

Meshech Chochmah Parshas Nitzavim

Returning to Hear Hashem's Voice

כִּי תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוּמֵר מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו הַכְּתוּבָה בְּסֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה כִּי תָשׁוּב אֵל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ

When you listen to the voice of Hashem, your God, to observe His commandments and His decrees, that are written in this book of the Torah, when you shall return to Hashem, your God, with all your heart and all your soul (30:10)

The opening pesukim of Perek 30 are devoted to the concept of teshuvah. Our pasuk links the idea of teshuvah with that of listening to Hashem's voice as expressed in the Torah. On the face of it, the nature of this connection is that when a person does teshuvah, they are then *prepared* to listen to Hashem's voice; something which they may have been avoiding beforehand. However, the Meshech Chochmah discusses a deeper element to this connection, explaining that doing teshuvah actually *enables* a person to hear Hashem's voice as written in the Torah.

What the Heart Lets Through the Eyes

A person who is in a pre-teshuvah state is possessed by the attitude expressed earlier on in the parsha: "בְּשִׁרְרוֹת לִבִּי אֵלֶּךָ – I will go as my heart sees fit."¹ This attitude guides not only their behavior, but also their perception; for a person is naturally reluctant to be confronted with a message from Hashem telling them that their path is misguided and reprehensible. As such, even if the person will look into the Torah, it is possible that he will not actually hear what it is saying, for he may "adapt" its message into one which condones and even endorses his actions. It is only when a person is prepared to teshuvah that he will be able to hear what the Torah is actually saying without distorting or contorting its message. Hence, our pasuk states that the stage when you are able to "listen to the voice of Hashem" is directly linked to – and resultant from – the time that "you return to Hashem with all your heart and all your soul."

¹ 29:18.

Opportunities and Responsibilities

רְאֵה נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם אֶת הַחַיִּים וְאֶת הַטּוֹב וְאֶת הַמָּוֶת וְאֶת הָרָע

See, I have placed before you today life and good, and death and evil (30:15)

It is interesting to compare this pasuk with the very similar sounding opening pasuk of Re'eh: “רְאֵה אֲנֹכִי נֹתֵן לְפָנֶיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה” – See, I present before you blessing and curse.”² Why does the earlier pasuk mention only “blessing” and “curse”, while our pasuk adds the more extreme consequences of “life” and “death”?

Opportunity Costs

The Meshech Chochmah explains that in between these two pesukim the Torah has introduced another element into the equation – the concept of Teshuvah, as discussed in the beginning of perek 30. Teshuvah brings with it the incredible opportunity to erase all of one’s aveiros; but that opportunity does not exist in a vacuum. To understand why this is so, he refers us to a comment of the Vilna Gaon in his Commentary to Pirkei Avos. The first Mishnah of the third perek mentions the concepts of “דִּין וְחִשְׁבוֹן” – judgment and accounting.” What is the difference between these terms? The Gaon explains:

- **Judgment** – refers to the judgment passed on someone for committing an aveirah.
- **Accounting** – refers to the mitzvos that a person could have done during the time he committed the aveirah.

The implications of this idea for Teshuvah is that the opportunity to do Teshuvah and erase all of one’s aveiros brings with it the indictment of someone who neglects to take advantage of it. There is room to say that the “accounting” for foregoing this opportunity exceeds any sin a person may have committed. Therefore, the earlier pasuk, which precede the Torah’s introduction of the concept of Teshuvah, describes the consequences of our actions in terms of

² Devarim 11:26.

“blessing” and “curse”. With the introduction of Teshuvah, those consequences rise in scale, so that they encompass “life” – for one who embraces Teshuvah’s rehabilitating capacity, and “death” – for one who neglects to do so.

In this regard, pasuk 19 of our perek states: “הַעִידֹתִי בְכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ – *I call heaven and earth today to bear witness against you, I have placed life and death before you.*” With these words, Moshe emphasizes that in light of what he has presented “today”, i.e. the mitzvah of Teshuvah described earlier in the perek, the consequences of the direction one takes are life and death themselves, “וּבְחַרְתָּ בַחַיִּים – and you shall choose life!”

A Justified Blessing

In a later section in our Parsha,³ the Meshech Chochmah comments similarly that the day which embodies the power of Teshuvah is, of course, Yom Kippur. On this day, every individual’s Teshuvah is answered with forgiveness and the Satan has no power to accuse. It is no wonder, therefore, that we usher in the day with the berachah of *she’hechyanu*, thanking Hashem for allowing us to reach this special day. Yet for this very reason, the “*cheshbon*” accounting for a person who neglected to use the day would be too terrible to contemplate. In this respect, the only prospect worse than no Yom Kippur is a Yom Kippur that remains unopened and unused. Therefore, the *she’hechyanu* that we recite with the advent of Yom Kippur should signify not only our joy over arriving at this day, but also serve to exhort us to take full advantage of its benefits and opportunities.

כתיבה וחתימה טובה!

³ 30:20 s.v. *Din*.