



Machon Meir - The Center for Jewish Studies in Israel

Parashat Nitzavim-Va'yelech 25th of Elul 5770



Rabbi Dov Begon – Rosh haYeshiva

Message for Today:

National Teshuvah

“Hidden things may pertain to the L-rd our G-d, but that which has been revealed applies to us and our children, forever. We must therefore keep all the words of this Torah” (Deuteronomy 29:28). Rashi comments, “I [Moshe] do not punish you for ‘hidden things,’ i.e., what is hidden in your heart. That pertains to G-d.” It is G-d who will punish that individual about whom it says, “Today, there must not be among you any man, woman, family or tribe, whose heart strays from G-d, and who goes and worships the gods of those nations” (verse 17).

As for “what is revealed,” that applies to us and our children. We must destroy the evil from our midst. If we do not execute judgment against sinners, the masses will be punished by G-d. And even regarding that which is revealed, G-d did not punish the masses until Israel had crossed the Jordan and undertaken the oath at Mount Gerizim and Mount Eval, by which all of Israel became one another’s guarantors (see Rashi there). Indeed, when they crossed the Jordan and Achan violated the taboo, the entire nation was punished, suffering defeat at the War of Ai, which melted the hearts of the people like water (Joshua 7:5). Only after judgment was executed against Achan, whose sin brought suffering upon the entire nation, did Israel achieve a great victory in the second war on Ai.

Today, a covenant of mutual responsibility has been renewed in our generation with the establishment of the State of Israel. The immoral behavior and corruption of the individual is not the private business of this person or that. It affects the entire nation and influences the plight of society, security and the economy. Upon all of us rests the responsibility to educate ourselves and others to integrity and morality, good character and fine deeds, and we must help others to return to Jewish sources and roots, for it was from there that the Jewish People have drawn life from time immemorial. “It is a tree of life to those who take hold of it” (Proverbs 3:18).

At the same time, we have to take to task those corrupt individuals, especially if they hold the reins of leadership, whose immoral and irresponsible behavior have a negative influence on the entire nation. During this season, the time of Selichot and judgment, we must search our souls, as individuals and as a nation, eradicating evil and rectifying whatever needs improvement. By such means, we shall march forward on the path winding upward towards complete redemption and repentance. And may we merit salvation and great consolation. With blessings for a good, sweet year, and looking forward to complete salvation,

Shabbat Shalom!



Rabbi Shlomo Aviner – Chief Rabbi of Beit El

The Prohibition Against Murdering Gentiles

(Published ten years ago, leaflet number 175 in the Hebrew, but, unfortunately, still needs to be published today).

(In answer to the question of whether or not it is permitted to murder non-Jews): I was caused great sorrow and shame by your very question of whether or not it is permissible to murder a non-Jew. The very fact of posing such a disreputable question is a mark of spiritual weakness and loss of direction. From four perspectives, each sufficient in and of itself, we can understand that a severe, absolute prohibition obtains here.

1. From the perspective of faith in G-d, murdering an Arab, as if to advance the renaissance of our people in its land, constitutes lack of faith in G-d. We believe that G-d is returning His Divine Presence to Zion and restoring Israel to its land, accompanied by ups and downs, light and darkness. With all of the problems and difficulties, we do not struggle out of despair, but as warriors certain of victory. We therefore are not dragged down into wild, corrupt deeds. Rather, our fight over our land must always be full of caution, integrity and aforethought. We must not lose our heads. We must be aware that this is not what G-d demands of us, but rather that we be partners in the rebuilding of our land.

2. From the moral perspective, harming one's fellow man is immoral, let alone murdering him. One's absolute duty to avoid such acts is part of the universal morality that encompasses every person on earth. This morality was not nullified for Jews by the Sinai Revelation. Quite the contrary, the Torah places us on a higher moral plane than any nation on earth. As the Mechilta teaches, "Prior to the Sinai Revelation, we were admonished against bloodshed. Following the Sinai Revelation, when our laws became more severe, could the laws of bloodshed have become more lenient?" (Quoted in Rambam's

"Kessef Mishnah," Hilchot Rotzeach U'Shemirat HaNefesh 2:11).

3. From the legal perspective, the Talmud and our legal decisors state explicitly the prohibition against shedding the non-Jew's blood (Sanhedrin 57a; Rambam, *Ibid.*). This prohibition is from the Torah (Bet Meir, *Even HaEzer* 17, se'if 3).

As for the question of why the punishment to the person who murders the non-Jew is "given over to Heaven" -- to the Heavenly tribunal -- rather than to an earthly tribunal (Rambam, *Ibid.*), Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk explains, in his second interpretation, that this is because besides the sin of murder involved, there is also the severe sin of *Chilul Hashem*, the profanation of G-d's name, for which there is no repentance. Neither Yom Kippur nor suffering atone for this, but only death. Therefore, execution by a human tribunal would not atone for his sin of murder (Meshech Chochmah, Exodus 21:14).

I do not believe that there is a rabbi who has permitted the murder of Arabs. Perhaps he expressed such an idea as figurative hyperbole, but even by doing so he violated the dictum of "Sages, be cautious in your words" (Avot 1:11). If, however, it should become clear, G-d forbid, that a rabbi gave a practical ruling to do such a thing, it would become retroactively clear that that rabbi, with all of his importance, is unworthy of the title *Moreh Hora'ah*, "Teacher of the Law." As a rule, one must be aware that regarding such grave questions, not every rabbi is entitled to render decisions, but only the great luminaries who lead our generation.

4. From the perspective of pure nationalism, partisan murder of a non-Jew brings harm to our country. In the early days before the establishment of our state, various Jewish undergrounds carried out sentence against non-Jews in accordance with the reality of those times, yet our own times are not like those were. Now we have an army and a police force who

risk their lives day and night for the nation's security, and it is they, and no one else, who are appointed by the whole nation to punish the enemies of our people. No private individual is entitled to engage in anti-Arab terrorism, to weaken the government and to perform, in the name of the nation, any acts as a result of which the whole nation will suffer.

Let us rid ourselves of the profanation of G-d's name inherent in such painful, insulting questions. Let us devote our educational efforts to explaining that this shameful path stands in



Rabbi Eyal Vered

“Let Me Hear Your Voice” – “The Shofar”

The central mitzvah of Rosh Hashanah is to hear the Shofar. Although this mitzvah is decreed by the Torah (Leviticus 23:24), Rambam offered a further allusion, saying, “Awaken, sleepers from your sleep, and slumberers from your slumber! Improve [shifru] your deeds!” We, as well, shall follow in his footsteps and try to find in the details regarding shofar, allusions to man's service on Rosh Hashanah.

Hearing

As is well-known, there is no mitzvah to blow a shofar, but only to hear it. On the Day of Judgment, a man is required to LISTEN. All year long the mouth doesn't stop talking, until we sometimes forget, through so much talk, that man's main task is to listen – active listening, constructive listening, the sort that enables one to absorb exalted matters and to internalize them. Reality has its own voice. We need only listen. We need only open up to the voice of G-d knocking on the door of man's heart and calling on him to return to his life and to the life of his soul.

The origin of sin involves man being frightened by G-d's voice instead of letting it give him life: “Adam said, ‘I heard your voice in the Garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid’” (Genesis 3:10). Hence, in order not to hear this voice which demands of man the primal question, “Where are you?” man creates an unceasing babble of noise throughout the year. We therefore have this day, in which the shofar blast creates listening: “He shall blow the great

opposition to the essence of the Jewish Torah and its morality, and further causes real harm to the people and State of Israel. We must fortify ourselves with patience, and we must remain aware that salvation comes gradually. Let us become stronger to overcome our difficulties. If we proceed with wisdom and understanding then in the end we will emerge victorious.

shofar and the delicate sound of silence shall be heard” (Rosh Hashanah prayers). Here it becomes clear that only by way of silence can G-d be heard. The shofar helps us to understand that our chief task is to listen to G-d's word and to the divine reality that is revealed to us, in our souls, in space and in time.

The Bent Shofar

Jewish law requires that the shofar be bent, an allusion to us that we must bend our hearts in submission. A person arrives at the day of judgment loaded down with an entire year of arrogance. He is proud of how much he has accomplished during the past year, and he credits himself for it. Yet one cannot approach the King in such a state, for such a person cannot accept anyone else as master. Arrogance is a curtain that cuts us off from G-d, as our sages said, “If someone is arrogant, G-d and he cannot coexist together.” To coexist with G-d we must bend ourselves to submit... “Bending the heart” means developing great humility, thereby making clear to us that we are not setting out to ask G-d for something in exchange for this or that deed which we accomplished. Quite the contrary, we approach G-d as paupers, citing only our descent from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Full of abject humility, we understand that it is a free gift that we are seeking.

The Simple Tekiah Blast

The basic unprocessed sound that emerges from the inner depths of man is simple and uncomplicated. It expresses man's simple longing to be close to G-d, to be upright and good in his actions, without calculations of profit and honor, with closeness to G-d being the most appropriate thing for man, and his greatest source of joy.

Before the other sounds of the shofar complicates matters, the shevarim and teruah with their emotional crises, one must remember what the starting point is. The foundation is simplicity. From there it all begins and to there it all returns. We therefore start with the tekiah.

Shevarim

Now comes the time to take a look at our present situation and to see just how fragmented it is. The result is not a simple sound, but a broken one, representing crisis. Life is divided up into different segments. We pray, we eat, we study Torah, we engage in mundane affairs, and generally we do not see the connection between these elements.

Yet life is actually simple and contiguous. Holiness is not confined to one corner or another, but bursts forth from everything man does. This is our primary level, and to that level we shall return. G-d says, "In the past I gave you Torah, and in the future I shall give you life." Yet in the meantime, we are in a situation of fracture, of discontinuity, of dissonance between matter and spirit, the soul and the body. Each of these pulls in its own direction, and we have to create peace between the warring parties.

This is an illness over which we should be moaning, just as a sick person moans from deep in his heart over his plight. We should moan over the simplicity lost to us, over the sophistication and superficial luster that inundate our lives, over our terrible breakdown when we all chose to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, the tree of complex awareness, when we followed the advice of the serpent, so sly that he offered us illusory sophistication. We should instead have kept eating from the Tree of Life, from life itself, which sings out G-d's glory in so simple and clear a manner, without any need of clever explanations.

Teruah

The word "teruah" carries an allusion to the words, "Awaken [uru] sleepers, from your sleep." The five Hebrew letters of "teruah" also spell out "erut Hashem" – "awakening by G-d". In Parashat Bereshit we learn that G-d placed Adam in a deep sleep. NOWHERE DOES IT SAY THAT HE AWOKE. We are asleep, and we have a duty to awaken. The main lesson to be learned is that it is possible to awaken! What sometimes seems like such deep sleep can be

transformed into a great awakening. We are the "people familiar with the teruah" (Psalm 89:16). We know the secret of awakening. "I am asleep but my heart is awake" (Song of Songs 5:2). The teruah serves to teach us: "You have it in your power to limit the gaps, to bring them closer together, to turn your lives into a contiguous, uniform whole, almost perfect like the tekiah with which we started. Do not despair! Awaken! Rejoice! Rediscover the light of G-d that fills up all the universes and sustains them. Crown G-d King over yourselves and over the entire world! Make it known to all that the world is not pandemonium, that the Divine Presence shall one day be revealed once more. Awaken and sing! G-d's glory is to you revealed!

The Tekiah after Each Group

This second tekiah is entirely addressed to the great future that awaits us. We have not despaired of hoping for it. We stand at Rosh Hashanah and we proclaim that the end of this process will come when we once more hear the contiguous, rather than broken, shofar blast, the sound of the great shofar that will be blown and that will restore all to its original state; that will reconcile sons to their fathers and fathers to their sons; that will return sons to their borders, and the Divine Presence to its abode: "On that day, a great horn shall be blown; and all those lost in Assyria and dispersed in Egypt shall come; and they shall worship the L-rd on the holy mountain at Jerusalem" (Isaiah 27:13). All the various dispersed Jews in the various Egypts will emerge to eternal freedom. The world will become, once more, a world of spiritual listening. Hearing will be the chief thing, and not speech. Then even the King will be happy to hear us, saying, "Let Me hear your voice, for sweet is your voice, and your countenance is comely" (Song of Songs 2:14).

Translation: R. Blumberg

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From the World of Rabbi Avraham Kook - (first Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael)

"Prayer is a concrete activity... Still, its outcome hinges entirely on the holiness of the worshipper's individual will, and on the divine content that fills his soul. The prayers of the righteous foment an enormous, beneficial upheaval in the values of the entire world."
(Orot HaKodesh 3:48)