



Parashat Nitzavim - #249

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Hirhurim Blog: Review of Rav Aviner's "Rosh Ha-Memshalah: Pirkei Kevod Malchut Yisrael Ve-Eretz Yisrael - The Prime Minister: Chapters on the Honor for the Government"

See here for Rabbi Gil Student's review of this book which was published soon after the assassination of Yitzchak Rabin:

<http://torahmusings.com/2012/09/peaceful-debate>

On the Haftarah...

Loyal Spouses

[Ashkenazim/Sefardim: Yeshayahu 61:10-63:9

Yemenite Jews: Yeshayahu 61:9-63:9]

In addition to simply being a place for us to dwell, the Land of Israel is a Divine gift to the Nation of Israel. The legitimacy of our right to the Land is beyond question, since it is an integral part of our identity as a Nation.

"You will no longer be called 'Forsaken,' nor will your Land be called 'Desolate,' but you will be called 'My Desire is for her,' and your Land will be called 'Espoused,' for Hashem desires you, and your Land will be espoused" (Yeshayhu 62:4).

There are two ways for a nation to relate to its Land. On the one hand, it is possible to relate to the Land as a necessity, since a nation requires a place in which to dwell. This is especially true for the Nation of Israel, which did not find a safe haven in which to settle during the course of two thousand years of Exile. One might say that this was advantageous for us since we then understood, as Theodore Herzl said, that it was essential for us to find a secure home for ourselves, where we could have physical and spiritual independence from the threats of persecution and assimilation. For this fact alone we are obligated to thank Hashem day and night. But according to this understanding, the Land is nothing more than a means to provide us with protection and comfort – and in fact could reasonably be exchanged or divided if it was not fulfilling this function. But there is a second way for the Nation to relate to its Land:

to see the Land of Israel as our spouse, as the poet Alexander Fine, who lived during the beginning of the return to Zion declared: "You are betrothed to me through blood." According to this understanding, it is obvious that if the neighbors begin to covet our spouse, we are obligated to protect her with all of our might, since a spouse is an integral part of a person and cannot be exchanged or divided.

Yeshayahu compared Eretz Yisrael to a spouse. When he turned to the Nation, he said: "But you will be called 'My Desire is for her,' and your Land will be called 'Espoused' (ibid.). This prophecy describes a renewed marriage between Hashem and the Nation, and between Hashem and the Land. "For as a young man espouses a virgin, so shall your sons espouse you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so shall your G-d rejoice over you" (ibid. v. 5). Only a prophet could make such a statement! And since this comparison has been made, that our Land is like our spouse, we are obligated to sacrifice ourselves for her and she will sacrifice herself for us.

As we see, for more than 100 years, the Nation of Israel has been embracing its Land anew, and many Jews are abandoning their professions and high material standards, which are often the source of jealousy, and are returning home. In return, the Land is giving off its fruits plentifully (Sanhedrin 98a with Rashi), and a desolate Land is being transformed into a flowering garden.

This deep connection must also be seen by the nations of the world: "For the sake of Zion I will not hold My peace, and for the sake of Jerusalem I will not be quiet, until her righteous triumph emerges as a light, and her salvation burns like a torch" (ibid. 61:1).

We must believe wholeheartedly that Eretz Yisrael is a part of us, and belongs to us completely! Only then will the nations of the world recognize this fact. We therefore are not returning to our Land as poor beggars with our hands out to accept help from the nations of the world, but as a free and proud Nation regaining control over its Land. "I have set watchmen upon your walls day and night, Jerusalem, they will take no rest. You who are Hashem's watchmen, do not be silent. And give Him no rest, until He establishes, and until He makes Jerusalem a praise on the Earth (ibid. v. 6-7).

We therefore are not silent. We constantly emphasize our right to this Land and to our eternal capital of Jerusalem. People like to ask: which takes precedence, the Nation or the Land? But we are not discussing two separate entities, rather one united whole. A nation does not live without a land, and the fact that we survived for two thousand years of exile does not contradict this fact. We survived but suffered the greatest tragedy in human history. And a land does not live without its nation. During the course of two thousand years, this Land was desolate and destroyed. Only when her children returned to her did she begin to live anew. This is the reason the Land is called the Land of Israel because without the Nation of Israel she is an empty shell, desolate, forsaken and awaiting her children.

For more than one hundred years, the covenant of marriage has been occurring, stage after stage; sometimes there are difficulties and sometimes there is light, but perfection will be achieved.

"Go through! Go through the gates! Clear the way of the Nation. Pave, pave the highway! Gather up the stones, lift up a banner for the nations. Hashem has proclaimed to the ends of the Earth, say to the daughter of Zion: 'Your salvation has come, its reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him. And they will call them the Holy Nation, the Redeemed of Hashem, and you will be called 'Sought Out,' a city not forsaken" (ibid. v. 10-12).

Rav Aviner on... The Scientific Approach to Learning Tanach

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Ki Tavo 5772 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Question: There's an increasing tendency in the yeshivot to introduce the academic/scientific approach to Tanach study. In other words, to make comparisons with various sources, to provide historic elucidation, style analysis, moral criticism and even to highlight aesthetics. Ostensibly there should be no problem with this approach, for ultimately our goal is to increase knowledge. Am I right?

Answer: Certainly our desire is to increase knowledge, wrote Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook in his article, "The Scientific Approach to Jewish Sources" (Li-Netivot Yisrael vol. 2, p. 242): "After all, that's what we do in yeshiva day and night. We seek to know Tanach, Mishnah, Talmud and Jewish law. We are men of science, toiling to learn and to analyze, to increase knowledge and wisdom. Surely we are interested in knowing and understanding our Jewish sources. Could we possibly approach them without the goal of knowing them?"

Yet it all depends on one's starting point. Do we believe that the corpus before us is Torah from Heaven, from the first letter to the last, or do we think that it constitutes something man-made? There are scholars who ponder Tanach as a fabrication of man - just some historic literary text. They view themselves as standing above it, and they decide based on their own considerations whether this text is worthy of entering the canon of truth and morality. This is an "entirely illegitimate approach to studying Jewish sources, Tanach, Talmud or Aggada."

This illegitimate approach they call "science". They arrogantly claim a monopoly on science, and they pronounce that what is learned in yeshivot is not science.

With this kind of Torah study, we do not say that the light it contains will return them to the proper path, for the student is locked in a place where the light cannot reach, since he relates to the text disparagingly. It is the researcher who decides whether or not the text has worth (see Rambam, Hilchot Talmud Torah 4:1; Shulchan Aruch Ha-Rav, Hilchot Talmud Torah 4:17; 4:3).

Out of this separatist, ostensibly objective approach, the student will understand nothing. The gates of Torah will be locked before him, because he will not believe in its divinity. Blocked before him will be the divine gate of infinite wisdom that preceded the world, into which G-d gazed before He created the universe.

"If we long for knowledge in its fullest sense, knowledge built on delving deep, with the presupposition that the Torah before us is the truth, the absolute truth, the uncontestable truth, the truth from Heaven and not from mankind, and our entire purpose is to reveal that truth, to understand that truth, with our being believers, convinced that **the truth is before us, but that it presently is concealed from us** – then our longing is positive and sincere.

In this longing, we are duty-bound to engage in all the spheres that find expression in our sources.

We must devote our efforts to the Tanach, to the words of the prophets, to their manner of speech, to examining the truth concealed within the aesthetics, the truth within the historical stories, the truth within the moral ideas, and all the more so, in the truth of our holy mitzvot."

We strive to uncover the truth, not to create it. It's not for us to accord the truth a stamp of approval. Rather, we humbly stand before the divine truth and wish to understand it. We believe and are convinced that we are standing before an infinite, divine intelligence.

We believe that G-d, in His kindness, teaches Torah to His people, Israel, and gives us the Torah which we can study and delve into, absorbing it into ourselves.

Everything must start with reverence for G-d. Whoever's reverence does not precede his wisdom will never taste the taste of Torah. That same researcher, ostensibly objective, has set himself apart from G-d's word, and he decrees what for him is the truth and what is primitive. This approach "forgets the first principle of faith that the Torah's words are from Heaven. This approach does not distinguish between divine writ and the writings of man, and its approach to both is the same. This being the case, any idea that seems impossible to understand is deemed illegitimate, since everything is judged by a human yardstick." The result is that this approach offers its adherents no possibility of being spiritually elevated and basking in the light of a higher truth.

Everything depends on one's point of origin. **One may ask questions, but he must do so out of faith and reverence.**

When the illustrious Rabbi Akiva Eiger does not understand Tosafot he writes, "This requires further analysis." Who requires further analysis? The Tosafot? No! Is the Talmudic source too difficult and impossible to understand? No! It's we who have the difficulty. It is we who don't understand. Tomorrow, a Torah scholar will come along and explain the source to us, and then everything will be clear.

"We approach Jewish sources as sources that were imparted from Heaven, and their words are the words of truth, an uncontested truth. Our entire goal is thus to uncover that truth, to uncover it – not to create it. For the sake of uncovering it, we thus use all the means at our disposal."

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Laws of Mourning

Vidui for a Deceased Person

Question: Can a nurse in the hospital recite the Vidui for a person who passed away there?

Answer: No, the Vidui must be recited by the living person. Vidui is repenting, and after a person passes away, he can no longer repent, nor can anyone repent on his behalf (see Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim #338).

Painting a mourner's apartment

Q: My wife is in mourning, can we paint our apartment?

A: There are two issues: 1. We do not find a prohibition against painting a mourner's home. 2. It is not only the mourner's home. There are other people who live there who are not mourners. Although it would be forbidden in order to benefit the mourner, it would be permissible for the others. A more serious example: it is forbidden to listen to music during mourning, but there are other people in the house and they want to listen to music. It is permissible for them to listen and if the mourner hears the music it is a benefit which comes to a person against his will (Pesachim 25b). Here, however, there is no prohibition to paint.

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