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B'S'D'

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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON NITZAVIM - 5761

Aish HaTorah, American Friends of Aish HaTorah, 24 Davis Road,
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===== [ADDED SEPTEMBER 13, 2001] =====

Mordechai ben Janet
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Chana Perel bas Sorah
Avrohom Yosef ben Chaya Shaindel
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Chana Perel bas Sorah
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OU Torah Insights, Orthodox Union, 11 Broadway, New York, NY
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contact information.

===== [ADDED SEPTEMBER 12, 2001] =====

Chaim Zalman ben Basha Sarah
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Mordechai Leib ben Yasfa Leah (Teaneck, NJ)
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Torah Weekly
Parshat Nitzavim Ohr Somayach
Idol Worship

And you saw their abominations and their detestable idols, of wood
and of stone" (29:16)

Think of idol worship. Primitive tribes in Borneo with painted faces
and wild eyes come to mind. Ancient Egyptians and not-so-ancient
Mayans. When we think about idol worship, we think of anyone - but
ourselves. In our own mind we are as far as can be from being
card-carrying idol worshippers. Me? An idol worshipper?

And yet there is a very subtle kind of idol worship that we can very
easily fall prey to.

Throughout the month of Elul, we have been sounding the shofar at
the end of morning prayers. Ostensibly, this is part of our preparation for
Rosh Hashana. One authority, however, when describing the shofar
blowing of Elul, makes no reference to Rosh Hashana at all. Rather, the
Pirkei d'Rabi Eliezer relates the blowing of the shofar to a specific event
in the first Elul after the Jewish People left Egypt.

When Moshe went up to receive the first tablets, the Jewish People
made a tragic miscalculation which led to the incident of the golden calf.
Eventually, G-d forgave the Jewish People for this sin and He summoned
Moshe on the first day of Elul to "ascend to Me to the mountain."
(Shemot 24:12) Moshe went up to receive the second tablets. As he
ascended, "the sound of the shofar was sounded in the encampment so
that they would not once again err after idol worship."

So, the reason we blow the shofar during Elul is to protect ourselves
from the same mistake the Jewish People made over 3000 years ago in
the desert - idol worship.

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Most people don't have graven images stashed away in their attic; they have no plans to convert their lofts into a local coven for witchcraft. Where do you see idol worship nowadays?

Nothing in Judaism is merely commemorative, if we still blow the shofar during Elul, it must be that the same potential for falling into idol worship still exists. What is this idol worship?

The Ramban in his discourse on Rosh Hashanah links the word shofar to the verse, "By His breath the Heavens are spread (shifra)." (Iyov 26:13)

This verse refers to the dispersing of the clouds to reveal the clear blue sky. That which was clouded over and concealed becomes revealed. The root of the word shifra also means to beautify, for true beauty is to see the essence of something, the purpose for which it was created. Shifra is also the root of the word shofar.

The shofar gives us a clarity to see beyond the clouds - to see to the blue sky beyond. It is this clarity that results in fear and trembling: "Can the shofar be sounded in the city and the people not tremble?" (Amos 3:6).

In 1948, when the sound of bomb blasts was all too common in Israel, the Slabodka Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Sher, took aside a ten-year-old boy and asked him what blessing should be made on the sound of a bomb blast. When the boy could not answer, Rabbi Sher told him, "Whose strength and power fills the world" - the blessing a Jew says when he hears thunder. Rabbi Sher was not giving the boy a practical halachic ruling; rather, he was telling him that bomb blasts are no different than unexpected thunder on a cloudless day. They are both a reminder of Hashem's power.

Thunder, the Talmud tells us, exists only to straighten the crookedness of our hearts, to strip away the layers of our self-deception. Thunder is an unexpected break from the everyday, and as such it snaps us to attention by reminding us of the One whose strength and power fill the world.

Every explosion in this city is like a clap of thunder, is like the blast of the shofar, reminding us of His power and awesome might.

... Written and Compiled by RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR
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<http://www.artscroll.com/parashah.html> Parashas Nitzavim
EXCERPT FROM DARASH MOSHE, BY RABBI MOSHE
FEINSTEIN

"See I have placed before you today the life and the good, and the death and the evil and you shall choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:15,19).

Why did Moses stress that he was placing these choices before the people today?

Perhaps this word's message is that each and every day of our lives, the same choices Moses described stand before us to be confronted anew. Certainly someone whose behavior has been improper until now is obligated to choose the path of good for the future. But even someone who has already chosen that path and remained firmly on it may not rely on his past performance to guarantee that he will continue to do good, and must make his choice afresh today and every day, because every day the path of evil and death also stands before him. Every day, therefore, he must once again consciously choose the good.

Subj: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Nitzavim From: ryfrand@torah.org
(RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND) "RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on
Parshas Nitzavim

NO EXCUSE NOT TO "DO TESHUVAH"

According to the standard ordering of weekly Torah readings, Nitzavim is always read before Rosh HaShanah. Despite the fact that

our current order of parshiyos (readings) is not necessarily the way that it was always practiced, there could be no more appropriate parsha to read at precisely this time of year. Nitzavim contains the following series of pasukim [verses]:

"For this mitzvah that I am prescribing to you today is not too wondrous for you, it is not too distant. It is not in Heaven that you should say 'Who shall go up to Heaven and bring it to us so that we can hear it and keep it?' It is not over the sea so that you should say 'Who will cross the sea and get it for us, so that we will be able to hear it and keep it?' It is something that is very close to you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can keep it." [Devorim 30:11-14]

There is a difference of opinion among the early commentators as to which Mitzvah the Torah is referring to in this pasuk [verse]. According to the Ramba"n (1194-1270) and others who follow his opinion, the Torah is referring to the mitzvah of Teshuvah [Repentance, Return to G-d]. Teshuvah is the Commandment that is "within our capacity and within our reach to fulfill".

The Sforno (1470-1550) writes as follows concerning this verse: "It is not too wondrous for you" - that you would require prophets. "It is not too distant" - that you would require distant wise men of the generation to explain to you that which is necessary to accomplish it, even while you are still in exile".

A person should not think, "In these times, I am incapable of doing Teshuvah. Had I lived in the times of the prophets who could have directly told me exactly what I was doing wrong - then I could have repented properly. Unfortunately, I live in a period of history when there are no prophets." To counteract such thoughts the Torah assures us "It is not in Heaven" - implying that we do not need prophetic words from heaven to allow us to do Teshuva. This is no excuse.

Likewise, we can not argue "If I had a real Maggid Mussar [expounder of homiletic lessons of chastisement] then I might be inspired to repent. If the Chofetz Chaim or the Vilna Gaon were here and would tell me to do Teshuvah, I would do it!" To counteract such thoughts the Torah informs us "It is not across the Sea". This, too, is no excuse.

"For the matter is very near. It is within your mouth and your heart to do it." We do not need prophets or wise men. It is all up to us. This pasuk is a double-edged sword. Teshuvah is easy. It is accessible. But, on the other hand, it is all up to us. We have no external excuses to fall back upon.

Perhaps this is hinted at in the famous Gemara [Avodah Zarah 17a] regarding Eleazar ben Durdaya. When the woman of ill repute told Eleazar ben Durdaya that he would never be able to repent, he pleaded "Heaven and Earth request mercy for me." They responded that they could not help him. He invoked the aid of the stars and of the sea and was given the same answer. The Gemara says he put his head between his knees and he expired on the spot as a result of intense remorse and repentance. What is the symbolism of placing his head between his knees? This was the ultimate acknowledgment that his repentance was dependent upon himself alone.

We can not wait for others to do Teshuvah for us, and we can not blame others for our failure to do Teshuvah. It is not because our parents raised us poorly. It is not because our environment was bad. There are no excuses! The ability to do Teshuvah is within our own mouths and hearts.

Kesiva V'Chasima Tova! May you be Inscribed and Sealed in the Book of Life!

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Subj: Shiur HaRav Soloveichik ZTL on Ki Tavo-Nitzavim Date: 9/13/2001 10:22:32 AM From: jr@caldera.com To: mj-ravtorah@shamash.org

SHIUR HARAV SOLOVEICHIK ZTL ON KI TAVO-NITZAVIM (Shiur Date: 1966 Yahrzeit Shiur. Thanks to Arnie Lustiger. Tape available through M. Nordlicht)

Ezra enacted a rule that we should read the Brachos U'Klalos of Vayikra (Parshas B'Chukosai) prior to Shavuos and Brachos U'Klalos in Devarim (Parshas Ki Tavo) before Rosh Hashonah (Megila 31b). The Rav asked: 1) according to our order of reading the Torah, Bamidbar is always read the Shabbos prior to Shavuos and Nitzavim is always read the week prior to Rosh Hashonah. Why do we deviate from the Takanas Ezra? 2) The Gemara distinguishes between the Brachos U'Klalos in Toras Kohanim and Mishne Torah (for example, in the Brachos U'Klalos of Toras Kohanim, one person reads the entire set, while the Brachos U'Klalos in Mishne Torah may be subdivided among several people). Why is there a distinction between them?

The Rav explained based on a Rashi (Devarim 14:2). Ki Am Kadosh Ata L'Hashem Elokecha etc. Rashi explains Ki Am Kadosh Ata as Kedushas Atzmecha M'Avosecha, you possess inherited sanctity from your forefathers. However there is another type of sanctity that Moshe mentions, U'Bcha Bachar Hashem Elokecha L'hiyos Lo L'Am Segula. Rashi describes an amazing principle, that a Jew has 2 forms of sanctity, Kedushas Yisrael through Yichus M'avos. There is a second individual Kedusha granted to each Jew, Kedushas Atzmecha, based on our selection Bnay Yisrael Hashem. The Rav asked what is the status of Meshumad? Does he retain complete Kedushas Yisrael or not? On the one hand there are sources in the Gemara that he remains a complete Jew (for instance his Kedushin is valid, see Yevamos 47b). On the other hand, there are other sources that exclude him from various religious tasks (Shechita, Kiesivas Stam and others, see Gittin 45b). (The Rav said that something held him back from saying that a Yisrael Meshumad retained full Kedusha Yisrael.) Which Kedusha does the Meshumad lose? The Rav said that the inherited Kedusha of a descendant of the patriarchs is irrevocable. However, the Rav felt that a Meshumad forfeited the second Kedusha that is based on the selection of the Jewish nation as the chosen people. A convert has both Kedushos, as the Halacha says he recites the Parshas Bikurim and he says Elokaynu V'elokay Avosaynu based on Abraham being called the father of a multitude of nations, Av Hamon Goyim. He has an inherited Kedusha from Abraham and he acquires the Kedushas Yisrael when he converted.

If there are 2 Kedushos by Jews, and every generation has these 2 Kedushos, they must be based on 2 separate Krisas Bris. Kedusha is based on the obligation to fulfill Mitzvos. The Rambam (Hilchos Mlachim 9:1) describes the observance of Mitzvos among the generations prior Mattan Torah as the historical map of sanctity among the Jewish people. Each higher level of sanctity could be attained only through the acceptance of additional Mitzvos. Even though they underwent Milah and Tevila in Egypt prior to the Korban Pesach and the Exodus, Bnay Yisrael needed an additional Tevila at Sinai. The Rambam says that since they attained new Mitzvos at Sinai, they had to undergo another conversion process. In short, Mizvos are built upon Krisas Bris.

A Jew has two distinct sources of obligation. The first is based on the original Bris at Mount Sinai that derived from the patriarchs and expressed through Moses. This covenant obligates all successive generations, through our lineage connection, Yichus, to fulfill the Mitzvos. There is a second Krisas Bris that is based on individual Kedusha and is entered into by each and every generation.

Where do we find these two covenants? The first KB is in Bchukosay and the second is in Ki Tavo. Why do we need both covenants? [Really there were 3 covenants, with the third at Mount Grizim. But that was a different type of covenant based on Arayvus, acceptance of mutual responsibility for fellow Jews.] Parshas Nitzavim is the continuation of the Bris in Ki Tavo (according to Rabbeinu Nissim Gaon). At Mattan Torah, Moshe read the Sefer HaBris while the Jews stood at Mount Sinai. What did Moshe read to them? Chazal tell us that he read the Torah from Breishis through the story of the exodus. The Sinaitic covenant was built on the exodus that was in turn built on the covenant with the patriarchs. In Toras Kohanim Hashem mentions that He will recall the original covenant with Jacob, Isaac and Abraham. In other words, the entire Sinaitic covenant is based on, and is the continuation of, the covenant of the forefathers and transfers from generation to generation.

Therefore Shavuos, the holiday of Mishne Torah, is associated with the Brachos U'Klalos in Bchukosay that were given at Mount Sinai. Even though the Brachos U'Klalos are recorded in Bchukosay, they are referred to and are connected to Parshas Mishpatim, when Moshe sprinkled the people and read the Sefer HaBris to them. These Brachos U'Klalos were part of the Bris enacted with the patriarchs. We read Parshas Bamidbar prior to Shavuos, because the entire concept of Yichus, Jewish lineage, is based on Parshas Bamidbar. The entire concept of counting the people derives from the sanctity of the patriarchs and the lineage of the 12 tribes who trace that lineage back to Abraham. As it says in the Parsha, Lmishpichosam UIBays Avosam, Vayisyaldy Al Mishpichosayhem. Chazal say that each one brought his lineage documentation proving that he descended from the patriarchs and their children.

The different levels of sanctity attained by each of the twelve tribes was derived from their connection to the Kedushas Avos of the previous generations. This is the Kedusha of Ki Am Kadosh Ata L'Hashem Elokecha. In Bris Atzeres read on Shavuos, we find the fulfillment of the statement Ki Am Kadosh Ata L'Hashem Elokecha, the sanctity of each Jew based on his lineage. The Midrash says on the verse Zeh Kayli V'anvayhu, that Moshe emphasized that the Kedusha did not begin with me, but rather it began long ago with my forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as expressed in Elokay Avi V'Aromemenu. This is the essence of Shavuos, Mattan Torah and Brachos U'Klalos of Bchukosay. Ezra established that they should read about this covenant, the covenant that mentions the patriarchs and the exodus from Egypt that led to Kabbalas HaTorah at Sinai, before Shavuos each year. How do I know that this covenant extends to subsequent generations? I would not know it from Parshas B'Chukosay alone. The Yichus, lineage described in Parshas Bamidbar teaches that the covenant also extends to me based on that Yichus.

The covenant based on Brachos U'Klalos in Nitzavim was not only given to the generation that stood before Moses prior to his death. Rather, this set of Brachos U'Klalos was, and is, given to each and every individual generation. We are not bound to this covenant through lineage, or through the patriarchs. It is our own responsibility. As Rashi explains U'Bcha Bochar Hashem Elokecha, Hashem has selected you and endowed each generation with a Kedusha that is separate and distinct from the Kedushas Avos. Rashi explains the verse V'Es Asher Ay'nenu Po Imanu Omayd Hayom that the oath obligates the future generations of Klal Yisrael. Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel says explicitly that it binds all future generations. All succeeding generations stood

before the Ark and Moses and accepted the oath to observe the Mitzvos of Hashem. Therefore Rosh Hashonah is a Yom Zikaron for Bris, not only for the Bris Avos but also for the Bris that Hashem makes with each generation. Brachos U'Klalos in Mishne Torah must be read prior to Rosh Hashonah, however the story would be incomplete without also reading Parshas Nitzavim, since the connection to each generation, Lo Itchem L'Vadchem Anochi Korays HaBris Hazos, is not found in Ki Tavo, but rather in Nitzavim. Therefore reading Nitzavim prior to Rosh Hashonah is in complete agreement with Takanas Ezra, as it is the continuation of the Brachos U'Klalos in Mishne Torah.

The Sinaitic covenant that was built on the patriarchs was a covenant created with the entire Am Yisrael. Everyone, each and every Yachid, is included and responsible, because each of us belongs to the Am, to the Rabim. Ki Am Kadosh Ata, the basis of the sanctity is the Am, the Rabim. That's why the Brachos U'Klalos in B'Chukosay are written in Lashon Rabim, plural, as it was given to the entire nation. However the Krisas Bris in Nitzavim was given in the singular form, to each and every Yachid. It is not just a Krisas Bris with each successive generation, but rather it is a covenant with each and every individual within those generations. Each of us stood before Moshe and the Ark and we accepted the oath administered by Moshe. Moshe is talking about each individual who might say in his heart Shalom Yihye Li, I will go my own way. Moshe warns that individual, that the retribution for such a sin will be great. He is talking to each and every Jew, throughout all the generations.

The Gemara has a concept Mushba V'Omayd M'Har Sinai (regarding Shavua Chal Al Shavua). We were bound by an oath at Sinai. What oath are we referring to? When the judges administer an oath to a litigant, they do so in the same way that Moshe administered an oath to Bnay Yisrael. This oath is given Al Daati V'Al Daas HaMakom (Nedarim 25a), as it says V'Lo Itchem L'Vadchem. We see in the Gemara that Moshe's oath was not based on the Krisas Bris at Chorev, but rather on the Krisas Bris at Har Moav. Yet the term is still Mushba V'Omayd M'Har Sinai. Why? Because we are obligated to observe what we were given at Sinai. An oath can only be administered to an individual, the Klal can't take an oath. If ten people take an oath, they do so as ten individuals not as a group. The Torah says Nefesh Ki Tishava, a Yachid takes an oath. That's why even though we refer to it as Mushba M'Har Sinai, it can only refer to the oath that was taken at Har Moav, where each individual accepted the oath to observe that which was given us at Sinai.

The Gemara (Megila 31b) says that the Brachos U'Klalos in B'Chukosay were given in the plural form and those in Ki Tavo were given in the singular form. (Gittin 60b) Rabbi Yochanan says that Hashem made a separate covenant with Bnay Yisrael to keep the oral law as it says Al Pi Hadevarim Hayleh Karati Itcha Bris V'Es Yisrael (Shmos 34:27). Rabbi Yochanan derives two things from this verse: Ksav Lcha Es Hadevarim Hayleh refers to the written law. Ki Al Pi Hadevarim Hayleh etc. refers to the oral law. Hashem tells Moshe that He will perform miracles that will be seen by the entire nation of which he, Moshe, is a part. When it comes to the written law, Moshe was an individual just like the rest of Bnay Yisrael. There was no separate Krisas Bris with Moshe distinct from the rest of Bnay Yisrael. Moshe had the same obligation to perform Mitzvos just like the rest of Bnay Yisrael.

However with regards to Torah Shbeal Peh, Rabbi Yochanan derived two things. The first is that there was a special Bris with Moshe and the second that there was a separate Krisas Bris with Bnay Yisrael. Why was the oral law, which featured separate Krisas Bris for Moshe and Yisrael, different than the written law, where Moshe was no different than the rest of Bnay Yisrael? Rabbi Yochanan explains that originally the oral law was given only to Moshe. The written law was given to all at once. Moshe was a recipient just like everyone else, he

had no greater share than others. Mesorah does not apply to the written law because it was given as one unit to all. However the oral law was given to Bnay Yisrael through Moshe. Zos Hatorah Asher Sam Moshe Lifnay Bnay Yisrael refers to the written law. All had an equivalent share in that Torah. Al Pi Hashem B'Yad Moshe refers to the oral law that was given through the Mesorah of teacher to student.

The Rambam says in the Hakdamah to Mishneh Torah that Pinchas, Elazar and Joshua all received Torah from Moshe however Joshua was his main student who received the tradition of the oral law from Moshe. When Hashem commanded Moshe to take Joshua aside as leader the Sifri says that he was to be given the Mesorah for the oral law. Pinchas received from Joshua, why did he have to receive it from Joshua if he already was a student of Moshe? We see that there is still a distinction among students in that only one is singled out to carry on the tradition. There can be only one Mekabel from Moshe the teacher, that one was Joshua. Joshua subsequently had the right to hand it over to his student, and he transmitted it to Pinchas.

Rabbi Yochanan said that the Mesorah was given to Moshe as the teacher of Israel and the Shalshelos HaKabbalah, from generation to generation, started with his turning it over to Joshua. The written law was given to all Bnay Yisrael, including Moshe. However the oral law was given to Moshe as the Rebbe of Bnay Yisrael and he had to hand it over to his students, as it says Al Pi Hatorah Karati Itchem Bris.

The Bris on the written law was consummated at Sinai. When was the Bris of the oral law consummated with the people? At Sinai the Bris for the oral law was only consummated with Moshe. It had not yet included the rest of Bnay Yisrael. When were Bnay Yisrael included? On the last day of Moshe's life, only after he completed his role as rebbe. After all, how could he consummate a Krisas Bris with them until he had given them the complete oral law? The written law is a Mchayev, a Mshabed, (it obligates). There is a direct obligation associated with its completeness that obligates the Jew to fulfill the Mitzvos. However at Sinai, Moshe was the only one who received the oral law. It would take the rest of his life to teach them the oral law before they could enter the Krisas Bris of Har Moav, the covenant of the oral law.

At Sinai, Hashem was the Daas Makneh for the written law. Hashem was also Kores Bris and Daas Makenh with Moshe at Sinai for the oral law. However 40 years later when Moshe completed his teaching and gave over the oral law, he was the Daas Makneh and the Kores Bris with Bnay Yisrael and each successive generation. That's why Chazal distinguish between the Brachos U'Klalos in Mishne Torah and those in Toras Kohanim. In Toras Kohanim the covenant was between the entire Kahal and related to the written law that was given to all directly by Hashem. Brachos U'Klalos in Mishne Torah are in the singular form because it was the Bris by which Moshe gave over the Mesorah for the oral law, a Bris that he alone had been given 40 years previously.

Rosh HaShonah is the time that nations are judged, V'al Hamdinos Bo Ye'amar Ayzo Lacherev etc. It is also the day that each individual is judged, V'al Habriyos. Therefore we read Brachos U'Klalos in Mishne Torah in Ki Tavo and Nitzavim prior to Rosh HaShonah, to stress the centrality and importance of the Krisas Bris with the individual regarding the oral law as well as the written law.

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Subj: A Letter from the Rashei Yeshiva Date: 9/13/2001 1:48:04 PM Eastern Daylight Time From: office@etzion.org.il (Yeshivat Har Etzion Office) To: yhe-test@etzion.org.il

A Letter from the Rashei Yeshiva
TO OUR BRETHREN-IN-DISTRESS IN THE WAKE OF THE
TERROR ATTACKS AGAINST AMERICA

Dear Friends, Achim le-tzara,

To the verbal and pictorial tidal wave which has engulfed us since Tuesday's cataclysm, there is little one can - and possibly, should - add. And yet, upon reflection, I find the suggestion that I set down some brief thoughts, to be sent to a Har Etzion constituency to whom they might be meaningful, striking a positive chord. I have no illusion about having anything novel to present. Indeed, in the context of the tragedy and under the impact of its enormity, I should regard the quest for expressive novelty as debasing, as bordering on desecration of the calamity and the memory of the stricken. All I can and seek to offer, as a shaliach tzibbur, is an encapsulated rendering of a Jewish and Israeli response, as experienced and expressed within the enclaves of a beit midrash in the Judean Hills.

At the most basic plane, "thoughts" is of course wide of the mark. Numbing pain, chilling sorrow, gnawing anxiety - all gripping us viscerally rather than cerebrally - obviously comprise our immediate human response. And yet, if our feelings can be communicated at all, we cannot but have recourse to the medium of ideas.

To speak of a Jewish response is not to negate the universal aspect. Commiseration with human suffering as such is endemic to our tradition, expressed, as the Rambam stated (Hilkhot Melakhim 10:12), in key verses:

"For it is written, 'God is good to all, and His mercies are upon all His creatures' (Psalms 145:9), and, 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace' (Proverbs 3:17)."

And presumably, when the tragedy is of such staggering proportions, even the most clannish among us are genuinely grieved. Nevertheless, one can, at this dark hour, discern a specifically Jewish and Israeli response; and this in, primarily, three respects.

The first concerns the locus of the tragedy. New York and its environs is the epicenter of Diaspora Jewry - both demographically and spiritually, by far the largest and most powerful focus of Jewish life in the Golah. Hence, whatever our universal commitment, it is only natural that we are doubly gripped, ethnically and ethically, by its particular suffering.

The second likewise concerns the locus of the catastrophe, but very differently conceived. Our empathy for the victims and their families would be acute even if the World Trade Center or the Pentagon had been demolished by an earthquake. In fact, however, they were attacked by evil incarnate, out of hatred for the United States and what it represents; and, quite apart from the revulsion engendered by bestial inhumanity, that element is inexorably related to the Jewish connection. Broadly speaking, the attacks were conceived and executed as part of an Islamic onslaught against the West, in general, and Christianity, in particular. Patently, however, America's sustained support of Israel and its identification with many of its causes and values was a critical factor, which, for us, adds a significant dimension to the tragedy. Rishonim asserted that a person who is killed by our enemies simply because he is Jewish is regarded as having died "al kiddush Hashem," in sanctification of God's Name, even if he never chose martyrdom and, possibly, is not even a believer. We may reasonably state, analogously, that a country which is attacked because of its support for the Jewish people and its state is likewise credited as having suffered while being engaged in the Ribbono Shel Olam's cause.

What that status, objectively, entails is not for us to surmise. We can, however, subjectively attest to the impact that the Jewish connection has, and should have, upon ourselves. These frightful days have rekindled our sense of what the United States, historically and currently, has been. I speak not only of its present position of global

leadership but of its inherent character and agenda. There is, surely, much to criticize in American culture - aspects of materialism, rugged individualism, crassness, shallowness if not vulgarity; and there is truth to some of Solzhenytsin's strictures decrying the lack of spirituality. None of this, however, should obscure the fact that, more than any other major modern country, it has been, collectively, a prime champion of Avraham Avinu's two principal causes: monotheistic faith (emunah) and generosity - hesed. We have felt anew appreciation, as both awareness and gratitude, of that commitment's having redounded to the benefit of Jewry; and that appreciation has deepened our sorrow and sharpened our anxiety.

Finally, our response is Jewish insofar as it is grounded in Jewish roots regarding relation to suffering in general. I hesitate to speak blandly (in what could indeed be universal religious categories) of the uses of adversity or the merit of acceptance, lest seemingly clichéd religious sensibility be misconstrued as glib insensitivity; and the last thing we might countenance is a facile and remote tsidduk ha-din for the tragedy of others. Surely, however, we ought follow the Rav's counsel: It is not for us to explain suffering but rather to cope with it, morally and religiously, our mettle and our faith being tested, steeled, and humbled within its crucible. We look to the Ribbono Shel Olam for solace and surcease, even as we prayerfully determine to make His cause ours, even as we strive, in purgation and repentance, to ennoble our spiritual self. We are driven to recognize the full force of the midrash which, while commenting on a verse addressed, in its direct context, to kneset Israel, nevertheless has clear universal import:

"I, even I, am He that comforts you' (Isaiah 51:12) - Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said: It is the way of a father to have mercy, as it is written, 'As a father has mercy on his children;' and it is the way of a mother to console, as it is written, 'As one whose mother consoles him.' The Holy One, blessed be He, said: I act as father and mother." (Yalkut Shimoni, 474)

Particularly, in these days of judgment and mercy, as we fuse prayer for the redemptive epiphany of "Melokh al kol ha-olam bi-khevodekha, ve-hinase al kol ha-aretz bi-yekarekha" - "Reign over the entire world in Your glory, and be exalted over all the earth in Your grandeur" - with the quest for personal and collective teshuvah, we share in the searing grief and in the yearning for rehabilitation.

"For the enemy has persecuted my soul; he has trodden my life down into the ground; he has made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead ... I stretch forth my hands to You; my soul thirsts after You, like a thirsty land. Answer me speedily, O Lord; my spirit fails; do not hide Your face from me, lest I be like those who go down into the pit. Cause me to hear Your words of steadfast love in the morning, for in You do I trust; cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You ... Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; let Your gracious spirit lead me on level ground." (Psalms 143)

With best wishes for personal and collective ketiva va-chatima tova for a year of life and peace,

Aharon Lichtenstein

To our brothers and sisters in the United States, and to their relatives in Israel and elsewhere, may God bless you from Zion:

During this most difficult and tragic hour, we are all a single family, Jews and gentiles alike - all the nations of the world. All nations, that is, with the exception of those who removed themselves from the community of mankind and destroyed the image of God with which they were created. They destroyed it to the point of non-recognition, and became like beasts of prey.

My heart - and all of our hearts - is with the many victims, Jews and non-Jews; my heart, and all of our hearts, goes out to the families who, in a matter of seconds, lost their loved ones.

"O Lord God of retribution, O God of retribution - appear!"
(Psalms 94: . Avenge the blood of Your creatures who were murdered so cruelly.

Dear brothers and sisters, we know that the villains who attacked New York and Washington, killing thousands of people whom they considered infidels, intended also to undermine Western culture, which is based on principles originating in the Torah and in the words of the prophets. We are confident that the United States will very soon recover from the devastating blow it suffered and show wisdom, stamina and strength in its war against these despicable forces.

I would like to emphasize an additional point. From the time of our forefather Abraham, the Nation of Israel has been dedicated to sanctifying God's Name in the world. As members of this nation, we cannot ignore the appalling "chillul Hashem," the desecration of God's Name that occurred before the entire world. These evil people murdered in the name of our God, the Lord of the universe; they killed thousands in their fanatical and cruel belief that they were carrying out God's will. As we rend our garments as a sign of bereavement for the victims, we must tear them as well for the terrible chillul Hashem that has occurred. We also plead with the Almighty: Look and see what these wicked people have done to us and what they have done to Your great and sacred Name! "You, our God - cast them down to the nethermost pit, for they are murderous, treacherous men," as King David writes in his Psalms (55:24).

The Talmud (Shabbat 77b) describes five fears that exist in the world, including the elephant's fear of the mosquito. A mosquito can cause the elephant pain, but it can never overcome or even debilitate it. The People of Israel sense deep feelings of friendship towards the United States for all it has done for the Jews and the State of Israel. We are confident that, please God, America will claim its leadership role, with even greater vigor, as a world power.

In the Days of Awe soon to be upon us, we pray, "Instill Your fear within all Your beings, and Your Awe within all that You created; and all beings will fear You, and all creatures will bow before You." I believe that the free Western world must, during this time, do some soulsearching as well. It must examine itself to see whether it had an exaggerated sense of self-confidence as a result of its technological strength and scientific achievements. Western society sometimes projected a sense that we can manage without divine assistance. It now turns out that the world, even in our time, needs God's grace.

We are reminded of Isaiah's prophecy (2:12-17):

"For the day of the Lord of Hosts shall be upon all that is proud and arrogant, against all that is lofty - that it shall be brought low: Against all the cedars of Lebanon, tall and stately, and all the oaks of Bashan; against all the high mountains and all the lofty hills; against every soaring tower and every mighty wall; against all the ships of Tarshish and all the gallant barks. Then the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down And the pride of men shall be made low; And the Lord alone shall be exalted on that day."

Since time immemorial we pray on Rosh Ha-shana on behalf of the Jewish People and on behalf of all nations: "All inhabitants of the world pass before Him like sheep."

This year, as we stand in prayer on the Days of Awe, we hope to intensify our prayers for peace upon all of us. We will pray for our well-being here, in the Holy Land, where over the course of the past year we have found ourselves engaged in a difficult struggle.

We will pray for the well-being of our Jewish brethren, wherever they are. We will pray for the well-being of the entire world.

We will pray for the well-being of the many wounded, that the Almighty shall grant them a complete recovery from the heavens.

May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year,
Yehuda Amital

<http://www.shemayisrael.co.il/parsha/peninim/index.htm>

Peninim Nitzavim

By RABBI LEIB SCHEINBAUM

Perhaps there is among you a root flourishing with gall and wormwood. (29:17)

And you will return unto Hashem, your G-d, and listen to His voice.(30:3)

A remarkable contrast between two people: the one who defies rebuke, laughing it off with disdain and derision; and the baal teshuvah, penitent, who hears Hashem's call, who responds to His voice, and returns wholeheartedly. Two people - or could it be one person, one individual in different stages of his spiritual development? Is it possible for the hard-core sinner, the individual who mocks Hashem and His followers bitterly, to return and be accepted? It is certainly possible for him to be accepted: Hashem is a loving Father Who waits patiently for His errant child. How does one whose attitude is likened to a bitter root, however, change from one extreme to another? We do not always know what turns someone on, because we are not always aware of what has turned them off. If we fail to properly diagnose the illness, we will have a difficult time discerning a cure.

Rabbi Paysach Krohn tells a story about the Klausenberger Rebbe, zl, which demonstrates this idea. The Rebbe was a unique individual. His love for all Jews was legendary. He had an especially keen interest in children. Immediately following World War II and its accompanying atrocities against the Jewish People, the Rebbe opened a yeshiva and a Bais Yaakov school in a Displaced Persons camp. The conditions were dismal and lamentable, but Torah study, the lifeblood of our People, has to continue. One day, the Rebbe was told about Meshullam, a young man who had succumbed to the heresy that followed Hitler's holocaust of our People. Until the age of sixteen, Meshullam had exhibited signs of becoming an incredible talmid chacham, Torah scholar. He was exceptionally diligent in his Torah study and meticulous in his mitzvah observance. Then came the Holocaust. Having lost most of his family and observed the tragedy that befell so many others, he rejected his Judaism, undermining any attempt to bring him back to observance.

The Rebbe was not a person to take "no" for an answer, especially when a Yiddishe neshamah, Jewish soul, hung in the balance. He asked that the bachur, young man, be brought to him. When Meshullam entered the Rebbe's room, the Rebbe motioned for him to sit down next to him. "I am told that you are the son of Reb Laibish, whom I knew very well," the Rebbe said. "Yes," Meshullam responded, glibly. He was not going to be lulled into any conversation about Judaism and faith in G-d. He knew it all, and he had rejected it after Auschwitz. For him, the world of religion was something of the past.

"They tell me you were once a great masmid, diligent in your studies, back home. Is this true?" the Rebbe asked in a non-confrontational tone. Knowing fully well the significance of Torah study to the Rebbe, he decided not to give the Rebbe the pleasure of telling him that at one time he had conformed to the demands of religion and loved Torah study. He simply nodded to the Rebbe's question.

"But, now you are angry," the Rebbe said in a soft, soothing tone. "Of course, I am angry," he blurted out. "How could I tolerate the heinous, brutal destruction of so many people? The best were taken from us, the finest are lost forever, and you expect me not to be angry!"

The Rebbe lovingly extended his hand and touched Meshullam's face, telling him, "You are so right. I also suffered heavy losses. They took my beloved wife and eleven children and murdered them. I was left alone, with nothing. You are right. The best were taken from us and look at what is left." With these words the Rebbe suddenly burst out in tears and began to sob. As the pent-up emotion poured from him, Meshullam also began to cry. Together, the Rebbe and Meshullam mourned their losses on each other's shoulders.

It was no longer necessary for the Rebbe to say anything. Rebuke was not and had never been a factor. There was so much bitterness bottled up in Meshullam that only needed a release. The Rebbe was that catalyst. Words were not necessary. Tears, streams of tears, an outpouring of emotion is what Meshullam needed. The Rebbe understood this - while others, regrettably, did not. Meshullam returned, because the Klausenberger Rebbe understood his need. It is unfortunate that more people like Meshullam did not connect with someone of the caliber of the Klausenberger Rebbe.

The hidden (sins) are for Hashem, our G-d, but the revealed (sins) are for us and for our children forever. (29:28)

Simply, we are not held responsible for those sinners who hide their evil. The hidden sinners are in Hashem's province. Our focus must be on those whose evil is blatant, who have no shame and no fear. Our lack of response to those sins and sinners - and in some cases, our open acceptance of their evil - impugns the integrity of Klal Yisrael. In an alternative exegesis, the Belzer Rebbe, zl, suggests that nistaros and niglos, "hidden" and "revealed," refer to mitzvos and good deeds, but not to sins. His pshat, rendering of the pasuk, is better understood in light of the following story:

A man was once called in from the street to join a minyan, quorum, being held in a private home for a group of aveilim, mourners. The minyan was being held in an apartment in a very frum, observant, section of Yerushalayim. He was, therefore, surprised to see that the mourners and a number of the minyan attendees were wearing their yarmulkes perched precariously on their heads to indicate that wearing a yarmulke was not a common occurrence for them. Yet, when he looked around the room it appeared like the home of a devout Jew. The shelves were filled with seforim, volumes of Torah literature, that were well-worn and used. This enigma was even more puzzling as a result of the fact that many of the seforim had notes and observations penciled in alongside the text. What was going on here?

After Mincha, the guest could no longer contain himself. He went over to one of the mourners and asked for an explanation, "Do any of the deceased's children use his books?" he asked, judiciously attempting to find out if any of the siblings might be observant. "No, he was the only one that was observant. You see, when my father came home from work, he would quickly execute his fatherly responsibilities and proceed to lock himself for the rest of the evening in his study, immersed in his precious books. Although we knew he was studying in there, this knowledge was basically hearsay, because we never actually saw him studying Torah."

What a living tragedy! Children learn from their parents. When children see their parents studying Torah, when they observe how their parents value Torah study, they learn to also value and appreciate it. This applies to chesed, acts of kindness, as well. Children should share in their parents good deeds. Make them a part of the endeavor. It is certainly more important and enduring than playing baseball with them. The most important memories children look back on when they become parents are related to the quality time they spent with their parents. How we spend this time with them will determine what aspect of our relationship with them they will remember and eternalize.

Let us return to the Belzer Rebbe's homiletic rendering of the pasuk. He explains that as Moshe Rabbeinu was about to take leave of his beloved nation, he turned to them and said, "The hidden things are Hashem's, but the revealed ones are for us and our children." If we act righteously but keep these acts hidden; if we do not include our children in our meritorious activities; if they are not privy to our Torah study and acts of chesed, then only Hashem will know of the honorable and upright way we lived. Our children will remain unaware and, consequently, uninspired. If we see to it, however, that our positive actions are revealed to our children, then these good deeds will become a part of the family

legacy as we impart our noble actions to the next generation to carry them on.

RABBI LIPMAN PODOLSKY

Yeshivat Hakotel

I often meet orthodox Jews who maintain a standard of observance that they have inherited from previous generations. They don't seem to grow; neither do they seem to have any desire to. They are complacent.

When probed about why they keep the mitzvos, they usually reply with the old cliché: "This is how I was raised." No thought or choice is ever made. On the contrary, it sometimes seems as though they would prefer to avoid having to choose, at all costs. "Don't rock the boat!"

For some reason, this type of Judaism never sat well with me and to this day I labor to imbue in my students with the need to think. Never should we act as robots, as victims of brainwashing. Hashem gave us a mind, and as the familiar advertisement asserts, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste."

Our Parsha introduces us to the mitzvah of Teshuva. How apropos! Teshuva is certainly at the top of our agenda as we approach the Ten Days of Teshuva. Once again we clearly see that there is nothing coincidental about Torah.

Our Parsha, however, begins with an unusual statement. "You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem... (Devarim 29:9)." At that moment the Jews were, apparently, standing before Hashem. Was it truly necessary to remind them of something so patently obvious? Of what significance was their physical pose?

Rav Elya Meir Bloch zt"l, the Telzer Rosh Yeshiva, offers an inspirational insight (Eitz HaDaas). The prerequisite for Teshuva is to stand before Hashem. First and foremost a person must stop moving, cease all activity, and think. Face Hashem! And contemplate.

The vast majority of people act without thought. We tend to "go with the flow"; our lives run on inertia. Never do we pause to think. To reflect. To decide!

How often do we stop to really think? Consider how much noise invades our lives. Some of it is environmental. But much of it we inflict upon ourselves in a desperate bid to avoid thinking altogether. Of course we don't look at it that way. "I enjoy music, so what's so bad about constantly listening to my Walkman?" But when do we think?

Are we afraid to think? Are we afraid what we might discover about ourselves and about the world in which we live? If we have questions for which we know no answers, let us ask the experts. To cease seeking truth is not the way of Torah. Throughout the Middle Ages, the church did its best to limit its believers to a life of ignorance. Questioning was discouraged, to say the least. Most laymen remained functionally illiterate. But Jews always learned, always inquired, always chose.

"See, I have placed before you today the life and the good, and the death and the evil... (Devarim 30:15)." Hashem placed us at a crossroads and demanded that we choose. Contrary to popular misconception, Judaism is not based primarily on action; it is based on choosing which action to perform and then doing our utmost to carry it out.

True, by placing the power of choice into our hands Hashem exposed us to the risk that we may potentially choose incorrectly. Nevertheless, Hashem wanted us to make the choice. We have to earn our good. That's all part of growing up.

"I have placed life and death before you, blessing and curse; and you shall choose life, so that you will live, you and your offspring... (Devarim 30:19)." This is Torah in a nutshell. Ideally, everything we do should be preceded by a decision to do it. By making a choice, we constantly reaffirm and intensify our connection to Sinai, to the original decision of Naaseh v'Nishma.

And this is the essence of Teshuva. Teshuva is not merely looking back. A complete Teshuva requires a concrete plan of action for the

future. Where do we go from here? What practical steps can we take to help ensure that past mistakes will not repeat themselves? And most importantly, how can we incorporate the all-important aspect of kavanna/focus into our every Avodah? How can I learn to think before I act?

The choice, simply stated, is ours!

Subj: Drasha - Parshas Nitzavim -- After the Ashes Date: 9/12/2001 4:02:30 PM Eastern Daylight Time From: rmk@torah.org (Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky) To: drasha@torah.org

I wrote these words before the devastating and horrific acts of terror on Tuesday morning. After a few addendums, I send them with a weary heart -- one that is charred with the pain of a nation, but with the faith to go forward. May Hashem send solace and strength to all the bereaved.

This week's Drasha is dedicated in memory of Reb Yisrael ben Eliezer by the Hirshman Family

Parshas Nitzavim -- Up from the Ashes

As his final days draw near, Moshe in his capacity as compassionate leader qua reproving prophet warns his nation to adhere to the mitzvos even after they leave his watch. He warns of those who may be smug in their complacency, and overtly defy G-d's will. "Perhaps there is among you a man or woman, or a family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from being with Hashem, our G-d, to go and serve the gods of those nations; perhaps there is among you a root flourishing with gall and wormwood. And it will be that when he hears the words of this forewarning, he will bless himself in his heart, saying, "Peace will be with me, though I walk as my heart sees fit" -- thereby adding the watered upon the thirsty" (Deuteronomy 29:17-18).

Moshe warns the Jews of the wrath of Hashem at such overt rebellion and apathy. "Sulfur and salt, a conflagration of the entire Land, it cannot be sown and it cannot sprout, and no grass shall rise up on it; like the upheaval of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which Hashem overturned in His anger and wrath." (ibid v. 20). Moshe continues his predictions of obliteration and doom, presciently foretelling of tragedies strikingly similar to those that befell Jewish communities beginning with the Babylonian Exile to the apocalyptic destruction of European Jewry to perhaps the daily acts of devastations that seem to permeate our sense of normalcy on a daily basis.

But in a verse that seems paradoxically both cryptic and revealing, Moshe comforts his flock with the words, "The hidden is for Hashem, our G-d, but the revealed are for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah" (ibid v. 28). What does that mean? Do we not know that only G-d can see hidden actions. Is that a message of hope or a warning to vision-limited mortals? Rabbi Berel Wein relates the story of Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog's visit to Chicago, Illinois following World War II. The entire Torah-revering community gathered at the airport. All the day schools and Yeshivos sent their students to greet the Rabbi, and many prominent lay leaders left their businesses to join as well.

Rabbi Herzog, his distinguished frame, unbent from the enduring pain of the plight of his brothers and sisters, in Europe and Palestine, walked upstanding and tall down the silver airplane steps, his silver tipped cane in one hand, his head majestically adorned with his signature top hat.

He was led to a podium from which he delivered a lecture on a complicated portion of the Talmud.

When he finished, his face immediately lost its radiance, and became somber and staid.

"I come not from Jerusalem," he told the assembled, "I come from Rome. I have just met with Pope Pious.

During the terrible war, many children were sheltered in monasteries across Europe. The kind Christians saved them from the Nazis. I asked

him to release those children, back to their heritage. Let them be raised as Jews." Suddenly, to the shock of the children and the awe of the adults, the Rabbi began to cry.

"The Pope did not acquiesce. He said that once a child is baptized, he can never be returned."

Rabbi Herzog trembled as he continued to sob uncontrollably. He looked at the assembled children

"My dear children," he wailed, "We lost them! Then his demeanor changed, as a ray of hope sparkled from his eyes. "We lost them," he repeated, "but," he continued, as he locked his eyes at the young faces, who stared directly at his teary eyes, "WE HAVE YOU! WE HAVE YOU!"

Moshe warns his kinsman that Jews will one day go astray; they will be exiled, with calamitous results. Perhaps his next prescient words imply rhetorical answers to the questions of faith we will have about the innocent victims of those calamitous conquests, crusades, and crematoriums, and contrived calamities.

Moshe tells us that there are no all-encompassing answers for mortal minds. The answers are hidden. Similar to the souls in question, the answers are with G-d. And so, after warning of doom and disaster, Moshe explains, "The hidden is for Hashem, our G-d."

We, those remaining, however, must deal with what we do know. We must comfort and place our hopes with the remnants of the charred edifices and face the future. We must build from the ashes of our despair, whether it be the ashes of Auschwitz or the embers of eateries in Jerusalem, or the scarred skeletons of a skyline. For those we lose are now "hidden, with Hashem," but as Moshe taught us, "the revealed are for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah."

1 2001 Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky Good Shabbos

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