

5) Moshe is warned by Hashem) The Lord) that the people will leave Hashem and follow other gods after Moshe's death (31:15-21). Why do you think that Hashem tells this to Moshe (who is about to die)? Does He give Moshe any hope for the future?



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The weekly Haftarah Commentary  
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## TORAH SPARKS

### *Parashat Nitsavim & Vayelekh*

September 15-16, 2017 • 25 Elul 5777

Annual (Deuteronomy 29:9-31:30): Etz Hayim p. 1165-1179; Hertz p. 878-891  
Triennial (Deuteronomy 29:9-30:14): Etz Hayim p. 1165-1171; Hertz p. 878-882  
Haftarah (Isaiah 61:10-63:9): Etz Hayim p. 1180-1184; Hertz p. 883-886

## Choose Life!

**Ben Richards**, Student, the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, and CY Alumnus

"I cause heaven and earth to witness upon you today. I put life and death before you, blessing and curse. And you shall choose life, in order that you shall live, you and your offspring" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

This choice presented in parshat Nitzavim is a seemingly straightforward one, choose life and you shall live. Yet it is the statement a verse later (30:20) which is key to the actual process. Choose life "by loving the Lord your God, listening to His commands, and cleaving to Him." The act of "choosing life" involves loving God, and following His rules, and drawing near to Him. What seems to be a seemingly straightforward command becomes significantly more complex when considered in the context of these three commitments.

One of the most well-known pieces of the High Holiday liturgy is the *Unetaneh Tokef* prayer. It is a prayer that asks the questions of who shall live and who shall pass onto death, and, for the latter, what form such death will take. "Who by fire, and who by water? Who by sword, and who

by beast?" But at its end this prayer contains a three-fold formula that is meant to enable us to avert the decrees of death. The three things that can save from death are *teshuvah* (repentance), *tefilah* (prayer), and *tzedakah* (giving charity). The end result of engaging in prayer, repentance, and giving is the same as by engaging in the acts prescribed in verse 30:20 above, for the person who chooses life.

Although seemingly distinct passages, one can find alignment between these two sets of three. *Teshuvah*, the act of repentance, does seem like a way to demonstrate a love of God (especially relating to repentance directed towards God). Listening to God's commands or voice has an interesting juxtaposition with *tefilah*, or prayer, which often involves using our voices to call out to a listening God. And the act of *tzedakah*, reaching out our hand to help another, certainly sounds like cleaving to an "other," and cleaving to God.

By choosing to emulate God in the world, we choose life. *Teshuvah*, *tefilah*, and *tzedakah* are all acts of God, as evidenced by many examples in Jewish tradition. For instance, in Genesis God does *teshuvah* and promises not to destroy the world again (8:21). The Talmud speaks of how God engages in *tefilah* and even has His own set of tefillin containing passages about the Jewish people (Berachot 6a). And God gives *tzedakah*, giving Avraham and his descendants the land of Israel as an inheritance because of His love for His future people.

These are Godly acts, but they are also available to people. They are the methods by which we may be godly and choose life.

At times, we must be willing to humble ourselves before others and ask forgiveness, and do *teshuvah*.

At times, we must be willing to cry out in prayer and supplication, and do *tefilah*.

And at times, we must go above and beyond in taking care of one another, and give *tzedakah*.

To strive to do any less is to choose curse instead of blessing. To choose death instead of life.

## A Vort for Parashat Nitsavim & Vayelekh

*Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb, Editor, Torah Sparks*

*Teferet Shomo* (R' Shlomo Rabinowicz, 1800-1866, the first rebbe of Hasidut Radomsk, Poland), explained why, having said in 30:2 "you will return unto the Lord", the Torah says "you will return and heed the voice of the Lord" in 30:8. Only by making *tshuva* can we begin to comprehend our sins, so when a person makes *tshuva* his grasp of his past behaviors becomes clearer; which in turn enables him to make more serious *tshuva*, and indeed understand more. Quite a deep psychological insight for someone who lived almost a century before Freud.

## Table Talk

*Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, CY Faculty*

*This Shabbat we will read 2 Parashot, but even when combined they are shorter than many single Parashot. You might find some material especially appropriate for this time of the Jewish year.*

1) In the ceremony to rectify the covenant with God (28:9-12) Moshe lists all who are participants in this ceremony. What ranks of society are included? What does it tell us about who the Torah considers to be part of the people?

2) Should we choose to leave our God and follow those of other nations, we will be thrown out of the land. But that is not the end of the story. According to 30:1-10 what might happen next? Who will take the first initiative? How will God respond? Is this a personal or national *Teshuva*?

3) We are assured that the Mitzvah is not distant and unattainable (30:11-14). What do you think is meant by 'the Mitzvah' in v.11? What do we need in order to be able to observe it?

4) In one of his last speeches to the people, Moshe tells them who will go before them to conquer the land (31:3-6). Who is listed first? What is Joshua's role? What will be the people's role?