

7011 1231

1) Why in Yavneh Mode talk
Yehoshua also not to
that God will not release you a
heart you

2) Why do children men have of knowledge
in the of yeha that by children to
only Yavneh to Mode's goal

3) Hard means to have to struggle to
make lessons to many men to have
the courage to do them a way
d of the mark

4) Why do children learn to make
lessons in yeha. Why in a place
could never get let get perfect
lessons. Why? I can't learn why I can't

won't let of after ten years
5) Why do children learn to make lessons
I can't do it when I come. Why
say I can't make a

57.
NITZAVEEM 1983
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Nitzaveem we learn many of the concepts for the High Holidays. We learn about Teshuva, repentance. We learn how we are to choose life, how G-d cares and is concerned about us. To my mind, perhaps the most important sentence in the whole Sedra is the sentence which reads "This command which I am commanding you today is not too hard for you neither is it far off." None of us is ever to despair. None of us should not think we can do things. We all have the power to do Teshuva. The Kotzka Rabbi said that despair is the worst of all sins. It robs us from acting. It makes us give up on life. We should never feel that life is hopeless. That's why it says "See, I have given before you today life in the good and death in the evil and you shall choose life." Today you read about so many youngsters committing suicide for no real reason. They have given up on life. Life has its problems, its drawbacks, but we can overcome them all. That's one of the purposes of our religion, to give us strength. We learn in the Torah portion Vayelach that there will come a time when G-d will hide His face. It mentions the word Haster twice. The Rabbis teach us that this means that a time will come when the people will not even know that G-d is hidden. G-d will be hidden from them and they will not even know it. They will be searching and searching and they will not even know what they are searching for. This is a terrible thing. Many of our youngsters today are searching. Husbands leave wives, wives leave husbands because they know something is wrong but they do not know what. The Torah is here to help us find our way. None of us should ever feel lost or hopeless. The story about when the hurricane came and cut off all the electricity to a 50 story building. Three roommates decided to walk up. The first 20 flights one would tell jokes. The second 20 flights one would tell riddles. The last 10 flights one would tell sad stories. Everything went well with the jokes and the riddles. When they got to the last 10 floors the last roommate said, "Oh, do I have a sad story for you! You know how the only one with a key is me? I forgot it on the first floor." Challenges we will always have. Let us all have the strength, courage to face them and overcome them. We are adequate to the challenge. That's why G-d gave us the Torah. That's why we say that Teshuva, Tefila, and Tzedakah remove the evil decree. Teshuva is our reply to the challenges which is symbolized by the Tekiah note of the Shofar. Tefila is for our prayers

NITZAVEEM 1983
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE TWO

to G-d to quickly change those things we cannot change right away. They are symbolized by the Shevorem note. Tzedakah is our capacity to hear the pleas of others and to answer them. G-d has created us to help Him perfect this world. We are adequate to the challenge. We can bring joy and happiness to others through Tzedakah and we know that G-d accepts us fully as symbolized by Tefila and prayer. May we all never despair and may we always realize that we can meet every situation and that we should do so. May we always have the strength, courage, and integrity to do so.

50.
NITZAVEEM-VAYELACH 1982
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today we celebrate a Bar Mitzvah. Bar Mitzvah means that a boy assumes responsibility for his religious actions. The word responsibility in English means to respond. In order to be responsible each of us must know how to respond to different situations. We must learn how to respond to challenges. Unfortunately, in our day and age people do not want to respond to others and to the challenges. They want to be concerned just with themselves. There is a paradox in life, though. The more you are concerned just about yourself the more you become alienated, while the more you attach yourself to others the more you find yourself. That's what the term Teshuva means, repentance. We learn about Teshuva in this week's Sedra. Teshuva does not mean repentance. The English word repentance means to be put back into a fence, to be repenned. The Hebrew word Teshuva means to learn to respond to the world and its challenges. Unfortunately, there are so many people who are only interested in themselves. The Hebrew word for life is Chayim. Chayim is plural because each of us has two lives, an inner life and an outer life. Our outer life everyone sees but it is not the most important. The most important is our inner life. We can have all the cars and swimming pools and big homes we like and still be miserable. Too often people are only concerned with externals, with fake surfaces. This leads to many perversions and many times to great selfishness. We are told "See, I have given before you today the life and the good and the death and the evil and choose life". We are to choose life. The only way we can live is to assume responsibilities to ourselves, to others and to the world. Unfortunately, too many people are only concerned about externals and themselves alone. The leading cause of death of young men in the United States is suicide. Their life is empty. They have no inner life. We are admonished to choose life, to be open to the challenges of life even though that may bring aggravation and struggle, but that also brings life. Many people in this life remind me of the fellow who went walking with his friend with an umbrella. It started to rain. The friend said, "Open the umbrella". He said, "I can't, it has holes in it ". The friend said, "Why did you bring it?". He said, "I didn't think it would rain". This, unfortunately, is the story of many people. On the surface they seem all right but their life is full of holes. They are only concerned about externals. They really cannot live because they do not know that in order to live you have to learn how to respond to the challenges of life.

51.
NITZOVEEM 1981
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In this Torah portion we learn about the third Covenant that G-d made with the Jewish people. He made it with all the people, with the men, the women, the children, the leaders, the lowly water carriers, everyone. The question is asked many times why did Moshe say to bring the infants also, the Tapchem? Why were the people to bring their infants to stand before G-d on the day of this Covenant? Did they have any understanding? The answer is that the Covenant with G-d was made with all the Jewish people. The experiences we give our young mold them and shape them. Even if they do not understand everything early experiences shape a child. Yehudi Menuhin tells how his parents took him to violin concerts when he was only 2 or 3. They could not afford a babysitter and he sat with them in the highest balcony. He says listening to the violinists at that early age caused him to be a violinist. Having early experiences shape our children. We need children even to realize ourselves. In order to be fully part of a Covenant we need our children beside us. Our children teach us how to be compassionate, how to respond to needs. In Judaism to be childless is considered a terrible thing because then one cannot even develop oneself fully because there is no one to whom we can fulfill all their needs. A baby when it is young utters a cry. The mother must recognize that cry. The baby imitates the mother and father and learns from the parents how to be human, how to feel others' needs. Every parent is the greatest artist because he shapes and molds the future generations. To be a member of the Covenant means to be responsible for others, to learn from our past, and to strive for a common future. Children teach us how to be responsible. Children are a great blessing from G-d. Today we are naming a baby. We are not just giving her any name. We are naming her after a grandmother and grandfather. A baby stands for something. A baby stands for our past. It allows us to live more humanly in the present and it is a symbol of our future and when more of our ideals of love and harmony will be put into effect. We just do not pick any name. A baby is a sign of our Covenant. The story about a boy who came to school whose name was Irving 71/8 Stone. I asked him what the name 71/8 was and he said his parents could not agree on his middle name so they put a lot of names in a hat and the mother picked out 71/8. That's not the Jewish way. Names mean something. Pretty soon it will be Rosh Hashonna when we all pray for Chaim. Chaim is plural not singular. We do not say

NITZOVEEM 1981
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE TWO

Chai. Chai in Hebrew means raw, a glob, embryonic material. Each of us if we only live for ourselves only have Chai, but if we live with others, with those who have lived before, with our children, with our spouses, with our friends, then we will have Chaim we have life, then we have meaning. Let us all hope and pray that we have this type of life in the coming year.

NITZAVEEM-VAYELECH 1996

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today we read the double Torah portion Nitzaveem-Vayelech. One of the underlying themes of both these Torah portions is the assumption of responsibility. We are told to choose, to choose between the good and the bad. We are told to choose life. We should not be fooled by choosing things which, at first glance, seem to be good but which really are not. "See, I have given before you today the life and the good and the death and the evil, and I am commanding you today to love the Lord your G-d, to go in His path, to observe His commandments, His laws, and His judgments, and you will live and you will increase and G-d will bless you in the land which you will come there to inherit." In other words, we are told to choose. That is the whole essence of these two Torah portions. "And you shall choose life in order that you shall live, you and your children."

Each of us is told that we must be responsible. Each of us has to assume responsibility for ourselves, for our families, and for our community. In fact, that is exactly what a bar mitzvah means. When a boy becomes bar mitzvah or a girl becomes bat mitzvah, it means that they now have the opportunity to assume responsibility for themselves, for their family, and for the community. That is the whole essence of Judaism. We all know that we are incomplete and we know that we have to complete ourselves. Other religions and philosophies have other ways which a person must follow in order to become complete. Some religions believe that you must be a passive recipient of the love of some individual or some god, etc. We do not believe that. We believe that what we have to do is assume responsibility for ourselves and our actions.

NITZAVEEM-VA YELECH 1996

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

What does responsibility mean? It means that we must learn how to respond to every given situation at hand. One of the most important things about a bar or bat mitzvah is that it teaches the young man or woman something about themselves. Many times they do not feel that they can do the task that is given to them. They do not know that they have the talent to do what they think they should be able to do. Therefore, they many times decide that they will not even try to do what they are not sure that they know that they can do. A bar and bat mitzvah force a young man and woman to do certain things, and, because they are able to complete these tasks successfully, they learn something about themselves. They learn that they can appear in public and they can do well, that they can master certain tasks. It is not even the tasks that they are doing which is important, whether to read a Haphtorah or give a speech to enunciate clearly before their parents and relatives and friends, to bear the family honor, so to speak, in their hands, but they know that they can now do things. In fact, I have seen it happen many times that young people will be profoundly changed by their bar or bat mitzvah, not that they are any smarter, not that they are even more diligent, but that they have more confidence. They know something about themselves. That is the mark of a good teacher. A good teacher is able to allow their students to feel confidence about themselves, to learn something about themselves that they did not know before. That is essential if a person is to grow. I think this marks off Jewish young men and women from others because they had this opportunity to prove themselves before others. They have assumed responsibility, so to speak, for their family and their family is counting on them, and this is something that is very, very important. Sometimes parents make a mistake. They give the

NITZAVEEM-VAYELECH 1996

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

child the responsibility of cleaning up their room but no other room. It is important that a child clean up their room but it is more important that a child clean up a room that is very important to the parents, like the living room or dining room, that they assume a job that the family knows is necessary because then you teach the child responsibility, and I think that that is essential. Unless you teach a child responsibility and tell the child that he counts and that the family is counting on him the child does not grow, and we know that a child has to grow, and if a child does not grow within himself, then the child will deteriorate. We all know the terrible alienation that many young people feel today. That is why they turn to dope and alcohol. They need to know that they are counted on. Many of them join gangs because only in a gang can they feel that they are really counted on. We know that assuming responsibility is what completes us and that is what the rabbis tell us. Sometimes it is very difficult to assume responsibility. In fact, as I always say, many times the difference between doing a mitzvah and doing an aveira, a sin, is the difference between when you say ah and oh. When you do a mitzvah many times it is hard in the beginning, but the next morning you say, "Ah, it is wonderful." On the other hand, when you do an aveira many times you say ah but the next morning you say, "Oh, it is terrible." A person has to feel that they have self-worth, that they have dignity, and that they can accomplish things in this world.

That's why this Torah portion starts out with the expression, "You are standing today all of you before the Lord your G-d, everyone, your leaders, your bailiffs, your children, your

NITZAVEEM-VA YELECH 1996

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

wives, your strangers, everyone, even those who hue the wood and carry the water." We all have a responsibility that we can assume. We all can only be the best parent to our child. We can only be the best child to our own parents. We have unique tasks that only we can perform, and it is not true that if a person is going to be selfish he is going to be happy. If being selfish would make a person happy then you would have a lot of happy people in the world, but most people when they know that they are not needed and that they are just acting selfishly, they are miserable. That is what Kafka talks about when he talks about man being a cockroach on this planet. We need others in order to complete ourselves. We have to assume responsibility. In fact, the Hebrew word for assuming responsibility is achraiys because the root of the word is from acher, means knowing how to relate to others, knowing how to relate to G-d, knowing that you count, knowing that you are important because people are counting on you.

There does seem to be, though, a contradiction in these two Torah portions because the first words of this Torah portion, "You are standing today," which means that you are standing before G-d and it seems that that does not seem to allow for spiritual growth, but, on the other hand, on the next Torah portion we learn, "And Moshe went." The rabbis all ask the question, where did Moshe go? It does not say in the text where Moshe went. They say that Moshe served as an example for us all. Moshe was the great leader of the Jewish people for over 40 years. Moshe led them through the desert and received the Torah on the Jewish people's behalf and had taught the Jewish people the Torah. He had allowed them to

NITZAVEEM-VAYELECH 1996

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

overcome so many trials and tribulations. This Moshe was no longer fit to be the leader of the Jewish people. The leadership was given over to Joshua. He was not going to be able to reach the spiritual goal to which he had striven. He was not going to be able to enter into the land of Israel. We might think that since this is the case, Moshe would give up. He would say, "I did what I had to do. I failed to reach all my goals so now I give up," but that was not Moshe. Moshe still went. He still was interested in attaining, and that, of course, is what we all have to have. If we are to have a good life we have to assume responsibility for those things we can, and Moshe could still do a lot. Even though he was not the leader of the Jewish people he could still help out in so many tasks among the people, give so much advice, help people in understanding a word of Torah, help them through visiting the sick and taking care of the poor, just like all of us can do. It is our responsibility to do these things, but why does it say, "You are standing today all of you for G-d"? Because we are all standing before G-d, which means we have a goal. The goal is to achieve constant greater spirituality, constant greater feelings of responsibility. Many times we will not be able to achieve that, as Moshe was not able to achieve his ultimate goal, but that does not mean we should quit. We should do that which we can do, and that, of course, is what we are talking about here in this Torah portion. We are talking about how we should try to strive continuously to better ourselves, to relate better to others, to be a better parent, a better son. We can all do these things. We are standing before G-d and this standing before G-d should initiate within us the feeling of continually growing, because G-d is perfect. G-d is above us. We are standing before Him but we should continually try to reach and to imitate those

