



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

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Parshat Nitzavim contains what we often call *Parshat HaTeshuva* — the Torah's description of the process of returning to *Hashem*.

But perhaps the most remarkable aspect of these pesukim is that they do not describe *teshuvah* merely as a *mitzvah* or an aspiration, but as a **promise**.

“והיה כי יבאו עליך כל הדברים האלה... ושבת עד ה' אלקיך ושמעת בקלו... ושב ה' אלקיך את שבותך ורחמך.”

There is a striking progression in these words.

“ושבת עד ה' אלקיך” — you will return toward *Hashem*.

And then:

“ושב ה' אלקיך את שבותך” — *Hashem* will return and restore you.

The *Torah* seems to be telling us that *teshuvah* is not simply a journey that we undertake alone. There is a Divine promise embedded within the journey itself: when we turn toward *Hashem*, *Hashem* turns toward us.

This may help us understand the famous words that follow:

“כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוך היום לא נפלאה היא ממך ולא רחוקה היא... כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפך ובלבבך לעשותו.”

Rashi explains that the *Torah* is not hidden or inaccessible; it has been brought close to us.

Rabbeinu Bachaya similarly emphasizes the accessibility of this *mitzva*, expressed through “בפך ובלבבך.”

And the *Ramban* famously understands “כי המצוה הזאת” as referring to the *mitzva* of *teshuvah*.

But if *teshuvah* means genuine change, why does the *Torah* describe it as something so close?

Perhaps because the *Torah* is not promising that change will always be easy. It is promising that **return will always remain possible**.

A person can become distant. We can make mistakes, develop habits that are difficult to break, and sometimes feel that the distance between who we are and who we want to be has become too great.

The *Torah*'s response is simple:

“לא בשמים היא... ולא מעבר לים היא.”

Teshuvah is never beyond our reach.

And then the *Torah* takes the promise one step further:

“ומל ה' אלקיך את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך לאהבה את

ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך.”

At the beginning of the process, **we return**.

At the end, *Hashem* **circumcises the heart**.

There is a dimension of *teshuvah* that we must initiate, but there is also a dimension that is ultimately the work of *Hashem*.

The *Sefat Emet*, the *Gerrer Rebbe zy'a*, in

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his discussion of these *pesukim*, emphasizes that the inner world of a Jew remains connected to *Hashem*, even when our perspective and understanding have become obscured. *Teshuva* is therefore not the creation of an entirely new self, but the return to an inner world, one's true self, that has never disappeared.

Rav Kook zy'a develops this idea in *Orot HaTeshuva* in a broader and deeply hopeful way. *Teshuva* is not simply a reaction to our mistakes, and result of the desire to shed ourselves of the guilt of our past misdeeds, rather *teshuva* is a fundamental movement within life itself—a return to one's true self, and ultimately to one's source, to *Hashem*.

Seen this way, *teshuva* is not only something we are commanded to do, rather something the *Torah* **promises will remain possible**.

Perhaps that is the significance of the repeated language of return in *Nitzavim*:

“ושבת”
“ושב”

“וימל'ה' אלקיך את לבך.”

We turn toward *Hashem*, and *Hashem* turns toward us.

The promise of *teshuva* is therefore not that we will never fall, nor that change will always be easy. It is something more fundamental:

We are never beyond return.

As we approach *Rosh Hashana*, perhaps that is enough to hear in the words of our verse:

“כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד.”

The way back remains close and the *Torah* promises that when we begin to take that first step, *Hashem* will meet us there, and help us to move forward.

Yehi Ratzon, may we indeed be blessed to experience this great promise of return.

Shabbat Shalom. ■



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