

Nitzavim-Vayeilech 2014

1.

Unity

Nachlas Tzvi page 514

“You are standing today before Hashem your God” (29, 9)

"אתם נצבים היום כלכם לפני יקוק אלהיכם ראשיכם שבטיכם זקניכם ושטריכם כל איש ישראל."

Why does the pasuk begin in the plural tense and end in the singular tense? It is impossible for an individual to perform all of the 613 mitzvos. However, if all Jews are unified as they were at Har Sinai, then all 613 mitzvos can be fulfilled. This is precisely why the pasuk starts in the plural tense, but ends in the singular tense; to indirectly inform us that when there is unity then all goals can be accomplished.

2.

Past vs future

Nachlas Tzvi page 520

“Moshe went (וילך) and spoke these words to all of Israel” (31, 1)

"וילך משה וידבר את הדברים האלה אל כל ישראל."

Why does the pasuk start with the word “spoke” and then discuss the events unlike parshas Devarim (1, 1) that related the events and only subsequently used the word “spoke”?

The context of parshas Devarim is the following; Moshe rebuked the Jews for the sins that they previously transgressed. He enumerated their sins first because he was referring to events that already occurred in the past. Dissimilarly, in this Parsha he spoke to them about future events regarding the positive attributes of Eretz Yisroel. Since these events didn’t occur yet, the pasuk therefore uses the word he spoke first.

3.

Torah is as critical to survival as air

Aleinu L’shabayach chalek beis pages 304-306

“It is not in heaven, (for you) to say, ‘who can ascend to the heaven for us and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and perform it?’ Nor is it across the sea, (for you) to say, ‘who can cross to the other side of the sea for us and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and perform it?’ Rather, the matter is very near to you – in your mouth and in your heart – to perform it.” (30, 12-14)

"לא בשמים הוא לאמר מי יעלה לנו השמימה ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשנה. ולא מעבר לים הוא לאמר מי יעבר לנו אל עבר הים ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשנה. כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיו ובלבבך לעשתו."

In the physical world, it is axiomatic that the more basic a need is, the easier it is to obtain and the more abundant it is. For instance, air. Air is vital for our survival, therefore it is easily found. **These pesukim teach us that the same principle applies to spiritual needs. The nourishment that our souls need is the Torah.** If necessary, we would technically need to travel overseas and over mountains in order to acquire the Torah. Hashem acted kindly towards us by making it very easy for us to access the Torah. Since the Torah is so essential for our survival, therefore, Hashem made the Torah very accessible. **Our feeling has to be that just as we cannot live without air to breathe, we cannot survive without Torah.** Without this feeling, it is very possible that the Torah we learn will not have its desired effect on us. Tosfos (Kesubos (63a)) says that it is the norm for one who learns to become a great sage in time. There is an obvious question that arises; there are many people who learn but do not become great people. That being so, what is the explanation of the aforementioned Tosfos? The reason why people who learn don't become great people is the following; they don't realize that the Torah is as important as air. They incorrectly think that we could breathe and exist without the Torah. They are mistaken. This type of Torah isn't as chashuv.

Let's relate a story of an individual who came to the Steipler to ask him something. Once the Steipler knew his last name, he asked if he had a brother in Bnei Bark's Vizhnitz neighborhood. The visitor answered in the affirmative. The Steipler asked him to send his brother. The visitor was confused, but he nevertheless got his brother and brought him to the Steipler. Once he came, the Steipler asked him if he remembered an incident that happened in his youth, when he was learning in a certain shul. One time the custodian asked him to relocate in order that he could clean the floor. The custodian then asked him to relocate several times again. He didn't remember the story until the Steipler said think back really hard. He then remembered the story. The Steipler then said that last night that custodian appeared to me in a dream. The custodian said that because he disturbed your Torah learning, he cannot find rest in the upper world. The obvious question regarding this story is why is the custodian held accountable? He was just doing his job. Just as a custodian in a hospital wouldn't unplug a machine, that someone's life depends on, because it is too noisy, so too he shouldn't have made him get up. The custodian could have simply asked him to temporarily lift his feet up.

The Gemara in Berachos (61b) relates the story of Rabbi Akiva who died while sanctifying God's name. The Romans decreed that the Jews were not allowed to learn Torah. Papas found Rabbi Akiva gathering Jews and teaching them Torah. He asked Rabbi Akiva 'aren't you afraid of teaching Torah?' Rabbi Akiva responded by means of a mashal (parable). Rabbi Akiva said that this is comparable to a fox that was walking by a river. He saw fish that were gathering together from place to place. The fox asked the fish 'from whom are you swimming away?' The fish responded 'from the fishermen who are trying to catch us.' The fox invited them ashore. He assured the fish that they would be safe. The fish questioned this 'welcoming invitation and offer'. They said '**if in the place from where we get our life, aka under water, we are in trouble, then surely out of our habitat, aka on land, we will be in severe danger.**' **The same applies to our current situation. If we are in danger when we are learning, then surely we will be in trouble when we aren't learning.** (תנו רבנן פעם אחת גזרה מלכות הרשעה שלא יעסקו ישראל בתורה, בא פפוס בן יהודה ומצאו לרבי עקיבא שהיה מקהיל קהלות ברבים ועוסק בתורה. אמר ליה עקיבא, אי אתה מתירא מפני מלכות? אמר לו אמשול לך משל, למה הדבר דומה? לשועל שהיה מהלך על גב הנהר, וראה דגים שהיו מתקבצים ממקום למקום, אמר להם מפני מה אתם בורחים? אמרו לו מפני רשתות שמביאין עלינו בני אדם. אמר להם רצונכם שתעלו ליבשה, ונדור אני ואתם כשם שדרו אבותי עם אבותיכם? אמרו לו אתה הוא שאומרים עליך פקח

שבחיות? לא פקה אתה, אלא טפש אתה! ומה במקום חיותנו אנו מתיראין, במקום מיתתנו על אחת כמה וכמה! אף אנחנו, עכשיו שאנו יושבים ועוסקים בתורה, שכתוב בה "כי הוא חייך וארך ימיו" כך, אם אנו הולכים ומבטלים ממנה. (על אחת כמה וכמה. The Maharsha explains that the fox, an impure animal, represents the goyim (non-Jews). The fish represents the Jews. The fox, aka goyim, tried to get the fish, aka the Jews, out of the water of Torah. Water represents Torah as stated in Tanis (7a). The fish going and gathering symbolizes the Jews trying to go to a safe location in order to learn. The fisherman's nets refer to the decrees that the goyim decreed upon the Jews. פירוש המשל ונמשל השועל הם העובדי. כוכבים שנמשלו לחיות טמאות. וראה דגים הם כלל ישראל שנמשלו לדגים. ושהיו מתקבצים ממקום למקום היינו מקהיל קהלות ברבים. והרשתות הם הגזירות והשמדות שהיו מביאין עלינו בני אדם. ורצונכם שתעלו ליבשה דהיינו The Gemara continues and says that they imprisoned Rabbi Akiva. They took Rabbi Akiva out of jail in order to kill him. It was the time of kriyas shema. They combed his flesh with metal combs. This was excruciatingly painful. Rabbi Akiva began to accept upon himself the yoke of heaven by reciting shema. The talmidim (students) of Rabbi Akiva asked 'until here?' Rabbi Akiva responded 'my entire life I was pained over this pasuk. I thought to myself, when would I ever be able to fulfill this pasuk? Now that I am finally able to fulfill this pasuk, should I not fulfill it?' Rabbi Akiva intently recited the first pasuk of shema and then died. A heavenly voice yelled out 'you will merit heaven.' אמרו לא) היו ימים מועטים עד שתפסוהו לרבי עקיבא וחבשוהו בבית האסורים, ותפסו לפפוס בן יהודה וחבשוהו אצלו. אמר לו פפוס! מי הביאך לכאן? אמר ליה אשריך רבי עקיבא שנתפסת על דברי תורה, אוי לו לפפוס שנתפס על דברים בטלים. בשעה שהוציאו את רבי עקיבא להריגה זמן קריאת שמע היה, והיו סורקים את בשרו במסרקות של ברזל, והיה מקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים. אמרו לו תלמידיו רבינו, עד כאן? אמר להם כל ימי הייתי מצטער על פסוק זה "בכל נפשך" אפילו נוטל את נשמתך, אמרתי מתי יבא לידי ואקיימנו, ועכשיו שבא לידי לא אקיימנו? היה מאריך באחד עד שיצתה נשמתו באחד. יצתה בת קול ואמרה אשריך רבי עקיבא שיצאה נשמתך באחד. אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא זו תורה וזו שכרה? ממתים ידך ה' ממתים וגו'! אמר להם חלקם בחיים. יצתה בת קול ואמרה אשריך רבי עקיבא (שאתה מזומן לחיי העולם הבא.)

There is much to discuss regarding this fundamental, memorable, historic and inspiring event. **The question arises; why are the Jews compared to fish out of water as opposed to a peacock or hyena without air? Rabbi Mordechai Gifter ingeniously explains that while a fish is in water, it doesn't look so alive, even though the reality is that it is completely alive. Many times fish casually and slowly glide. Dissimilarly, when fish are removed from water they tend to shake around and move a lot, it looks like it's vibrant and completely alive, even though the reality is that it is dying. The same applies to people. Many people who are out of the water, aka the Torah, look alive. They go to prohibited places and are energetic. The reality is that they're dying.** This is precisely what the Gemara in Berachos (18) refers to when it says that wicked people are called dead even when they are alive and righteous people are called alive even when they are dead. (רשעים שבהייהן קרויין מתים). The Mishna in Avos (perek beis) states the more Torah one learned, the more life he has. (מרבה) Some people say 'take a break from learning, it's the summer. Get a life.' The response to these people is 'this is life. Torah is life!' The pasuk states 'it is a tree of life for those who grasp it. Similarly, we say in the second beracha before shema during maariv 'it is our life'. **Other animals differ in this regard. Meaning, when they have air they look alive and when they don't have air then they look like they're dying. This is true, when they have air they are actually living and when they don't have air then they are actually dying. The fish that look dead while they are in the water symbolize righteous people. Many times they look tired and dead so to say. This is only because they exert, utilize and save all of their**

energy to learn and perform mitzvos. The reality is that they are more alive than anyone else. (רבי משה שיינערמאן) פרשת שמיני דף רמח, איתא בזבחים יג., הפורש ממך כפורש מן)

החיים. כתב בהערה 99, רבי מרדכי גיפטר זצ"ל אמר נמשלו ישראל לדגים שבים מה דגים שבים כל חיותם במים כך ישראל כל חיותם הוא מכוה התורה. ללא תורה הם מתים. עומד אחד מן הצד ומביט בדגים הם שטים בניחותא במים, אך אם רק תוציא את הדג מן המים הוא קופץ ומשתולל הוא מנפנף בסנפיריו ובזנבו נראה שהוא מתחיל לחיות! אך באמת אין אלו סימני חיות אלא פרפורי הגסיסה שלו. אלו הלומדים בישיבה בעמל יום אחר יום לעתים נדמה להם ששם ברחוב יש חיים! שם משתוללים וחיים ונעים וזזים, והכל כל כך תוסס... אין אלו חיים, אלו פרפורי גסיסה שלהם... כדג המשתולל מחוץ למים. צריך לגלות את השקר להסיר את המכסה המטעה.

Additionally, explains the Chafetz Chaim, water is a complete necessity for fish. So too, we need our water, aka the Torah. The Tana D'bei Eliyahu Zuta says that just as one cannot survive without water after a certain period of time, such as a week, so too Jews cannot survive without Torah after a certain period of time.