

SEPTEMBER 27, 2019

Parashat Nitzavim

Deuteronomy 29:9-30:20

Taught By:

Carter & Maya



SUMMARY

In this Torah portion, every Israelite gathers to hear more of Moshe's closing words. They are told that they all have a share in G!d's *breet* or contract. Once again they are warned of the consequences for not observing the mitzvot, but they are also told that G!d will accept anyone who sincerely wants to and tries to do better.

Towards the end of this *parasha* Moshe offers the Israelites words of encouragement, saying that *teshuvah*--understanding and following the instructions we find in *Torah* is not beyond the abilities of our brains or our bodies. Moshe reminds the Israelites that the words of *Torah* are in their mouths and in their hearts. Even if we might see that understanding *Torah* or living according to the mitzvot in *Torah* can be challenging, it is within our reach.



Moshe then tells the Israelites that, although G!d is bringing them to them the Promised Land, they will only be able to continue to live there if they listen to G!d's instruction and be careful that their hearts do not turn to false gods. Moshe calls heaven and earth to see that G!d is putting the choices of life and death, blessing and curse before the Israelites. Moshe then gives the Israelites the tip, "Choose life so that you and your children may live."

Towards the end of the *parashah*, G!d gives us the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*--looking at our behavior, thinking about how we can do *mitzvot* better, and changing our behavior accordingly. G!d tells us that doing *teshuvah* is not confusing or impossible for us. Why would G!d tell us this? Shouldn't it be obvious that we can do *teshuvah*?

CARTER: G!d is telling us that we have the ability to change our behavior and helps us get better over time.

MAYA: Maybe this is how G!d encourages us to try to do *mitzvot*. It could be a way of saying even if it is overwhelming to try to do all the *mitzvot*, you don't have to do everything at once. Start to do *mitzvot* and keep at it and you will get better at doing *mitzvot*. This might make them want to practice doing *mitzvot*.

Why might a person want to do more *mitzvot* or get better at doing *mitzvot*?

CARTER: I think that doing *mitzvot* makes G!d happy. Studying Torah, in particular, is like reading G!d's stories and I bet G!d is happy that we are working hard to learn and to chant G!d's stories. It also makes me happy when I work hard to develop a better understanding of things.

Later in this *parasha* the Israelites hear that G!d has given them the power to choose life or death, to choose blessing or curse. Moshe tells them that G!d wants them to choose life and to choose blessing so that they and their children may live. What might it mean to choose life and to choose blessing? How could choosing life and blessing cause their children to live?

CARTER: Choosing life means choosing to embrace the challenges of life. If you choose to give up, it is like dying and your children may also learn from your example to give up, too. That is why it is important to choose life and embracing challenges--for you and for your children.

MAYA: Choosing death could mean choosing to be disconnected from your life--getting swept up in anxiety and stress. Choosing life is about taking time to breathe. If you don't choose to take time to breathe and focus on the moment and release your anxiety, stress spills over and nothing goes well. I think Moshe is telling the Israelites that when they enter the Promised Land, G!d hopes they choose to breathe and release anxiety when things feel overwhelming.