

SEPTEMBER 11, 2020

Parashat Nitzavim

Deuteronomy 29:9-30:20

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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."

1) In this week's *parasha*, G*d once again reminds the Israelites not to turn to false G*ds. What do you think this might mean and why might it be important to G*d that the Israelites not rely on other gods?

DYLAN: Maybe G*d thinks that the Israelites will turn to other peoples' gods *before* they reach the Promised Land because the Israelites are in a wilderness, and it feels unsafe. It feels weird and they have been there for a very long time so they might not completely trust that G*d knows what G*d is doing to lead them through the wilderness. Or. . . maybe G*d wants to remind them not to turn to other G*ds when they finally do reach the Promised Land and they feel like they don't need G*d's help anymore.

2) This week's Torah portion also teaches us that *teshuvah*--turning towards living a life based on Torah--is not difficult. But aren't there 613 *mitzvot*? Don't you think it might be challenging to live according to all of these *mitzvot*? So why do you think Moshe would want to tell the Israelites that choosing to follow the Torah is possible and not too difficult for them?

DYLAN: I remember when I first saw the Torah--it looked like a whole bunch of weird shaped words, and there is so many of them! If I wanted to try to follow Torah I probably wouldn't even know where to look to start! Maybe the Israelites felt the same way. Moshe probably knew that not all the Israelites could read and that they might feel intimidated by seeing all of the words in the Torah and feel like they could never understand it or follow it.

3) 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?

DYLAN: I think Moshe is telling them that they have it in them to live according to the Torah--even if they don't see it yet. It reminds me of rock climbing. One time we went rock climbing--at Elephant Rock. I wanted to get to the top of a rock, but didn't know exactly how I was going to do it--so I just started and I found a way. Maybe Moshe is saying that living a life guided by Torah is a little like that. We have to keep our goal in mind and just start. It might feel like something we don't think we can do, but he wants us to know that we can do it.

