

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Nitzavim-Vayelech  
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Nitzavim-Vayelech – We can do it!

Towards the end of this weeks' double Parasha of Nitzavim Vayelech, Moshe inspires Bnei Yisrael with some powerful words of chizuk:

*“For this mitzva that I command you today – it is not hidden from you, and it is not far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say “Who will go up to heaven for us and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and fulfil it?” Nor is it across the sea, that you should say “Who will cross the sea for us and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and fulfil it?” Rather, this matter is very close to you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can fulfil it”*  
(Devarim 30:11-14)

Many commentators understand this passage as referring to the Torah as a whole. That is, Hashem through Moshe is instructing Bnei Yisrael that the Torah is achievable.

In the first week after birth, babies consume about 30-60 ml (1 to 2 ounces) per feed. And it's hard work. After using all of their energy to suck the milk, the newborn often falls asleep from exhaustion

How much food does the average first-world person consume in his life? Economists at the United States Department of Agriculture have estimated that the typical American adult eats about 900 kg (about 2,000 pounds) per year. This means that, assuming an average life expectancy, the typical American will consume about 33 tons of food (around 73,000 pounds). That's equivalent to eating about six adult elephants over the course of a lifetime. Imagine showing that newborn baby how much food they would have to consume over the course of their lifetime. They would likely feel completely daunted and suffer despair.

But with time, the baby grows. During the first month, babies gradually eat more until they consume 90 to 120 ml (3 to 4 ounces) per feed. And before too long, eating becomes easy. An adult often has to take care not to over-eat!

Yeshivat Shaalbim in central Israel is blessed to have one of the largest libraries of Jewish sefarim in Israel. Walking through the rows and rows of books is an amazing experience. But it might also be quite daunting. How can one possibly acquire all of this Torah knowledge? We may feel like the newborn baby that is shown how much food they have to consume over their lifetime. We can't fathom how it would be possible to achieve so much.

Moshe is reassuring us that the Torah is accessible. It may seem out of our reach – up in heaven or across the sea. But in reality, it is right here next to us, “in our mouth and in our heart”. It is not easy, but we **can** do it.

Interestingly, the Gemara<sup>1</sup> teaches us that if the Torah were in the heavens, then we would be required to ascend there to reach it, and if it were across the ocean, we would have to cross the ocean to reach it. This is because, if Hashem tells us to do something, then by definition it must be possible for us to do it. We learnt this lesson two weeks ago in Parashat Ki Teitzei, which began by discussing the yefat toar. The Torah remarkably permits a soldier during battle who becomes

<sup>1</sup> Eruvin 55a, quoting Avdimi bar Chama bar Dosa. Rashi quotes this idea in his commentary to this pasuk.

infatuated with a non-Jewish woman to marry her.<sup>2</sup> Rashi<sup>3</sup> explains that this is granted as a concession to the yetzer hara. If the soldier was not allowed to marry this woman in a permissible fashion, it would be impossible for him to withstand the temptation. So Hashem made an allowance for this exceptional case. This is the only example in the Torah of a concession to one's yetzer hara.

Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky<sup>4</sup> learns an inspiring lesson from this idea. Judaism requires of us many obligations, including the lifelong tikun of fixing our middot. It is likely that some of those obligations may seem to be too difficult for us to achieve. However, the fact that the Torah permitted a soldier to marry a yefat to'ar is evidence that Hashem is clearly aware of human limitations, and He does not ask us to do something that is impossible. The very fact that Hashem instructs us to do something means that He knows that we can do it.

The Ramban understands the verses quoted above as referring to a specific mitzva – the mitzva of teshuva. Thus, according to this understanding, Hashem through Moshe is instructing Bnei Yisrael that teshuva, though it may seem unreachable, as if it were up in the heavens, or across the sea, is actually right here next to us and is achievable.

The Ponovezher Rav once travelled to South Africa to give chizuk to the Jews there.<sup>5</sup> Before he left, he consulted with his teacher, the Chafetz Chaim, asking him what message he should bring. The Chafetz Chaim advised that he should tell them that the mitzvah of teshuva is achievable and simple. There are only a few requirements to fulfill, and every Jew is capable of doing them: ceasing to transgress, confessing and expressing regret over one's sins, and resolving not to transgress again. The yetzer hara tries to convince a person that proper teshuva is so difficult, and this negative attitude causes one to give up at the first barrier.

Moshe's words speak to us today. Whether we are focusing on the Torah in general, or teshuva in particular, the yetzer hara will do its best to convince us that we cannot succeed. But Moshe is reassuring us that we can do it. It is not up in the heavens or over the sea. It is right here in our mouth and in our heart and we can achieve it. We just need to push ourselves to our limits, continue growing, and not give up when the going gets tough.

As we get closer to Rosh Hashana and the Ten Days of Repentance, now is the time to start preparing to do teshuva, planning for the New Year, and deciding how we can improve in our Avodat Hashem. The first step is to have the will to do it. And this is fortified by the belief that **we can do it!**

Let's try something this week:

1. Put aside some quiet time to reflect on your actions this past year.
2. Try to pick one (or a few) sins that you committed and practice the 3 steps of teshuva listed above.
3. Choose some Torah goals for the coming year that are realistic, achievable and measurable. And then do them!

Darchai Noam will take a short break for the chagim. BE"H we will return next year with Parashat Noach. Wishing you all a Shana Tova, Gmar Chamita Tova and Chag Sameach!

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>2</sup> Devarim 21:11.

<sup>3</sup> Based on the Gemara, Kiddushin 21b.

<sup>4</sup> 1886-1976, head of the London Bet Din and a rosh yeshiva of Slabodka yeshiva in Bnei Brak.

<sup>5</sup> This story is quoted by Rabbi Ozer Alport, Parsha Potpourri - <https://aish.com/169086096/>