

DIVREI TORAH BULLETIN

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A project of the NATIONAL COUNCIL OF YOUNG ISRAEL

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PARSHAT: Nitzavim-Vayeilech
25 Elul 5771 / 9/24/2011
DAF YOMI: Chulin 90
Nach Yomi: Chronicles 5

1917 Days of Captivity for Israeli MIA Gilad Shalit

The words “Nitzavim- Vayeilech” are not only the name of this week’s Parshiyos, but are also indicative of the tone of the final Shabbos of the year. On the one hand, Nitzavim: We stand and reflect on the year that has passed. But on the other hand, Vayeilech: We are ready to go and proceed into a new and blessed year.

According to the cycle of Jewish customs, we have actually been preparing for this moment of transition throughout the summer months. This Shabbos marks the conclusion of the summer season when Jews throughout the world pursued the traditional study of the Book of Avos, aimed at growing in ethics and in Jewish perspective. I would like to share with you an incident that is found in this classic work.

The Book of Avos relates that the Talmudic sage, Rabbi Yosi, was once approached by a Jew who came from a city that had limited exposure to Judaism. The man invited Rabbi Yosi to move to his town and said, “If you will join us - to live with us in our city - then I will give you enormous wealth.” Rabbi Yosi declined the offer. He said, “If you will give me all the wealth in the world, I will only live in a place of Torah.”

The commentaries ask: Why didn’t Rabbi Yosi accept the money, and the invitation, and proceed to build Torah in that community. If given “all the money in the world” he certainly could open a Jewish education system and the infrastructure of vibrant Torah living. Why did Rabbi Yosi turn the offer down?

The commentaries explain that from the man’s invite, to “join us - to live with us in our place,” Rabbi Yosi understood that they were not interested in change, and they were not inviting him to build a Torah community. Perhaps they respected him and wanted him as an ornament of prestige for their community. They were prepared to admire him from afar, as long as he would have no impact on their lives. This is the offer that Rabbi Yosi refused.

Rabbi Yosi declares: I will only live in a place of Torah - a place that already is one, or a place that has the potential to become one because its residents are ready to grow.

One of the greatest gifts that a parent can grant a child is to allow them to change and to grow. This grants the child the gift of life itself, the gift

of individuality. As one parent told me regarding her children, "I know that they will not be just like me. I hope they will be more religious, not less."

Too often, however, people do not give themselves or their children permission to grow.

For example, in the story of Lot and his daughters, I often wondered how, upon the destruction of Sedom, the daughters came to the conclusion that all of humanity was destroyed. In their minds they were convinced that there was no one left. In their minds they had to live with their father intimately in order to perpetuate the human race. Didn't they ever hear of their righteous great-uncle by the name of Avraham? Didn't it occur to them that maybe he survived the destruction of Sedom, along with some of his followers? After all, Avraham did not even live in Sedom.

It seems to me that the way Lot raised his family was that they did not perceive Avraham as a relevant player in their lives. Perhaps they had a painting of their world famous uncle in their homes for ornamental purposes. They might have even visited him for dinner. But Lot raised them in a way that they were not emotionally open to the teachings of Avraham. Their father ran away from the legacy of Avraham, and he never gave them the emotional permission to return.

When the man invited Rabbi Yosi to "join us - to live with us in our place," it was clear to Rabbi Yosi that "Permission to Grow" had not yet been

granted. Rabbi Yosi, or one of his colleagues, certainly would have accepted a sincere invitation to teach Torah virtually anywhere. But the Rabbi's condition was that it must be a place of Torah, a place that already is one, or a place that is open to become one.

I believe that the greatest gift that we can give our children and ourselves is to grant permission to grow - to ensure that we and our children are comfortable with the legacy of Avraham. This does not require perfection in observance. But it does require that we consciously decide to be warm and open to mitzvah opportunities.

Let us decide that in the coming year we will make an increased effort to interact with people greater than ourselves. Let us decide to study the lives of great people, both past and present. May the new year come upon us as a year of growth and blessing beyond all expectation.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos and a K'Siva V'Chasima Tovah.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine, originally of Monsey, New York, is the Rav of Young Israel of Cherry Hill and the Director of TEACH613™, an organization which promotes Halacha and Hashkafa classes in the Cherry Hill/ Philadelphia area.

Rabbi Rhine is the author of a popular book, "The Magic of Shabbos: A Journey Through the Shabbos Experience," (Judaica Press, 1998) and the producer and presenter of an audio series entitled The Perek Shira Collection, available in stores or at www.teach613.org. To invite Rabbi Rhine to speak in your community, please contact him at RMRhine@teach613.org or 908-770-9072.