

Parshas Nitzavim is always read the Shabbos before Rosh Hashono. There are two opinions in Tosfos if the brochos and klollos that are mentioned in the gemara refer to the ones in Parshas Ki Savo or the ones in Parshas Nitzavim. Tosfos says Parshas Nitzavim is read to give us a break from the tochocho of Parshas Ki Savo before we go into Rosh Hashono. But if there are klollos in that parsha as well, how is it a break?

There is a difference between the tochocho in Parshas Ki Savo and the tochocho in Bechukosai. At the end of the tochocho in Parshas Bechukosai, the Torah says there will be a final reconciliation after all the punishments. Hashem will remember the bris with the Ovos. It says the land will be desolate while Klal Yisroel is in golus. Chazal say this is a hidden brocho because the land will be uninhabited when Klal Yisroel eventually come back. And the land will be appeased for all the years that shemittah wasn't kept. Hashem will make sure that Klal Yisroel will survive in golus and they will be brought back.

By contrast, the tochocho in Ki Savo concludes only with punishments – they are the very last thing that is mentioned – with no turnaround provided. Only in Parshas Nitzavim do we read about a turnaround and we are also provided with a mechanism of how that reconciliation is set in motion. This is more than what we find in Bechukosai, where there is only mention of a turnaround with no description of the mechanism of how it will come about.

Nitzavim starts with the klollos – it describes the mindset of the future generations who will see the extreme desolation of the land and be shocked by it. Why did Hashem turn such a fertile land into such a wasteland? Why did Hashem change the climate to such inhospitable conditions? People will wonder. Hashem guarantees that one day, after all the klollos come to pass, Klal Yisroel will wake up and start the process of doing teshuvoh.

There is a machlokes if this awakening to do teshuvoh is a promise or an obligation. Perhaps it is both.

The posuk gives us the mechanism by which we do teshuvoh. It says we will start to listen to the voice of Hashem. This is a reference to what we discussed last week when the Ohr Hachayim explained that listening to the voice of Hashem is when we learn Torah and we hear Hashem talking to us through His Torah. In the end of days, it is through limud haTorah that we will finally get back on track and not let us lose focus on what is important in life.

150 years ago, the Jews living in Europe became overwhelmed by Western culture and ran away from limud haTorah. They didn't appreciate the value and the relevance of Torah in modern times and went looking to other philosophies and movements to find solutions to all their problems in golus. But at the end of days, as the midrash in Bereishis tells us, when the long golus of Edom – Rome succeeded by Christianity – will crumble, there will be an awakening of teshuvoh through limud haTorah.

It is a gradual process that doesn't happen overnight. There is a return to Torah and gathering of the exiles, then more Torah and teshuvoh. The catalyst to that process of turning around and making a stronger connection to Hashem starts with more limud haTorah.

Then the posuk says Hashem will remove the orlof of our heart. This is an important idea. A person can be sunk so deeply into all the tumoh and taivoh of the guf that he can lose all sensitivity to ruchniyus and

the life of the neshomo.

There are a number of things happening simultaneously. When people will wake up after all the suffering and all the destruction, they will realize that they brought it upon themselves. There will be a recognition that we must return to limud HaTorah to renew our relationship with Hashem – to listen to His voice. This goes together with the ingathering of the exiles.

In the 19th century, there were two opposite trends impacting the Jewish world. On the one hand, the haskoloh movement was tearing apart Jewish life. But at the same time, in 1803, Yeshivas Volozhin was opened. It signaled a dramatic change where limud haTorah started to move out of the local beis midrash and into the reshus harabim in the form of large, structured institutions with hundreds of talmidim coming from all over the world. The Torah needs to be the heritage of all Jews everywhere and not just belonging to an elite, exclusive group. The Gra predicted that first Torah will spread throughout the entire world before Moshiach will come. Rav Chaim of Volozhin asked the Gra, where is the last place Torah will spread before Moshiach can come? And the Gra answered, in America.

The Russian government started to crack down on Yeshivas Volozhin as it grew to a student body of 450 talmidim. The representative of the government asked, why do you need so many rabbis? The Netziv and Rav Chaim responded, we aren't teaching Torah here just to train rabbis. We are simply teaching Torah to spread limud haTorah to the masses.

When limud haTorah spreads throughout the world, and you hear Hashem talking to you, it brings with it teshuvoh and gathering of the exiles. This leads to a removal of the orlas halev – and we develop more sensitivity to kedushoh and a life of ruchniyus. It then enables us to connect to Hashem in a deeper way through ahavoh. It is an entire process where one stage leads to the next.

Once there is widespread limud haTorah which becomes part of the reshus harabim, then mitzvos will be observed on a more serious level. There is much more awareness of and competence in keeping halacha today than how it used to be 70 years ago. Why? It is because of the success of yeshivos spreading limud haTorah to the masses. All Jews are more educated about halacha in general and there is greater dikduk b'mitzvos today as a result.

At the end of this section of brochos and klollos, the posuk says we will finally take the messages to heart to do teshuvoh and listen to the voice of Hashem. As a result, Hashem will be enthusiastic to shower us with all the blessings just as He was happy with our ancestors. The turnaround will come as a result of coming back to the Torah. But the tochocho of Ki Savo ends with the klollos and that's it.

At a certain point at the end of days when Hashem is preparing for Moshiach to come, there will be teshuvoh fueled by limud haTorah. It is interesting to note that of all the various ways that have been devised to bring Jews back to their heritage, the most potent method has been through serious limud haTorah. That is why there are yeshivos for baalei teshuvoh and not just programs that only provide inspiration and good feelings about Judaism. Exposing a person to the greatness and the depth of Torah moves him more profoundly than any other method.

There is another part of the parsha – how is it possible that limud

haTorah can spread throughout the entire nation to arouse a mass movement of teshuvoh? Can everyone learn Torah? Yes. Torah isn't just for the elite, for the 'iluyim'. The posuk says the Torah is accessible to each and every one of us. 'Lo bashomayim he'.

Rashi says something incredible. He says Hashem did us a favor. If the Torah would be in the heavens – on the moon, for example, it wouldn't be an excuse! We would have to get into a rocket ship and get the Torah! But Hashem spared us all that trouble and gave the Torah in our mouths and our hearts to fulfill it.

Hashem gave the Torah in a way that each person can understand it on his level. The Rambam in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah at the end of the 4th perek says:

וְאִנִּי אֹמֵר שְׂאִין רְאִי לְטִיל בְּפָרְדֵּס אֶלָּא מִי שֶׁנִּתְמַלֵּא כְרִסּוֹ לְחֵם וּבָשָׂר. וְלֵחֵם וּבָשָׂר הוּא לִידַע הָאִסוּר וְהַתּוֹרָה וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָהֶם מִשְׁאֵר הַמִּצְוֹת. וְאִם עַל פִּי שְׂדֵבְרִים אֵלּוּ דָבָר קִטְן קָרְאוּ אוֹתָן הַכֹּמִים שֶׁהֲרִי אֶמְרוּ הַכֹּמִים דָּבָר גָּדוֹל מִעֲשֵׂה מִרְכָּבָה וְדָבָר קִטְן הַיּוֹת דְּאֵבִי וְרָבָא. אִם עַל פִּי כֵן רְאִיִּין הֵן לְהַקְדִּימֵן. שֶׁהֵן מִיִּשְׁבִּין דְּעִתּוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם תְּחִלָּה. וְעוֹד שָׁהֶם הַטּוֹבָה הַגְּדוֹלָה שֶׁהִשְׁפִּיעַ הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְיִשׁוּב הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה קְדִי לְנַחֵל חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. וְאִפְשָׁר שְׂיִדְעֵם הַכֵּל קִטְן וְגָדוֹל אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה בַּעַל לֵב רַחֵב וּבַעַל לֵב קָצֵר:

There is a simple reason how this is possible. Chazal say that before every Jew is born, the Torah was already taught to him. Chazal are trying to tell us a deep idea – that Torah is natural to a Jew – it isn't something foreign to him. Learning Torah is just a matter of reacquainting yourself with the ideas that you already became familiar with in the womb. This is why every Jew can learn Torah

On Shabbos I have different grandchildren of all different ages and stages visiting me. The amazing thing about Torah is that I can learn the parsha with all of them – from the five-year-old to the 18-year-old – each on their own level. There is no other book in the world that is so universally accessible. Certainly there are more esoteric parts of the Torah that are only accessible to a chosen few. But all of Toras hanigleh – Shas and poskim – are able to be mastered by everyone. Limud haTorah orients a person's mind to the correct way of thinking and is the key to olom haboh – this is why it has to be accessible to everyone.

The Rambam in Hilchos Geirushin writes that deep down in the neshomo of each Jew there is a desire to do the will of Hashem. This also means that there must be a natural affinity every Jew has to limud haTorah – this is how we naturally connect to the will of Hashem.

The parsha is telling us that limud haTorah is the way Klal Yisroel get back on track and achieve the turnaround in golus at the end of days. But if the Torah is only in the domain of an elite select few, then how can Klal Yisroel as a whole be able to make this connection to Hashem and find a way to do teshuvoh as the Torah predicts? So the posuk assures us that Hashem did us a favor and made the Torah available to everyone, everywhere, and at all times.

The parsha concludes with a final command to love Hashem, and to walk in Hashem's ways – middos tovos. It is interesting how the Rambam organized his Mishnah Torah. There is first the Yesodei haTorah, and

then the very next thing – before Talmud Torah – is Hilchos De'os – what are the proper middos every Jew should have. Without proper middos, you won't really be able to learn Torah effectively.

We always have a choice – bechiroh chofshis. Even at a time when everything becomes clear and the turnaround has happened and there is a massive return and widespread limud haTorah, there is still a choice.

There is a machlokes between Rashi and Rabbeinu Yonah. Rashi explains that in this posuk – u'vochartoh bachayim – Hashem is giving us good advice – choose life! Rabbeinu Yonah says this posuk is giving us a mitzvah to use your bechiroh and consciously choose how to live your life. Rabbeinu Yonah explains that bechiroh isn't automatically how a human being always operates. People are subject to all kinds of social pressures and inner drives and they often function on auto-pilot. Most people are not really thinking and making their own decisions – but following the trends and the expectations of their social circles. The Torah is commanding us to take control of our lives and make careful calculations about what is right and wrong. Then we will naturally make the right decisions and choose life.

We keep hearing that everyone has bechiroh chofshis. But what about an addict? He is someone who lost control and is not exercising his bechiroh. He is obligated to train himself to take back the control over his life and exercise his bechiroh again. You can't do that in a second with just a single decision. The Rambam says you have to slowly and gradually change bad habits by consistent training – going in the opposite direction until you regain full control over your behavior.

Exercising bechiroh means you are able to see clearly what is good and what is bad and what is right and what is wrong. Then we again have ahavas Hashem with limud haTorah and it leads to deveikus to Hashem.

This parsha is always read right before Rosh Hashono. We can't end the year just with Ki Savo because it is very stark – there are only klollos there – it is a dead end with no turnaround. We read Parshas Nitzvom describing the promise that eventually there will be a turnaround for the individual and the community. There will be an end to the klollos and the golus when Klal Yisroel is aroused to do teshuvoh with a massive investment in limud haTorah.

In Parshas Vayelech, Hashem tells us we have a guarantee that the Torah will never be forgotten. Despite all the persecutions and tragedies we experience, we will always have the Torah to guide us and show us how to get through all the difficult times.

Boruch Hashem, we live in a world where there is a massive amount of limud haTorah going on today. But we have to take control over our lives and use limud haTorah to connect to Hashem and re-sensitize ourselves to living a life of kedushoh. We can't get sunk into a materialistic life. We need to reach for higher goals of ruchniyus.

We need to take these lessons before Rosh Hashono and think about how to integrate them into our lives.