



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

## Nitzavim 5782

### Can Good Come From Affluence?

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered September 2, 1972)

**T**he question in this title sounds strange indeed. It might be more appropriate coming from the context of Christianity, which is frank in its prejudice against the affluent, holding that the chances are indeed poor for a rich man to enter the “kingdom of heaven.” Judaism, however, has never entertained such economic discrimination. It believes in צדקה to the poor, but it does not deny גמילת חסדים (lending money) to the rich too. It holds to the ideal of absolute justice, and this may not be weighed in favor of the rich or even the poor – ודל לא תהדר בריבו, you may not discriminate in favor of the poor and thus cause a miscarriage of justice.

Why, then, bother to ask the question?

My explanation is that the question is based on the practicalities of sociology, not the abstractions of theology. Of course we do not discriminate against the rich – the Talmud even tells us that רבי מכבד עשירים, Rabbi Judah respected rich people. But the hard fact of life is that success often leads to failure, that material plenty is frequently the prelude to spiritual poverty. Moses already complained וישמן ישורון ויבעט, that when Israel grows fat it begins to rebel against God. Maimonides plaintively noted that in his generation when a man became wealthy or achieved social or political prominence, he began to leave his Judaism, and that the degree of his defection was in clear proportion to the degree of his rise on the social ladder. In the United States, as a general rule (but with significant exceptions), the spectrum of Orthodox-Conservative-Reform follows an ascending economic pattern. So, unfortunately, economic opportunity and social mobility, which are the pride of the United States, present a formidable challenge to Jewish tradition and continuity.

The question, then, does make sense: can good come from affluence?

In attempting to answer the question, let us look at our Sidra and especially at the פרשת התשובה, the portion which speaks of repentance – both the challenge to repent and the promise that our people some day will repent collectively. This portion appears immediately after the description of the ברית (covenant) which Israel entered. The repentance portion begins “and it shall be that when all these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse,” that you will return to God.

Now, one can understand that קללה – curse – can lead to repentance. Man sees failure and frustration all around him; he experiences the transience of life, the ephemeral quality of his achievements, the impermanence of his conquests; he sees all his triumphs reduced to ashes and life turning sour in his mouth; and he realizes that all his social and economic accomplishments are empty and vain. In disillusionment with the material world and its chimerical nature, he turns to God, recognizing that only in Torah and in the life of the spirit can man attain immortality. But how does man come to תשובה through ברכה? Indeed, does blessing and affluence ever inspire a man to spiritual eminence?

The answer is: yes! Blessing too can lead to turning to God, but it requires moral excellence and spiritual heroism. A Hasidic teacher once said: how hard is it for a rich man to believe in God! He comes to his lavish home or to his big business, and all his possessions cry out to him, “believe in us!” And so he believes in them – and not in God...

Yet, this is the way that a true religious spirit manifests itself. A man who has come to God and to Torah because of the experience of קללה (curse), is never quite sure of why he turned toward his Creator. But if he becomes affluent, if fortune smiles upon him and his conditions improve, and nevertheless he remains a good Jew and a loyal and

observant son of his people, this reveals that his original religious inclinations were genuine, that his spirituality was authentic, that his Judaism was not social but real. He had come to Torah and to God not only through קללה but through ברכה as well; not through failure but through success; not through adversity but through affluence.

A great Hasidic scholar, the author of “בני יששכר,” makes the following incisive comment on the verse we recite at the end of ברכת המזון (Grace): יראו את ה' כי אין מחסור ליראיו: “fear the Lord, O His holy ones, for those who fear Him shall have no want.” Now, that is a patently strange remark. Surely there are many pious people who are in want and in need. Indeed, were statistics available, we might discover that it is the pious who suffer more want than the impious, the observant who are more needy than the unobservant, the religious who are more stricken than the non-observant. What then do these words mean? The author of “בני יששכר” answers: the meaning is this – the holy ones of the Lord should fear Him, and not because of מחסור any need or physical want that they experience in their lives!

American Jewry, for all its problems and concerns and its newly discovered poor, is still a quite affluent community. And hence the challenge to us is: תשובה through ברכה and not through קללה, to do the good out of affluence and not out of adversity. It is not easy. It is not

easy at all, especially with regard to children. The affluence of parents apparently makes living easier for children – but life more difficult to fulfill. Yet, תשובה that comes through ברכה is infinitely superior to תשובה that comes through קללה.

What is the source for attaining good through affluence? We can become more authentically Jewish by being more truly Jewish. By that I mean, a true Jew is one who lives up to his name, and the name “Jew” is derived, via the word “Judean,” from the name Judah or Yehudah, the son of Jacob and Leah. He was called by this name, the Bible tells us, when Leah proclaimed at his birth הפעם אודה את ה', “this time I will thank the Lord.” In other words, the word Jew means – “thank God.” The principle of gratitude is enshrined in the very name of the Jew. And when a man feels grateful for his blessings, he turns to God.

This is the best way in which to enter the סליחות season and the new year. Gratitude must remain the greatest spur to repentance.

May the Almighty grant us a year in which affluence and ברכות of all kinds will surround us, and through them may we achieve תשובה and return to Him. May it be a year of life, plenty, of happiness, of spiritual eminence – לברכה ולא לקללה.

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## Where Are You Going?

Rabbi Joshua (*The Hoffer*) Hoffman z”l

Parshas Vayeilech begins with the words “And Moshe went (Vayeilech Moshe) and spoke these words to all of Yisroel (Devarim 31:1). Where did he go? R. Avraham Ibn Ezra says that he went to each tribe, to comfort them over his imminent death, and to strengthen and encourage them by appointing Yehoshua as his successor. Interestingly, the Midrash Tanchuma, cited by Rav Mordechai Ilan in his Mikdash Mordechai, says that “and he went” as used here, is an expression of rebuke. Rav Ilan suggests an explanation of what kind of rebuke is implied here, but I would like to explain this midrash on the basis of an idea presented by Rabbi Dov Berel Wein in his *BaMesillah Na’aleh*.”

Rabbi Wein connects the word “Vayeilech,” as used here, to the word “mehalchim” – strides – used in Zechariah, 3:7. In the prophecy brought there, an angel of God tells Yehoshua, the high priest, in the name of God, “If you

go in my ways and safeguard My watch... I will give you strides among these angels, who stand here.” The Vilna Gaon explains that an angel is referred to as standing because angels are given one task, one function and that is all that they do. They do not grow in their spirituality. A human being, however, does not stand still. He either progresses or regresses. God was telling the high priest that by following the Torah, he will be able to grow. This was the message that Moshe was giving to the Jewish people, as well, before he died. He was telling them, by going to each tribe, that although he was already one-hundred twenty-years old, he was still growing, because he was constantly teaching Torah and following its ways, observing God’s command. In this way, the word, “Vayeilech” was an expression of rebuke, telling the people that if they wanted to grow and actualize their inner selves, the way to do that was to search for new approaches and practices, but to

follow God's Torah faithfully.

Moshe's appointment of Yehoshua as his successor underscored this message. Yehoshua was chosen because, as the Torah describes him, he was Moshe's faithful servant, never leaving his tent, and always following in his path as a servant of God, following His Torah as Moshe taught him. The rabbis tell us that Yehoshua served Moshe to the extent that he would put the study hall back in order after Moshe taught Torah to the people. This was the model that Moshe presented to the people before he died, teaching them which path to follow in order to grow.

Perhaps that is why this section of the parsha is followed by the mitzvah of Hakheil, during which the people gather

in the Beis HaMikdash during the Sukkos that follows the end of the Shemittah year, to hear the Torah read to them by the king. The Shemittah year, when the land is left fallow, allows the people time to immerse themselves in Torah and renew their commitment to it. The reading of the Torah at Hakheil, as the Ramban describes it in the Laws of Chagigah, is a kind of re-enactment of the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, a fitting culmination to the Shemittah year. By giving over this mitzvah before he died, Moshe was again telling the people that the way to continually grow is strengthen one's commitment to Torah, on both a collective and an individual level, reinforcing the commitment made at Mt. Sinai.

## Lo Ba-Shomayim Hee

*Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Sep 29, 2016)*

A famous passage in this week's Parsha says: *Ki ha-mitzvah ha-zos asher Anochi metzavecha hayom, lo nifleis hee mimcha ve-lo rechoka hee*—this mitzvah is not far, not difficult, and not hidden from you. There is a well know machlokes Rishonim—where the Ramban brings both sides—whether it refers to the whole Torah or is it within the context of this specific Parsha, and it's referring to the idea of Teshuvah. But either way, they come down to the same thing. Teshuva, of course, means properly keeping the whole Torah. So we are talking about the idealism of keeping the Torah, the Teshuvah, and fixing things—and Hashem is saying that it's not too hard for you. And the Torah uses two metaphors to express this—*Lo ba-shomayim hee and Lo me-eiver la-yam hee*. This tells you that it's not as hard as you may think. Why did the Torah davka use these metaphors of heaven and across the sea? The Peshuto shel Mikra—on the pashut peshat level—the Torah says: It's not in the heavens—it's because you will say, "Who can go for us to the Heavens?" And when the Torah says: It's not across the sea, it's because you will ask, "Who will go for us across the sea?" Of course, the Torah is hinting at something particular here. As we see in the next week's Parsha—*Va-Yeilech*—one of the concerns of the Torah is what the Jews would think after Moshe Rabeinu died. Can they keep it up without their Rebbe? What did Moshe do? He did go up to the Heavens to bring down the Torah to us. And he also split the sea at Kriyas Yam Suf. So maybe—on the Pshuto-Shel-Mikra

level—the Torah is hinting to us here not to think that you can only connect to Torah when you have the right Rebbe or Gadol. You don't need Moshe Rabeinu in order to learn Torah. Because: *ki karov eilecha hadavar me'od!* Even though you should always cling to Talmidei Chachamim, you cannot wait for someone else to come and mekareiv you to the Torah and to inspire you. You really need to have an achrayus, find the inspiration within yourself, and not depend on others. Try to learn all you can from others, but ultimately you must take achrayus for yourself.

On the Drash level, though, there are many Midrashim and Meforshim who darshen the phrases of *Lo ba-shomayim hee* and *Lo me-eiver la-yam hee*. I heard a fascinating suggestion to explain the difference between the Torah being in the Heavens and across the sea. When it comes to Heavens, in our minds it's something that is entirely out of reach. Even in our days—with all the technology and space travel—we can't get to the stars. We can go to the Moon; we can send something to a comet, other planets in the Solar System, etc.—which is a minute distance to travel compared to the incredibly vast distances that we need to traverse on the way to the nearest constellation. It is impossible to go to the Heavens. However, people cross the sea all the time. It's just entering a different context and a foreign culture. But in our mind, it's something that is accessible; it's just not where we are right now. Maybe the Torah is telling us two things. *Lo ba-shomayim hee*—don't think that keeping the Torah,

Teshuva, living a lifestyle of living up to all our ideals, is impossible. It's not like when something is in the Heavens. It's not impossible. I know we can't reach the stars. We can't reach the Heavens. But the Torah is practical—it's something we can do. That's the first step. But there is another step. And this is a much more insidious *hava amina*. A person could easily think "I know it's possible. But it's *me-eiver la-yam*. I can do it in Yeshiva, but I can't do it in college. I can do it with the right friends, but I can't do it with these friends. I could do it when I was younger, or maybe I will be able to do it when I am older, but I can't do it now." It's so easy for someone to say: Yes, the idealism of Teshuva Sheleima, of keeping the whole of the Torah properly, I know it's possible. But it's possible in a different country. It's possible at a different time and in a different place. It's not possible in my circumstances now. And the Torah is telling us: No! *Lo me-eiver la-yam hee*. Don't make either excuse. Don't say it's *ba-shomayim*. Don't say that it's impossible. It's possible. Everyone could do it. Don't say it's possible, but it's not possible for me here and now. Maybe I'll do it next year, or in two years. Maybe I'll do it when I move someplace else, when I get married, or when I go

to Israel for a year. No. It's not *me-eiver la-yam*. You don't have to go travel to a different place and time. Wherever you are, whatever place and circumstances you are in, *Karov eilecha ha-davar me'od*. Wherever you are, you must find within yourself the inspiration, commitment, and a deep realization of what's right and what's wrong, what the purpose of life and what's the meaning of being human, and dedicate yourself to it. And Hashem promises you that whoever you are, whoever you are with, whatever state you are in life, if you really try, if you really make that effort, then *u-mal Hashem es levav'cha ve-es levav zarecha*. Hashem will help you come back—*ha-ba le-taher mesayin oso*. We must take the first step and dedicate ourselves and want the right thing, and then Hashem will help us, wherever we are, to do teshuva and live up to the ideal Torah lifestyle. And if we do that, with the right work and with *Siyata di-Shmaya*, we can live up to our dreams of *ki karov eilecha ha-davar me'od*. *Be-ficha u-vilvavecha la'asoso*. And this way, we can fix our hearts, our speech, and our actions, and live up to our ideals.

Shabbat Shalom.

## The Hidden Things Belong to G-d

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

On the final day of his life, Moses gathers all the people of Israel, from the most exalted to the lowliest, old and young, men and women, and, for the last time, inducts them into the Covenant of G-d. He again warns the people against engaging in idolatrous worship, and beseeches them to remain loyal to G-d.

Moses concludes his message with the following enigmatic statement. Deuteronomy 29:28: *הַנְּסֻתָּרֹת לַהֵשֶׁם, אֲדֹלֶיכֶינּוּ, וְהַגְּלוֹת לָנוּ וְלִבְנֵינוּ עַד עוֹלָם, לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת*, the hidden things are for the L-rd our G-d, but the revealed things are for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah.

The classical commentators Rashi and the Ramban explain that the people of Israel were afraid that they would be held responsible for the transgressions committed by sinners in private, even though they had no knowledge who committed those sins. Moses therefore reassures the people, that hidden sins are the province of G-d alone, and that only the sinners themselves are held responsible for those transgressions. Nevertheless, all of Israel is expected

to maintain the nation's integrity by opposing all sins committed openly.

The Ramban also explains that this verse alludes to sins that are hidden from the perpetrators themselves. In these cases, the Ramban explains, those sins belong to G-d, in the sense that G-d will not hold those sins against the sinners, since the people who commit them did so out of ignorance of the law or because of the lack of clarity regarding the particular situation.

Rashi, in his commentaries to Psalms 87:6 (cited in the Stone Edition of the ArtScroll Chumash p. 1090), explains that because of the vast assimilation that the people of Israel will experience, many Jews will completely forget their Jewish origins. In the time of the Final Redemption, these "hidden ones," [assimilated Jews] who are known only to G-d, will be reunited with the Jewish people, and restored to their status among the Jewish nation.

Upon learning of Rashi's interpretation to Psalm 87, I immediately concluded that Rashi must have been referring to our own day and age, since so many Jews, who



had lost their Jewish identities, are now being restored to their Judaism, as the movement of Jewish return sweeps across the country.

It is indeed exciting to see the many people, young and old, known colloquially as *בַּעְלֵי תְּשׁוּבָה* —Baalei Teshuva (Masters of Return), who are re-engaging in Jewish life in significant numbers. Truth be told, they are not all “re-engaging” in Jewish life. In fact, most are engaging in Jewish life for the very first time, and that is why a more proper classification for such people would not be Baalei Teshuva, but *תִּינוּקוֹת שְׂנֵאָבוּ* —children who have been taken into captivity and are now being taught the heritage of their people for the very first time.

While the Baal Teshuva phenomenon has been ongoing for decades, as of late, a newer phenomenon has appeared on the scene. It is probably still too early to say that it is a real “movement,” but significant numbers of people, from extremely assimilated Jewish backgrounds, seek today to embrace the heritage of their parents and grandparents. Many of these people have only one Jewish parent, very often a Jewish father, and a Jewish surname. Traditionally, these young people, of paternal Jewish descent, are not considered Jews by Orthodox and Conservative standards, who recognize as Jews only those of maternal Jewish origin. Yet, they seek to adopt traditional Judaism and observance.

These young people, who often come from prominent homes and have attended the most prestigious schools, are coming, in not insignificant numbers, seeking to embrace their Jewish heritage. Many of them undergo rigorous Orthodox conversions, and at times, painful adult circumcisions, with a fervor and devotion that is absolutely staggering. Significant numbers of Russian Jews, whose parents knew nothing about their Jewishness in the former

Soviet Union, are also coming to embrace their Jewish heritages.

I recently received a call from a friend who runs a school for Russian Jewish boys. He told me that he was in the throes of a painful dilemma about accepting a young Russian student into the ninth grade. The boy’s Jewish father came in to plead with him to allow his son to enter the school. The boy, as well, staged a virtual sit-in at the school, refusing to leave unless he was admitted. Pleading with the Principal, the father explained that when he married the boy’s non-Jewish mother, he knew nothing about Judaism, and now was determined that his son not be ignorant as well. He wanted to give his child a choice. Trying to dissuade the father, my friend drew a grim portrait of what would happen if his son became religious, started to observe the Sabbath and keep kosher, and depicted the turmoil it would create at home and wreak on the family. Without hesitating, the Russian father stated that he was prepared to take the risk, as long as his son had a chance to be the kind of Jew that he never had the opportunity to be.

After consulting with different rabbinic authorities, the young man was conditionally accepted into the school, and appears to be, at least at this point, one of the most committed, diligent, and knowledgeable students.

Within this context, the aforementioned verse, found in Deuteronomy 29:28 takes on new meaning: The hidden things belong to the L-rd our G-d, but the revealed things are for us and our children forever, to carry out the words of this Torah.

We pray that our “hidden” and assimilated brothers and sisters will soon be “revealed,” and reunited with the rest of the Jewish people, restored to their status as full and beloved members the Jewish nation..

## We are All on the Same Ship

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

הנסתרות לה' אלוֹקֵינוּ, והנגלות לנו ולבנינו עד עולם.  
“The hidden matters are for Hashem our God, but the revealed matters are for us and our children, forever.” (29:28)

**R**av Shemtov Gaguine – who served as the *av beis din* of the Sephardic community in London – writes in his work *Keser Sheim Tov* that there was a practice in Amsterdam and London to stand for the reading of this *pasuk*. These communities had the custom to stand during

the Torah reading on only four occasions: the reading of the *Aseres Ha'dibros*, the reading of the *מִידוֹת הַרְחֻמִּים*, and the reading of this *pasuk* here in Parshas Nitzavim. What exactly does this *pasuk* mean, and why is it so significant?

Rabbeinu Bechaye interprets this *pasuk* as expressing our relationship with *mitzvos*. The *נסתרות*, the hidden meanings behind the *mitzvos*, the reasons why we must

observe them, are reserved for אלוקינו 'ה; these are not for us to know. We are allowed and encouraged to explore and think in an attempt to understand to the best of our ability, but ultimately, we must recognize that the reasons behind *mitzvos* are נסתרות, concealed from us, known only to God Himself. והגלות לנו ולבנינו – we must focus our attention on what is revealed, namely, our halachic obligations, our requirement to fulfill each and every *mitzva*.

Rashi, however, explains this *pasuk* differently, as speaking of the concept of ערבות – our responsibility toward one another. The Torah here tells us that the נסתרות – people's "hidden" behavior, that which they do in private, without our knowledge – are אלוקינו 'לה – only God's responsibility. We are not held accountable for what people do behind closed doors, in privacy, without our knowing about it. But הגלות – that which is done publicly, misconduct of which we are fully aware – is לנו ולבנינו – our responsibility. We cannot just ignore it. We do not reserve the right to not care, to decide not to get involved. If we have the ability to inspire, to effectively lead our fellow Jews closer to Torah and *mitzvos*, then we have a responsibility to do so. כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה. We are mutually responsible for one another.

This notion has been explained by way of analogy to passengers on a ship. If one passenger drills a hole under his seat, the other passengers would be foolish to think, "What do I care? It's his seat, so he can do whatever he pleases." A hole under that fellow's seat is a hole under everyone's seat. They're all in the same ship, and so if the ship goes down, they will all perish. The same is true of *Am Yisrael*. Our fellow Jews' religious observance is very much our business, and our responsibility. True, הנסתרות אלוקינו 'לה. We are not going to start peering into people's homes or inquiring about their private lives. But we are responsible for the גלות, for what we know. And there is a great deal that we know. We know the frightening intermarriage statistics in this country. We have the data. We know that for every Jew that will be in shul on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, there are many, many more who aren't. These are the "holes" in our ship which we must not ignore. If we have the opportunity to reach out to a fellow Jew, to share with him or her the beauty of Torah life, we are obligated to do so. והגלות לנו ולבנינו.

Rav Soloveitchik pointed out that this concept of ערבות is not only a halachic construct, but also a verifiable fact, proven throughout Jewish history, and even in our own

times. When a Jew is found guilty of misconduct, our enemies hold all Jews accountable. When the picture of a Jew with a *yarmulke* in handcuffs appears in the newspapers, we are all considered guilty. The gentiles have always cast the blame for the lone Jewish miscreant upon the entire community. They intuitively understand the concept of ערבות, that we are responsible for the גלות, for the public conduct of our fellow Jews.

This is why we pray on *Yamim Noraim*, יעשו כולם אגודה, אחת לעשות רצונך – that all *Klal Yisrael* will join together into a single אגודה ("bond," or unit) to serve Hashem. Our goal must be not only that we ourselves serve Hashem properly, but that we join together with all our fellow Jews to serve Hashem collectively, as one, unified entity. This must be our vision, and this is the responsibility that we all bear.

Perhaps, then, this is why some communities had the practice to stand for the reading of the *pasuk*, הנסתרות לה, אלוקינו. This *pasuk* establishes the critical principle of ערבות, that we are responsible not only for our own religious observance, but also for that of our fellow Jews. We must do whatever we can to reach out, with love and affection, with genuine concern, and work to inspire our fellow Jews to connect with our tradition and with the spark of *kedusha* within them – because we are all on the same ship.