפ"ו

Nisyonos, Consequences and Teshuvah

This week we read Nitzavim-Vayeilech. It's the Shabbos before Rosh Hashanah, and Moshe Rabbeinu is telling Klal Yisroel: there are consequences. He tells them that there's no such thing as life without nisyonos.

There are consequences. And the sooner you learn there are consequences, the better it is.

Moshe is speaking to the people. And what does he tell them? We accepted the Torah with brochos and k'loles. Someone will say, it will be okay, "sholom yihyeh li" – it will be good with me, "bishrirus libi eilech" – I'll do what I want. No, there will be consequences. Hashem will not forgive him and disaster will follow.

The posuk talks about a "shoresh poreh rosh vela'anoh". The meforshim say sometimes it could be a little underlying root cause in behavior. But it eventually comes out.

"Ve'omar hador ha'acharon" – the last generation before Moshiach. That's approximately where we're living today. We're living at the end of history. That generation will say, what happened to Klal Yisroel? The response is: because they didn't keep the Torah. So whatever you want to analyze – anything that's happened to Klal Yisroel, it all depends on whether we keep the Torah or we don't keep the Torah. Hakodosh Boruch Hu causes things to happen and tries to shake us up.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin has a very interesting question. There is a machlokes: Will Moshiach come with teshuvah of Klal Yisroel, or even without teshuvah? Then the Gemara asks the question: Teshuvah depends on our free will – bechiroh chofshis. If Klal Yisroel will never do teshuvah, maybe Moshiach will never come?

No. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is not going to tolerate it. Rabbi Yehoshua says, He's going to shake us up so badly that we'll have to do teshuvah.

That means there's something deep in the neshomo of each Jew that says, 'I want to do good.' Under pressure of ta'avos, social pressures, financial pressures, all sorts of pressures we don't do what we should be doing. So he shakes us up until our deep desire to do good emerges. The Rambam explains in this in Hilchos Geirushin.

Hakodosh Boruch Hu is going to put us through something unbelievable. He will shake us up with things you can't imagine – and then the real Jewish neshomo comes out.

The posuk continues, "Veshavta" – you will return. There are two things. One is: "Veshavta Ad Hashem Elokecha". The meforshim say it's a promise of Hakodosh Boruch Hu that Klal Yisroel will eventually do teshuvah. But the question is: what's it going to take?

And then there is "V'shamata bekolo". There are two steps: one is a decision and understanding that we must change in a fundamental way. Then the next step is to put that into action. Then there will be kibbutz galuyos and everything will be wonderful.

But how does this all happen? It happens in a very simple way. The Torah jumps to another topic:

Torah Is Not Beyond Us

The Torah says:

כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוה היום לא נפלאה היא מקר וְלֹא רְחֹקָה הִוא.

A person can say there's a whole enormous list of taryag mitzvos,

a whole Shulchan Aruch. It's so overwhelming. I'm in the business world, how am I supposed to do my business without stealing, without cheating, without lying?

It's not beyond you. Torah is telling you a very simple thing: yes, there are nisyonos in life. But we have a klal: Hakodosh Boruch Hu does not give us a nisayon we can't stand up to. Go through Chazal, through all the meforshim. Yes, nisyonos aren't easy. But Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave Avrohom Ovinu a nisayon; He knew he had the potential to overcome it.

The purpose of a nisayon is to take the potential and make it actual. You grow from that nisayon. You confront the situation, you overcome it, and in the process, you bring out all the potential inside of you.

And don't think it's beyond you. Lo rechokah hi – it's not beyond you. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is not going to do that to you. Lo ba'Shomayim hi.

The Torah continues:

מִי יַעֲלֶה לָנוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְיִקְחֶהָ לָנוּ וְיִשְׁמְעֵנוּ אֹתָהּ וְנִשְׁעָנָהּ.

Rashi says, based on the Gemara in Eruvin, that if the Torah were in heaven, you would have to go up after it and learn it.

People think it's very hard to learn Torah. Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, you're making a mistake. If it was up in Shomayim, you'd have to have Elon Musk give you some sort of a rocket going up, all the way up to Shomayim, to get it. But He didn't do that. He made it easy for you. There has never been a generation that limud haTorah has been as easy as in our generation. But if you want it, the Torah is accessible to everyone. Nothing is beyond us.

לֹא מֵעֵבֶר לַיָּם הִוא.

It's not across the sea. It is wherever you want.

כִּי קָרוֹב אֵלָיךְ הַדָּבָר מֵאֵד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ.

This is telling you a very important yesod. This is what the Rambam says in Hilchos Geirushin. It's in the heart of every human being to do the right thing.

Limud HaTorah Changes a Person

The transformation happens through limud haTorah. Limud haTorah is the most powerful way of changing a human being.

The Rambam is very clear about it, and our davening is very clear about it. The Rambam says at the end of Hilchos Mikvaos – I repeat it a hundred times during the year – that if a person wants to change himself, he has to immerse himself in Torah, just like you immerse yourself in a mikvah. The mikvah purifies the guf; Torah purifies the neshomo.

The Torah Is Already Within Us

But more than that: there is an amazing Gemara which says that before I was born, a maloch taught me the whole Torah. And just as I was about to be born, the maloch slapped me above my mouth and I forgot everything.

The Gemara is saying a very, very simple idea. The most natural thing for a person to learn is Torah because he already learned it. It's relearning it. It's built into my neshomo. Deep in my neshomo is Shas. Deep in my neshomo is Shulchan Aruch. It's part of me. It's not foreign

to me. Torah is given to us as a matonoh.

There's an interesting Midrash Tanchuma in Ki Sisa. The posuk says:

וַיֵּתֶן אֶל מֹשֶׁה כָּכֶלֶתוֹ לְדַבֵּר אֹתוֹ.

"Vayiten" is lashon matonoh. For forty days Moshe Rabbeinu was on Har Sinai, and he learned the Torah. Hakodosh Boruch Hu taught him the whole Torah the first day. He was supposed to review it that night.

The next morning he told Hakodosh Boruch Hu, "I forgot the whole thing!" Hakodosh Boruch Hu said, "No problem. We will go over it again."

That night Moshe is supposed to review. The next morning he tells Hakodosh Boruch Hu, "I forgot it again!" This forgetting and relearning goes on for thirty-nine days. Then, on the fortieth day, Moshe Rabbeinu turns to Hakodosh Boruch Hu and says, "Listen, I have to go down and give Klal Yisroel the Torah. I don't know anything." Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, "Don't worry. Here it is as a gift."

What are Chazal trying to tell us with this story? Moshe Rabbeinu spent forty days putting all his effort into learning Torah. Remember, Moshe Rabbeinu was not a simple human being. But he can't remember it! On day forty, what happens? Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives it to him as a gift. If you put in that effort, Hakodosh Boruch Hu will give it to you as a gift.

That's why it's not beyond you. A maloch taught me before I was born. That means before I was born, I knew an unbelievable amount of Torah – Brochos, Taharos, Shulchan Aruch – and then I got slapped and I forgot it, but it's deep down inside me. Hakodosh Boruch Hu enables me, if I make that effort, to really make the potential actual.

Choosing Life

And the posuk says:

הַעֲדַתִּי בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת־הַשְּׂמִים וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַחַיִּים וְהַמָּוֶת נֹתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְלָלָה וּבְחִרְתָּ בַּחַיִּים לְמַעַן תִּחְיֶה אִתָּה וְזָרַעְךָ.

There is an unbelievable Rabbeinu Yonah who explains this posuk. Rabbeinu Yonah says as follows: bechiroh chofshis is not a simple reality; it's a mitzvah! This is puzzling. Doesn't everyone have bechiroh chofshis? How can he say I don't have bechiroh chofshis automatically?

Rabbeinu Yonah is saying a very important idea. Most people never exercise their bechiroh chofshis. How do most people go through life? Their friends tell them do this, get that; they get pushed through life from all sorts of social influences. They never take their life in their hands.

וּבְחִרְתָּ בַּחַיִּים is a mitzvah commanding you to take your life in your own hands. It's no one else's life. It's your life and it becomes what you make it and what you do with it.