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*Shabbat Netzavim/Vayelekh*

*September 12, 2009*

*23 Ellul 5769*

## **News**

### **JEWISH ADVENTISTS IN NEW YORK**

New York's Jewish Adventist congregation Bet Shalom (House of Peace) is located in the most densely populated Jewish area in North America. The congregation was started seven years ago by a group of Seventh-day Adventists who worked or lived side by side with Jewish people and wanted to learn how to witness to them. One of the talents of the members of this group is a love for singing. The group has learned many Hebrew songs and sings many Psalms in Hebrew. This helps build bridges and provides witnessing opportunities with the Jewish community because people immediately become interested in why non-Jews are singing in Hebrew.

Recently a special friendship was built between the Reform Temple Bet Am of Merrick, NY and our congregation. Several months ago the son of the Treasurer of Bet Shalom, Dr Paula Lewis (her husband Jorge is a NYPD detective) attended the Bar Mitzva ceremony of his schoolmate. At this Bar Mitzva Paula and Jorge met a cantor of Bet Am Temple. When the cantor learned about Bet Shalom members and their love of singing in Hebrew he became very excited. He asked if Adventists would be willing to help him in his synagogue choir. The invitation was accepted. Last November both congregations sang at the civic concert in Merrick. After this event the Cantor and the Rabbi asked the Seventh-day Adventists if they would be interested in conducting joint Kabbalat Shabbat (Friday night greeting of the Sabbath) services. Last March the combined choir of the members from Beth Am and Beth Shalom led Kabbalat Shabbat. At the end of the service the president of the synagogue expressed his gratitude to the Adventists and expressed his wish to come and participate in the Adventist worship. The next joint worship on the premises of Bet Shalom will be on August 15. All members of Bet Am were officially invited by the Rabbi to come and participate.

## **ROSH HASHANA SHANA TOVA**

Sabbath September 19 will be the first day of the New Year 5770. According to the Bible it is the First of Tishri, or the Feast of Trumpets, the first day of the period of the Ten Days of Teshuva (repentance or return to G-d). The feast will start on Friday evening September 18.

There will not be another parasha newsletter until Sabbath September 26.

The texts of the readings for Rosh Hashana are: **First Day**

**Torah reading:** Gen 21:1-34; Num 29:1-6.

**Haftarah:** I Samuel 1:1-2:10.

On the first day of Rosh Hashana we read Genesis 21. Isaac's miraculous birth is the focus of the reading. The haftara for the first day is the miraculous birth of Samuel.

### **Second Day**

**Torah reading:** Gen 22:1-24; Num 29:1-6.

**Haftarah:** Jer 31:1-20.

On the second day the reading recounts the binding of Isaac. The haftarah reading is from Jeremiah, a love song from G-d to the Jewish people. **Festive lunch meal:** the challah is dipped in honey.

### **Rosh Hashana Reflections**

If you mark Rosh Hashana in your congregation, it would be good if you could speak with your friends and members about your personal spiritual life. Some questions suggested by Rabbi Packouz for Rosh Hashana are:

1. When do I most feel that my life is meaningful?
2. If I could change only one thing about myself, what would that be?
3. If I could change one thing about my spiritual life, what would it be?
4. Are there any ideals I would be willing to die for?
5. If I could live my life over, would I change anything?

# OVERVIEW



## NETZAVIM

### DEUTERONOMY 29:9-30:20

**O**n the last day of his life, Moshe gathers together all the people, both young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations yet unborn. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship, because in spite of having witnessed the abominations of Egypt, there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality.

Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel which will be a result of the failure to heed G-d's mitzvos. Both their descendants and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desolation of the Land and its apparent inability to be sown or to produce crops.

The conclusion will be apparent to all - the Jewish People have forsaken the One who protects them, in favor of idols which can do nothing. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled.

However assimilated they will have become among the nations, eventually G-d will bring them back to Eretz Yisrael. Moshe tells the people to remember that the Torah is not a remote impossibility; rather its fulfillment is within the grasp of every Jew. The Parasha concludes with a dramatic choice between life and death. Moshe exhorts the people to choose life.

## VAYELEKH

### DEUTERONOMY 31:1-31:30

**I**t is the last day of Moshe's life, Moshe goes from tent to tent throughout the camp, bidding farewell to his beloved people, encouraging them to keep the faith. Moshe tells them that whether he is among them or not, G-d is with them, and will vanquish their

enemies. Then he summons Yehoshua, and in front of all the people, exhorts him to be strong and courageous as the leader of the Jewish People. In this manner, he strengthens Yehoshua's status as the new leader.

Moshe teaches them the mitzvah of Hakhel: That every seven years on the first day of the intermediate days of Succoth, the entire nation, including small children, is to gather together at the Temple to hear the King read from the Book of Devarim. The sections that he reads deal with faithfulness to G-d, the covenant, and reward and punishment. G-d tells Moshe that his end is near, and he should therefore summon Yehoshua to stand with him in the Mishkan, where G-d will teach Yehoshua.

G-d then tells Moshe and Yehoshua that after entering the Land, the people will be unfaithful to Him, and begin to worship other gods.

G-d will then completely hide his face, so that it will seem that the Jewish People are at the mercy of fate, and that they will be hunted by all. G-d instructs Moshe and Yehoshua to write down a song—Ha'azinu—which will serve as a witness against the Jewish People when they sin. Moshe records the song in writing and teaches it to Bnei Yisrael. Moshe completes his transcription of the Torah, and instructs the Levi'im to place it to the side of the Aron (Holy Ark), so that no one will ever write a new Torah scroll that is different from the original—for there will always be a reference copy.

## WHEN DO WE READ THESE TWO PARASHOT?

**W**e read these two portions whenever the first day Rosh Hashana occurs on Shabbat (as this year) or Thursday. However, when the first day Rosh Hashana falls on Monday or Tuesday, Netzavim and Vayelekh are read separately. (The first day Rosh Hashana cannot be Sunday, Wednesday or Friday).

## STAND FIRM WITH FAITH

**P**arasha Netzavim contains a direct message for every believers before Rosh Hashana. On the last day of his life, Moshe tells the Jewish

people, “You are standing this day, all of you, before the L-rd your G-d: Your heads, your tribes, your elders, your officers all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, your stranger that is in the midst of your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the one who draws your water; so that you shall enter into the covenant of the L-rd your G-d and unto His oath which the L-rd your G-d makes with you today... Not only with you do I make this covenant and this oath, but with him that stands here with us this day and also with him that is not with us this day.”

Moshe uses ten expressions which correspond to the ten categories of people, from the heads of the congregation to those who serve as laborers. Everyone is important before the eyes of G-d and thus everyone must stand together as one nation and one soul in order to pass into the covenant of G-d.

Parashat Netzavim, is read on the Shabbat preceding Rosh Hashana for its message is important for Rosh Hashana. “Netzavim” means to stand firm with confidence and security. Our sages say that to for us to be confident and assured that when we come before G-d on Rosh Hashana, the day of judgment, we will be inscribed for a good and sweet year, we, as a nation must make every effort to stand united amongst ourselves.

A father, on his deathbed, called his children together and gave each one a stick. He told them to try and break the stick, which each did with little effort.

Afterwards, he gave them the same amount of sticks tied together. “Now try to break them!” he instructed. No matter how hard they tried they couldn’t break the bundle of sticks.

“This is my lesson to you, my dear children. If each one of you cares only for himself, it will be easy for the outside forces to break you and destroy you. But if you stick together, no one will be able to harm you!”

When we come before G-d on Rosh Hashana, we can overcome any adversity as long as we stay together.

For this reason it is customary, before Rosh Hashana, to forgive and ask forgiveness for wrongs which we may have done to each other. This way, we come as one before G-d and receive His blessings for the New Year.

## FREE-WILL

Jews are not Calvinists, they don’t believe in single or double predestination. Netzavim concludes with perhaps the clearest and most powerful statement in the Torah about the purpose of life and the existence of free-will: “I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil ... the blessing and the curse. Therefore, choose life that you may live, you and your descendants.” (Deut 30:15; 19).

## ACQUIRE THE TORAH

The Torah states: “[The Torah] is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it to us that we may hear it and do it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea that you should say, ‘Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it to us that we may hear it or do it?’” (Deut. 30: 12,13). The Talmud (Eiruvim 55a) states on this verse that if the Torah were in heaven, you would still have to climb up to reach it. If the Torah were on the other side of the ocean, you would still have to go traveling for it.

This means that the Torah is so crucial for one’s existence that even if it were extremely difficult to acquire, you would still have to make every possible effort to acquire it.

# SHANA TOVA HAPPY NEW YEAR

## HILLEL TAUGHT

*“Do not separate  
yourself from  
the community.”*

(Pirkey Avot 2:5)

## TRUST HIM

**A** Chassid once came to his Rebbe complaining that he had a bad year financially. The Rebbe asked him, “How is your health and the health of your family?” The Chassid replied that health was, thank G-d, good. The Rebbe told him to have trust in G-d and quoted him the words of the Talmud, “He Who gives life will surely give sustenance!”

The Rebbe went on to explain the words of the Talmud with the following parable, “A wealthy businessman was traveling home from the fair and had with him a large sum of money. The way home was long and for Shabbat he stopped at an inn run by a Jewish innkeeper.

“As it is not permitted to carry money on Shabbat, the businessman had no choice but to give his wallet of money to the innkeeper for safekeeping until after Shabbat. The wallet contained 5,000 rubles plus 5 kopikes (pennies).

“As he didn’t know the innkeeper, the businessman was worried all Shabbat whether the innkeeper was trustworthy and will he ever see his money again. Immediately after Shabbat he asked for his wallet which the innkeeper returned. The merchant quickly went to his room to count the money. He counted the rubles and found the 5,000 rubles intact.

The Rebbe now turned to his Chassid and said, “Do you think that after realizing that the innkeeper returned the 5000 rubles, would the businessman be worried whether the five pennies-kopikes were also returned? Only a fool would suspect the innkeeper in not giving back the five kopikes when he was trustworthy with the large sum of 5000 rubles!”

“The same is with you,” concluded the Rebbe. “G-d gave you and your family, health and life which is worth far more than anything else in the world. Don’t you think that you should trust Him to give you your livelihood? If you believe that G-d gives you

health, you will automatically have faith that He will bless you in your dealings and will provide you with your livelihood as well. For, “He Who gives life will surely give sustenance!”

## G-D DOES IT FOR GOOD

**T**he Talmudic sage Rabbi Chanina ben Elazar had a tree whose branches were bending over into someone else’s field. Since his neighbor didn’t complain, Rabbi Chanina didn’t cut the branches.

One day, a man came before Rabbi Chanina and complained that the branches of his neighbor’s tree were entering his field. He wanted Rabbi Chanina to order the neighbor to cut the branches.

“Come back tomorrow,” Rabbi Chanina told him, “and I will judge your case.” “Why does Rabbi Chanina want me to return tomorrow?” the man wondered.

After the person left, Rabbi Chanina hired workers to cut down the branches of his own tree which were leaning over into the other field. The next day, the man came back to complain about his neighbor’s branches. Rabbi Chanina sent for the neighbor and ordered him to remove the branches.

“But, Rabbi, doesn’t your tree also lean over into your neighbor’s field?” the man protested.

Rabbi Chanina told him to see for himself that the branches were cut. Thus, even though his own neighbor didn’t mind the branches, Rabbi Chanina knew that before correcting others one must first abide by these rules himself.

## HAPPY NEW YEAR

### EDITOR

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## HAFTARA

### Isaiah 61:10-63:9

**T**his Shabbat is the seventh and last Shabbat after Tisha B'Av. We are ending the period called *Shiva D'nechemta*—"Seven weeks of comfort" reading seven prophesies of comfort and hope for Israel and God's people at large.

**HAFTARA:** This last text of comfort is an exultation of Israel for God's salvation. "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." (Is. 61:10). This text is wonderful, because it is an affirmation of the free gift of salvation from God. "for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation," these garments are free, there is no need for any payment. In the same way, God is ready to cover our sins and transgressions freely, just because he loves us and wants to save us. God does not love only Israel but all the nations, his love and his righteousness are available for every nation. "so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations." (Is. 61:11). However, the nations will see and benefit of God's salvation, only if they recognize God's love for Israel "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory" (Is 62:1-2). We have seen in Isaiah 54, that the Lord has forsaken Israel for a while, in this chapter, the Lord wants to marry again his people "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you" (Is 60:5) Even the land of Israel will come back to her "your land shall be married." Whatever could happen, Israel is seen as holy "They shall be called, "The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD" (Is 62:12). The lord sees what the nations are doing to Israel, each persecution is recorded in heaven, "in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old" (Is 60:9a). What a wonderful promise. Israel is assured of God's love. Israel can enter the fall feast with certitude, God loves and will forgive them.

## BESORAT YESHUA

### Mark 8:14-9:1

**T**he disciples are worried, they have just experienced a wonderful miracle, but they still have no confidence...

**BESORAH:** "Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat." (14) Yeshua cautioned them, not to have the same spirit as the pharisees who did not believe in Yeshua. "And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod." Yeshua reminds them what happened by asking them some questions "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?" (17) His questions demonstrate to his disciples his mission and who he is. "Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" They said to him, "Twelve." "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" And they said to him, "Seven." Then he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?" . (18-21) To give confidence to his disciples, Yeshua is going to perform a new miracle. Coming back to Capernaum, Yeshua and his disciples walk through the village of Bethsaida. Passing through the village, the people bring to him a blind man "Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him." (22). Yeshua accepts to do something for this man. "He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?" (23). It is strange that Yeshua asks the blind man if his application was successful, The man starts to see something but not clearly "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." (24). Yeshua comes back to the blind man for a second time "Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly," What a wonderful savior.

