

# PARSHAS NITZAVIM-VAYELECH

תשפ"ג

On the Shabbos before Rosh Hashono, we read Parshas Nitzovim-Vayeilach.

The gemara in Megilloh says the tzibbur has to read the brochos and kolos of Mishnah Torah before Rosh Hashono. Currently, our minhag has arranged for all the parshiyos of the Chumash to be finished once every year. There were places where the minhag was to finish the Chumash once every three years. So these communities had to interrupt their schedule and read these parshiyos out of order before Rosh Hashono.

Tosfos has two opinions regarding which parsha is being referred to – Ki Savo or Nitzovim. Practically, we read Nitzovim-Vayeilech right before Rosh Hashono. These kolos have an interesting aspect to them.

Hashem made a bris with all of Klal Yisroel till the end of time. But more than that, as I mentioned last week, all Jews became responsible for one another at this bris. We are more than just individuals living our own private lives. We are part of one corporate unit that includes all Jews throughout Jewish history. The closer the Jew is to me, the more responsibility I have towards him.

The pesukim say that people will look at the churbon – the desolation of the land – and be shocked. What happened to turn such fertile land so desolate? It will make people stop and think. The section ends with the message that Klal Yisroel are only responsible to fix the problems we can become aware of. Things that are hidden are up to Hashem to fix.

A major distinction between these kolos in Nitzovim and those in Ki Savo is that the kolos in Ki Savo are not turned around in the end. Churbon is the final stage and it doesn't say what happens afterward. In other places, the pesukim continue with things turning around and Hashem changing direction. Klal Yisroel wake up and they will eventually do teshuvoh. The Rambam paskens that despite everything that will develop in history, it is inevitable that teshuvoh will take place and then there will be kibbutz goluyos and geuloh.

The gemara asks: if geuloh needs teshuvoh first, and Klal Yisroel have bechiroh not to do teshuvoh, maybe they will never do teshuvoh and there won't be a geuloh? The gemara answers that things will get so bad that Klal Yisroel will be forced to wake up and do teshuvoh.

What is the process of this awakening to teshuvoh? Rashi explains that the pesukim tell us that it comes through limud haTorah. Torah is so accessible – it is already in your mouth and in your heart. The Rambam says at the end of perek 4 in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah that everyone can master the revealed parts of Torah Shebaal Peh – men, women, young and old, all levels of intellectual ability. No one can credibly say that they aren't "cut out" for learning.

The Torah is an unbelievable book. Every week I learn the parsha on my level, and when I speak to my grandchildren at my Shabbos table, each one is able to relate to the parsha and gain something from it on their level. No other book has this capacity to reach everyone on so many different levels. No-one can make the claim that Torah learning isn't for everybody – the Rambam disagrees and the Torah disagrees.

The posuk says the Torah is not in shomayim and not across the sea. Hashem made it so close and so easy to obtain. Rashi deduces that if Hashem didn't make Torah so accessible, we would still have to travel into space somehow, or cross the sea in order to learn Torah. That is how far our obligations would go. But Hashem did us a favor and we

don't have to make such difficult journeys.

According to Rashi, the Torah is describing the end of days when all the falsehood of avodo zoro will be exposed and rejected. Some people will wake up and realize how deep the Torah's chochmoh goes, and that will inspire Klal Yisroel to do teshuvoh.

Then the posuk says that our security and stability in Eretz Yisroel depends on our commitment to Torah.

Then the posuk says: Choose life.

This means everyone is confronted with different situations in life, and we are under different pressures to go in various directions – social pressures, financial pressures, etc. But everyone has the ability to take their lives in their own hands and make the right decisions. We will see the emptiness of everything around us and if we make the effort, we can see the infinite depth and wisdom of the Torah. But then we have to take responsibility for the direction we take in life and make the right decisions.

Then Hashem tells Moshe about the future of Klal Yisroel: they will start sinking into avodo zoro after you die. They will abandon Me and I will be angered. I will forsake them – there will be hester ponim.

What is 'hester ponim'? There is a constant protection Hashem provides for us which allows us to survive among the nations of the world who are like wild animals who are hungry to devour us. The minute Hashem removes His Divine protection, the natural forces of history start to exert themselves and Klal Yisroel become persecuted and get closer to extinction.

When calamities and disasters befall us, we will realize that Hashem removed His protection and ask, where did Hashem go? Klal Yisroel understands that it is because Hashem made Himself distant and concealed Himself, this is the reason we find ourselves in trouble.

But then something baffling happens. The tragedies continue and they get worse – after Klal Yisroel have woken up! The Ramban explains that it often happens that people become aware of the situation, but aren't motivated to actually do anything about it. They would rather just bemoan their circumstances and not think about making any changes. They prefer to go back to sleep. So Hashem has to bring more troubles to prevent this from happening. He brings a double hester ponim.

What is the solution to this? 'ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת' You must look for the answers to your problems in the Torah and nowhere else. Look what is happening to you and then look in the Torah and put two and two together. It won't help to analyze the standard rules of history that determine the fate of other nations. We are above any normal historical explanation. Hashem gave the Torah as a constant witness to remind us of our special position in world history.

We are guaranteed by Hashem that the Torah will go on forever. When you survey human civilization, you see that all the great religions of the world have become relics of the past. The Canaanite gods of Baal and Molech, Greek gods, Roman gods, Christianity, – all of them either are, or are becoming obsolete. There will eventually come a time that everyone will realize there is only one idea that keeps going and never fades: that is Torah.

150 years ago, the Haskalah movement was making big inroads in Jewish life – making a churbon among Klal Yisroel, and there were so many famous Yiddish and Hebrew poets and playwrights whom

almost everyone in the Jewish world revered at the time. They looked at the Torah and those who learned it as old-fashioned and outdated.

I went to Warsaw Cemetery to visit the kevarim of the Netziv and Rav Chaim. As I was there, I visited the kevarim of the geonim of Poland: Rav Shlomo Zalman Lifshitz, the author of Chemdas Shlomo; Rav Yaakov Gezundheit, the author of Tiferes Yaakov; Rav Avrohom Luftbir, the author of Zera Avrohom. I saw very simple matzeivos for these great talmidei chachomim – whose seforim everyone learns and quotes today. Then I noticed on the other side there were all these fancy, elaborately decorated matzeivos for the most celebrated members of the Hebrew and Yiddish culture. These were names that no-one even heard about aside from a handful of people in academia who studied the history of Haskalah. And all these once-famous people at the time, looked down on the Torah and lomdei Torah with so much disdain and disrespect.

I stood there and I asked myself, who won this struggle? It's obvious. No-one heard of these Maskilim today, but in the Beis Midrash today, you learn all these seforim. Their Torah is alive and well. Torah is forever.

The solution to all of these problems is to understand and appreciate the depths of Torah. It is not something empty. It is your life and the source of your security in your land. If you think Torah is superficial and without deep meaning, you are the one who is lacking the insight.

Once you start to understand that Torah is a chochmoh beyond all other chochmos, you realize that nothing else that has been produced by the world even comes close. You start to wonder why Jews in various points in history abandoned the Torah for non-Jewish wisdom. Did they really appreciate what they were trading away for what?

In the times of the Spanish Rishonim, many Jews were fascinated by Greek thought and philosophy. It became a threat and a competitor to Torah. All the enlightened people neglected the study of Torah. The Rashba made a cherem to forbid learning Greek philosophy before age 25 and the people in Spain were in an uproar. Angry and upset! But today? We learn the Rashba day and night. Who studies Greek philosophy today? Even in the universities, most of them are studying

all kinds of nonsense that no-one will ever look at when the trends shift in another fifty years.

But Torah always stays fresh and relevant to our lives.

What is going to bring Klal Yisroel back at the end of days? They are going to look at everything else out there and see that limud haTorah is forever. It has been going for generation after generation uninterrupted and its depth and breadth is enormous.

As we approach the yemei hadin, we read these parshiyos and we see where the turnaround is going to happen. We don't see the turnaround in Parshas Ki Savo.

I think about where we are today, and I realize that we are at a critical crossroads in Jewish history and the history of the world. One development is the fall of golus Edom – the end of Christianity. The midrash compares Edom to a tehom – a bottomless pit with no end. We are finally seeing the end today when the ruach of Moshiach is starting to blow. There is an amazing midrash which says at this time, there will be an unparalleled spread of limud Torah.

We live in a blessed time in history where it is so easy to sit and learn. But at the same time, the world has never been on the dangerous edge of explosion. There are constant terrorist attacks happening every day – backed by Iran and Hezbollah who are threatening our very existence in Eretz Yisroel.

The Torah is describing our times – we have the opportunity to be a part of the revival of Torah that will bring about the geuloh. Hashem isn't making us climb to the heavens or travel across the sea. But you have to grab that opportunity – it is in our hands to take what Hashem is giving us.

What are we getting from this? It is what makes the keshar we have between Hashem and us. This is the challenge of our generation.

It has never been easier for so many Jews to immerse themselves in a sugya with Rashi, Tosfos, Rambam, Ramban, Rabbi Akiva Eiger and Rav Chaim. It is all there at our fingertips, and we become closer to Hashem as a result.