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9 years of Points to Ponder on Parashas Netzavim

**Nitzavim comment on the Parsha** -- **Rav Pam**  noted that it is interesting that in a year like this one it is possible to have read 2 large parshiyos (Matos & Maasei) together which total 244 possukim while separating Nitzavim and VaYeilech which have only 70 in total. Why not combine these and separate those Parshiyos? Rav Pam cited the Halacha that one needs to read the Tochacha before the year is over but in order not to end the year on a bad note, we add a Parsha as a buffer. Rav Pam added that if we put in a buffer for us not to start a year on a bad foot, shouldn’t we remind educators not to do the same for their students and allow a buffer for growth as well?

**אַתֶּ֨ם נִצָּבִ֤ים הַיּוֹם֙ You are all standing here (29:9) - Rashi** notes that there is a connection between the current Parasha and the last one. For when Bnei Yisroel heard the Tochacha, they got scared and were ready to give up. Moshe told them not to give up because despite the fact that they have angered Hashem in the past, he didn’t wipe them out until now. But was Moshe implying that the Tochacha was just words? That it had no meaning? **Rav Leib Chasman**  explains that the purpose of the Tochacha was to open our eyes. When we walk around with a sense of complacency then the Tochacha happens. Our job is to open our eyes and change our actions to create the best awareness of Hashem in everything we do. If we are successful, we will stay off the Tochacha.

**אַתֶּ֨ם נִצָּבִ֤ים הַיּוֹם֙ Today (29:9)** – The Torah mentions the word “Today” three times in the opening of the Parsha. Why? **Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski**  notes that there 2 roadblocks placed before us as we endeavor to become better people and Jews. The first is the fear of the future as we look ahead to the challenges that we might encounter and our frustration in meeting them and overcoming them. The second is the guilt we feel about the past which can make us feel unworthy and depressed. The Torah tells us to ignore the roadblocks and focus on the present. We are here now and can achieve that which is with us in the moment. Attaching moment to moment can help create great things.

**אַתֶּ֨ם נִצָּבִ֤ים You are all Nitzavim (Standing) (29:9)** - What is the difference between a Nitzav and an Omed? Moreover, didn’t the people SEE that they were all standing? What did Moshe add by telling them Atem Nitzavim? **Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi** explained that the idea of Hitayatzut (standing at attention) as opposed to Omed refers to a status wherein everyone present stands at the ready to perform a particular mission together. Each person in the job dedicates himself or herself to that job fully. Here the job is to place one’s entire being at the service of Hashem or the idea of “Erin Od Milevado”.

**אַתֶּ֨ם נִצָּבִ֤ים הַיּוֹם֙ Nitzavim (29:9) – Rav Elya Meir Bloch**  noted that Netzavim is a blessing. Sometimes in moments of transition there is a choice between crisis and opportunity. The secret to success is to sit with the quiet and pay attention to one’s thoughts at those times. My colleague **Dr. David Pelcovitz** often points to a famous prayer of **Rabbeinu Bachaya** who prayed HaRachaman Hu Yatzilenu MPizur HaNefesh – may Hashem save us from being scattered in our souls. The ability to be Nitzavim is the secret to safety from that torture.

**אַתֶּ֨ם נִצָּבִ֤ים הַיּוֹם֙ You are Nitzavim here (29:9)** – Rashi comments that Bnei Yisrael were scared after they heard the Tochacha and wondered who would be able to survive. Moshe encouraged them by noting Atem Nitzavim HaYom – you stand here – you’ve made it thus far. **Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop**  explained that the people thought that the Klalos were merely a a punishment but Moshe showed them that they were really a Beracha. The intent of the Tochacha was to serve as a deterrent from performing sin and to give the people an extra push against the desire to sin. If they would fail, it would be the proof to Hashem of insanity on their parts (who would sin knowing the dire consequences if not one who is ill) and make them not liable.

**אַתֶּ֨ם נִצָּבִ֤ים הַיּוֹם֙ You are Nitzavim here (29:9)** **– Rashi** comments that when Bnei Yisrael heard the Tochacha they turned white and were scared. They wondered if anyone could withstand the wrath of Hashem. Moshe calmed them down reminding them of the fact that they had already angered him plenty and still “Atem Nitzavim Hayom” . **Kli Yakar** asks that if this is the case, why offer the Tochacha at all? The **Eretz Tzvi of Khozinglov** explains that while they feared utter annihilation, Moshe reminded them that the Tochacha would be on the bad parts within them. As far as the good in them? Atem Nitzavim HaYom.

**אַתֶּ֨ם נִצָּבִ֤ים הַיּוֹם֙ You are all standing here in front of Hashem…to enter a covanent with Hashem (29:9-11**) – The Torah begins with the plural and switches to the singular. Why**? Rav Ovadiah Yosef**  noted that there is a duality to the nature of a public covenant – and whether one could annul it individually or not at all (See Y.D. 228: 30 and Shach there). Therefore, although it was a national covenant (Kulchem) it was accepted individually by each member of the Jewish nation contiguously so as not to be able to be annulled until it is annulled successfully on behalf of the entire nation.

**רָֽאשֵׁיכֶ֣ם שִׁבְטֵיכֶ֗ם Your tribal leaders and elders (29:9) – Rashi** comments that the leaders come first on purpose. Why is that so? Why does Moshe single out leaders before the rest of the people? **Rav Yehuda Amital**  cited a Yirushalmi [(Chagiga 2:2)](http://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Chagigah.2.2?lang=he-en) about Shimon ben Shetach and the fate possibly awaiting him for taking a mantel that wasn’t his to have. More adherence is demanded of Jewish leadership. One who takes the mantel must stand up and be held to the higher standard and thus gets called out first.

**כֹּ֖ל אִ֥ישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵֽל: Every single Jew (29:9) – Rav Shaul Yisraeli** explained that while individualism is responsibility enough for every Jew, we are also called upon to give of ourselves wholly and fully to the collective. This is the secret of Arvus – this is why the Torah uses the word “Kulchem” to describe the assemblage. Each of us is filled with a tremendous potential to serve Hashem with a total devotion that contributes to the whole collective.

**מֵֽחֹטֵ֣ב עֵצֶ֔יךָ עַ֖ד שֹׁאֵ֥ב מֵימֶֽיךָ From the woodchoppers to the water carriers (29:10)** - Why the distinction between the 2? Aren’t these references to people at the same stage of life? **The Shivim Panim L’torah** notes that the axe never thinks he is above the chopper who wields him and the bucket never thinks he is beneath the one drawing the water. The same lesson is important for the Jewish leadership — it needs to not think of itself as too far above or too far beneath the people to be with them.

**לְעָבְרְךָ֗ בִּבְרִ֛ית To enter a covenant with you (29:11)** - Why do we need a second Bris? We already entered on with Hashem? **Rav Schachter**  noted that the Bris mentioned in Netzavim includes those who aren’t “here” -- those who weren’t around at Har Sinai. That group was not a part of the Bris at Har Sinai. this one was. Why is this Bris different? **Rav Schachter quoted Rav Soloveitchik**  who explained that God wanted to make the second Bris in Eretz Yisrael when the concept of Arvus (guarantorship) would apply. However, Moshe wasn’t able to enter Eretz Yisrael and would lose. As such, Moshe started it here, and then the one made at Har Eival/Grizim was a continuation of this second bris. In other words, God wanted to make the bris only in Eretz Yisrael since the land connects us. At the same time, God wanted Moshe to be involved in the Bris which is why He had Moshe start off this bris מעבר לירדן.

**אֶת־אֲשֶׁ֨ר יֶשְׁנ֜וֹ פֹּ֗ה עִמָּ֨נוּ֙ עֹמֵ֣ד הַיּ֔וֹם** **Those who are here and for those who are not (29:11)** – The **Behag** counts the Bris of Har Grizim and Har Eival as a Mitzva but the **Rambam** does not. The Rambam argues that the Bris was a single event and how could it count. **Ramban** defends the Behag by explaining that he counts even Horaas Shaah if they have Halachic ramifications. **Rav Schachter**  explained that the ramification of the Bris mentioned here was that it included all future generations. This is why in opposition to the Tochacha in Bechukosai which is written in the plural, the one here was written in the singular for it was to the entire nation as one. Why then did it not begin immediately? Rav Schachter explained that Eretz Yisrael is a further attachment that united the people into a nation. That would not happen until they crossed the Yarden. However, since Hashem wanted Moshe to exact the Bris on His behalf, he had Moshe do it now.

**כִּי֩ אֶת־אֲשֶׁ֨ר יֶשְׁנ֜וֹ פֹּ֗ה עִמָּ֨נוּ֙ עֹמֵ֣ד הַיּ֔וֹם For those who are here today and even for those who are not standing here today (29:14)** - How can there be a Bris created if part of some of the people (namely those not yet born — who lack a Guf) be obligated in a Bris here**? Chida** explains that within each Guf of a person is his parents’ Guf. Since the ancestors were at Har Sinai, our bodies are included as well. Thus, says Chida, when a parent takes on a Hiddur Mitzva or practice, technically so should the children. Children are the outgrowth of their parents. **Rav Yisrael Reisman quoted Rav Chaim Kanievsky** who explained that therefore when one learns in memory of a parent, s/he does not need to mention the parent’s name since it is understood. The **Mishna Berurah** makes this point in regard to Yizkor donations. Thus, children should strive to keep to their parents’ practices in Mitzva performance.

**וַתִּרְאוּ֙ אֶת־שִׁקּ֣וּצֵיהֶ֔ם  You have seen their detestable things (29:16)** - If Bnei Yisrael had already seen how detestable Avoda Zara is, why does Moshe need to go into such a discourse about it? **Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski**  explained that we find that when we use scare tactics in order to discourage people from engaging in certain forbidden pleasures, the audience tends to be more stimulated to try that illicit pleasure and the stimulation for immediate pleasure may exceed the deterrent effect. Moshe understood this but in order to turn off the desire for dangerous pleasure, Moshe needed something beyond scare tactics.

**פֶּן־יֵ֣שׁ בָּ֠כֶ֠ם אִ֣ישׁ אֽוֹ־אִשָּׁ֞ה** **Lest there be among you a man or woman …whose heart turns away from being with Hashem (29:17)** – The Gemara (Sukkah 46a) explains that while man fills empty vessels, Hashem can ONLY fill a vessel that is full. **Rav Wolbe**  explained that when the Tora explains L‘Maan Sifos Harava Es HaTzmeia (adding the watered to the thirsty) it means that when one has tried sin and satiated his soul with that Avaira, he will again thirst for it. The trick to avoid that cycle is to be involved and immersed in Mitzva performance. One who is too busy to sin, usually does not do it.

**כִּ֛י בִּשְׁרִר֥וּת לִבִּ֖י אֵלֵ֑ךְ For I will follow my heart’s desires (29:18)** – Here the word “Kee” implies a translation of “even though”. It should be pointed out that we NEVER find “Kee” translated that way anywhere else. How can we understand the Possuk with a more acceptable definition of “Kee”? **Rav Shaul Yisraeli**  cautioned that Pharaoh also wanted to use the same argument – that there was no reason to be punished for not following Hashem’s word for it was pre-ordained. (“We were born into a Galus and it is a weak world – you need to understand that”) Pharaoh made the same argument when he argued that Hashem hardened his heart. However, it was Pharaoh who chose to give up his choice and we too, who need to choose to change. It is in our mouths and hearts to do so.

**כִּ֛י בִּשְׁרִר֥וּת לִבִּ֖י אֵלֵ֑ךְ When he hears the words of this covanent and blesses his heart that he will be ok being complacent (29:18) - Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz**  was once walking in Yirushalayim during the hot summer,  and passed a funeral procession. He inquired as to the person being buried and, upon learning the name of the Niftar, noted that he knew the person and thought he was young. He was told that the person had died of the chills (Pneumonia). He asked how one could get the chills in the midst of the intense summer heat. The students told him that the person had gotten the chills in the winter and did not take care of himself properly and, as a result, passed away in the summer after a chronic struggle. Rav Chaim exclaimed that he also has “cooled off” not from the winter but from the Yamim Noraim. This, he told the students, was not a good thing. We need to understand that Gezeiros are made on Rosh Hashana and we need the excitement of the Tefillah at that point for the rest of the year.

**כִּ֛י בִּשְׁרִר֥וּת לִבִּ֖י אֵלֵ֑ךְ He will bless himself in his heart saying I will be at peace…Hashem will not be willing to forgive him for then Hashem’s anger and jealousy will smoke against that man (29:18-19)** – How can one be so foolish to think he will be ok**? Rav Betzalel Ashkenazi (Shittah Mikubetzes)** explains that the world needs many different kinds of people who make different contributions to it. Lest a person think that since the world cannot exist without him and thus he can sin to his heart’s content, Hashem says “not so.” The world will indeed exist without him.

**מִתַּ֖חַת הַשָּׁמָֽיִם From under the heavens (29:19)** - What is added in noting that the person will be wiped out from under the heavens? **Rav Nissan Alpert**  explained that the Jewish nation can never be wiped out insofar as we are above the heavens. However, one who does not want to enter the Bris with Hashem is thus, beneath the heavens and ripe for destruction.

**אָ֣מְר֔וּ עַ֚ל אֲשֶׁ֣ר עָֽזְב֔וּ אֶת־בְּרִ֥ית They will say since you left the Bris you made with Hashem (29:24)** – **Rav Zilberstein**  likens this to the story of the people of Chelm who, in the winter wondered how the Shamash would be able to walk through the town to wake people up for Tefilla and not trudge through the beautiful white cover that the snow provided. The trustees of the town decided that 2 people would carry the Shamash and thus he would have no need to walk on the snow and ruin it. The people marveled over the ingenuity of the trustees oblivious to the fact that the solution merely compounded the problem. Rav Zilberstein added that when people decide to act in a certain manner “for the parnossa” so that they can raise a good Jewish family, they do not realize that they too, are making this same mistake. The closer to a Torah life you are, the closer the example that your family can choose to follow.

**הַנִּ֨סְתָּרֹ֔ת** **The Hidden things are to Hashem (29:28**) – When we say Vidui on Yom Kippur we note this Possuk as well – noting that the hidden Aveiros are for Hashem while the revealed ones are our responsibility. What does this mean? **Rav Schachter**  would often point out that the intention here is to note that when it comes to public Torah observance and non-observance, we have a collective responsibility of Avreivus for one another. This is the source for that concept in Judaism. What we mean to state is that we cannot be responsible for Nistaros but the things that are revealed are ours La’asos – meaning we have the responsibility to be miaseh others to join us in mitzvah observance.

**הַנִּ֨סְתָּרֹ֔ת** **The HIDDEN is for Hashem, our G-d, but the REVEALED is for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah ( 29:28)-** On a simple level, the Torah is encouraging us to engage in the keeping of Torah and Mitzvos as a community with responsibility for one another. However, **Rav Moshe Stav**  saw a deeper message here: Often we look at the Galus as a punishment, there is also a positive aspect embedded within it. In exile our own Emunah became more real, and any progress in the values, belief in One G-d, and morality of mankind stem from the impact of Bnei Yisrael in one way or another. The entire route of the exile is guided by a Hand that directs all events toward the perfection of the world. Our minds cannot grasp this idea, let alone understand it! Certainly we cannot base any of our personal life decisions on this idea, for this Ultimate Providence is hidden. We must only think in terms of reward and punishment to do as we are commanded. Providence will guide our lives to different places and situations so that our actions will lead to the appropriate goals. This is one level of the possuk The hidden Hand that guides all of history is G-dly, and we merely have a faint awareness of it. However, "the REVEALED," i.e., observing the mitzvot and learning Torah, even though we may not see the immediate purpose in them, is in our hands to live by. In the end of days, we will see that everything was under G-d's guiding Hand.

**וְהַנִּגְלֹ֞ת ֹלָֹ֤נוֹּ ֹוֹּלְֹבָֹנֵֹ֨יֹנֹוּ֨ עַד־עוֹלָ֔ם  The hidden (sins) are for Hashem, but the revealed (sins) are for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah (29:28)- Rav Mordechai Willig**  noted that Hashem does not punish *Am Yisroel* for the hidden thoughts or sins of individuals. However, we are required to destroy the evil of revealed sins from our midst. Otherwise, the entire community will be punished. We cannot accept deviation form Torah values from within our midst. How, then, can we maintain our own limited community in a postmodern world which denies absolute truth, at a time when punishing and cursing wrongdoers are not viable options?  First, we must make Torah life exciting and attractive. We can no longer take observance for granted in an open global marketplace of competing ideals and values. Second, we must adapt the biblical precedent of proclaiming sinful activity as unacceptable. While we can no longer punish or curse offenders, we can, and must, excoriate sinful activity. We must distinguish between the person and the action. The purpose of this last activity is preservation and strengthening of the existing Torah community. The formulation of timeless principles in a trendy world has the additional benefit of proclaiming the essence of Torah Judaism before the entire world. After all, all of the nations talk about us and our covenant with Hashem.

**וְהָיָה֩ כִֽי־יָבֹ֨אוּ עָלֶ֜יךָ כָּל־הַדְּבָרִ֣ים הָאֵ֗לֶּה It will happen that when all of these things come to you—the blessing and the curse we will do Teshuva (30:1)- Rav Schachter**  would point out that this is one of the fundamentals of the faith – that there will be a coming of Moshiach after Hashem sees to it that we will do Teshuva and there will be a Kibbutz Galiyos. The Rambam adds that if one does not believe in the coming of Moshiach, he is contradicting the words of Moshe. Hashem does not do a miracle unnecessarily and Hashem miraculously created a world for which there must be a purpose. So far, that purpose is not defined. We believe that this miracle will have a purpose –and that will be clear with the arrival of Moshiach.

**וְהָיָה֩ כִֽי־יָבֹ֨אוּ עָלֶ֜יךָ כָּל־הַדְּבָרִ֣ים הָאֵ֗לֶּה הַבְּרָכָה֙ וְהַקְּלָלָ֔ה And it will be when the Beracha and Klala come and you will return to Hashem (30:1) - Rav Schachter** explained to us that the Torah is identifying the concept of Moshiach in this Possuk. The Ramban explains that one who denies Moshiach is not only denying the words of the Neviim but also the words of Moshe. How? Rav Schachter explained to us that Hashem does not make miracles for no reason. The creation of the world was a miracle. That world makes no sense and hasn’t since day #1 when Kayin killed Hevel. However, we believe that one day there will be an explanation of purpose to all of the creation and all of the subsequent history. That day will be at the days of Moshiach.

**וְשַׁבְתָּ֞ And you will return Ad (Until) Hashem (30:2) –** Shouldn’t the proper language be El Hashem – to Hashem? Why is the intention Ad Hashem? **Rav Schachter**  noted that the process of return can either imply a direction or a destination. By using the word “El” one might assume that simply turning toward the direction would be enough. This is not so, by returning Ad Hashem, the person is establishing a stated goal for his Tehuva efforts.

**וְשַׁבְתָּ֞ עַד־ה And you will return to Hashem (30:2) -** Chazal throughout Jewish history have viewed Teshuva as a tremendous gift. As **Rav Shmelke of Nikolsburg** noted “I wonder what kind of existence would there be in Shomayim if one could not perform Teshuvah? But still, we do not seem to try to do it. Why? **Rav Yechiel Meir of Gustenin** explained that people have a hard time believing that Teshuva can wipe a slate clean. He noted that this is an error. Teshuva is not like chess. When playing chess, you cannot retract a wrong move. In Teshuva one can undo every wrong. It just takes sincerity.

**וְשַׁבְתָּ֞ And you shall return to Hashem (30:2)** – The **Chida** asks how Charata and Vidui will work if we are of the opinion that words cannot undo actions? **Rav Asher Ansel Jungreis**  explained that the Gemara (Yoma 86a) notes that when one does Teshuva it is considered as if he has offered the Korbanos. This is considered an action. Teshuva isn’t just words – it is change – real change.

**אִם־יִֽהְיֶ֥ה נִדַּֽחֲךָ֖ בִּקְצֵ֣ה הַשָּׁמָ֑יִם If there shall be refugees in the midst of the heavens (30:4)** – Shouldn’t the promise be if there are refugees in the midst of the earth? Why in the midst of the heavens? **Rav Zaidel Epstein**  commented that sometimes the holding onto of some spiritual ideas (Lo Shinu Es Shmosam etc.) serves as the connection and antidote to assimilation. So long as we are connected on some level to Shomayim, the salvation can come.

**וּמָ֨ל Hashem will circumcise your heart (30:6)** - What does this even mean? Milah is not on the heart, it is performed on the Orlah!? **Ramban** explains that in the time of Moshiach there will be no desire for anything that holds us back from understanding and doing the will of Hashem. **Rav Michel Yammer** explained that the entirety of Teshuva is not the introduction of something new within our lives. It is the removal of the thought that we cannot change or improve that makes a difference.

**כִּ֚י הַמִּצְוָ֣ה הַזֹּ֔את For this Mitzva (30:11) - Rashi** notes that the Mitzva referred to is that of Torah while Ramban explains that it refers to Teshuva. **Rav Wolbe**  explained that despite the distance between Hashem and his creations, we can bridge the gap through Torah and Mitzvos which are close to us. He added that true Torah connection comes with the awareness that Torah is infused within each of us -- like it was for Dovid who discovered in the bathhouse that he still was connected with the Mitzva of Bris Milah. His intention and fear, explains Rav Wolbe, was that his connection to Hashem and His Mitzvos was merely external. What he discovered was that they were in his very fiber and makeup.

**לֹ֥א בַשָּׁמַ֖יִם הִ֑וא**  **It isn’t in heaven (30:12) – Rav Baruch Dov Povarsky**  explains that while only man has the ability to choose to listen to Hashem, the Gemara in Chagiga identifies that even Malachim can make errors in following and carrying out Hashem’s commandments – this is part of the reason that even the Malachim tremble on Rosh Hashana. They too, can err. Thus, Lo BaShomayim allows man to be one step ahead and be able to outpace the punishment for erring in Halacha.

**לֹ֥א בַשָּׁמַ֖יִם הִ֑וא  It is not in Heaven (30:12) - Rashi** explains that if Torah were to be in heaven you would need to scale the heavens to find it. In other words, there are no excuses not to study Torah to the best of our abilities and to extend ourselves as much as humanly possible. **Rav Baruch Sorotzkin once told his son Rav Yitzchok** that when he was in such pain, that was the time to study Torah. One who goes to the limits to study Torah today will certainly get to continue his Torah study when the limits are constrained in the future.

# כִּֽי־קָר֥וֹב אֵלֶ֛יךָ  The matter is close to you it is in your mouth and your heart to do (30:14) – Rabbi Jonathan Sacks noted the Jewish tendency to seek spirituality by going far from Judaism. This is unnecessary. In Judaism Hashem is quite close. He is in the Shul waiting to hear our voice and at the table waiting to enjoy our meal and at work and on the playground waiting to see us act within a manner that inspires respect and honor. All we need to do is to call out to Him while being true with ourselves.

**כִּֽי־קָר֥וֹב אֵלֶ֛יךָ**  **It is a close matter to you – it is in your mouth and hearts to do it (30:14) – Ramban** learns the concept of Teshuvah from this possuk. Why does the possuk put the mouth before the heart here? Doesn’t the heart need to come first**? Rav Yitzchock Sorotzkin**  explains that based on **Rabbeinu Yonah’s** prescription for Teshuva (1:11) those who sin inadvertently will voice their desire to change before they actually do it – as they notice the error of their ways. Thus, the Torah highlights that the matter is in the mouth first then the heart.

**כִּֽי־קָר֥וֹב אֵלֶ֛יךָ**  **It is close to you – it is in your mouth and hands to do it (30:14) – Ramban** tells us that the “it” is Teshuva. Why would one think that the ability to Teshuva was far off? **Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel** , Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva used to say that when one is close to Torah – that is the Torah of Middos – then Teshuva is a close issue for him. However, when he is far removed from it, it can make Teshuva look very far away.

**בְּפִ֥יךָ וּבִלְבָֽבְךָ֖ לַֽעֲשׂתֽוֹ: It is within your heart and mouth to achieve (30:14)** - What is the connection between the heart and doing? The **Chasam Sofer** explains that this Possuk speaks about Teshuva and when we speak of Teshuva, done properly, it turns wanton Averios into Mitzvos — as if one DID the Mitzva. That is the connection between the heart and doing. Your heart of Teshuva converts the actions into actual Mitzvos.

**הַיּ֔וֹם Today (30:15)** - There is a tremendous stress on the word Hayom in this week’s Torah reading. When is “Hayom?” Is it a reference to every day or is it a reference to Rosh Hashana? **Rav Zevin**  explained that the 2 options are not contradictory. Rosh Hashana is the Today -- the beginning of each subsequent day and the “Today” of each day is a continuation and a renewal of the commitment of the days of Rosh Hashana.

**אֶת־הַֽחַיִּ֖ים וְאֶת־הַטּ֑וֹב וְאֶת־הַמָּ֖וֶת וְאֶת־הָרָֽע I have placed before you life and good and death and bad (30:15) – Rav Noach Weinberg**  explains that when the Torah speaks of death, it does not mean the process of not being alive. The Torah warns us about what death represents. If life refers to the process of growing in one’s service of Hashem and developing his or her own character, then death is the choice not to improve. Rav Noach added that one can be observant of Mitzvos and choosing to coast – this too, is death. If we do not choose to push ourselves then we are choosing death. Faced with these contrasts – between challenge and comfort – the Torah warns us that there is no real choice – choose life or everything stops.

**אֶת־הַֽחַיִּ֖ים וְאֶת־הַטּ֑וֹב וְאֶת־הַמָּ֖וֶת וְאֶת־הָרָֽע: Behold I have placed before you TODAY life and good (30:15)** - Why is the word Hayom in the possuk? What does it add**? Rav Moshe Feinstein**  explains that the Torah is trying to remind us that we make the choices of life and good each and every day. Lest one think s/he can be complacent and assume that just because in the past s/he has chosen wisely, it is a new choice each time.

**אֶת־הַֽחַיִּ֖ים וְאֶת־הַטּ֑וֹב וְאֶת־הַמָּ֖וֶת וְאֶת־הָרָֽע: Behold I have placed before you today life and good and death and bad (30:15) - Rav Schorr** explains that the choice here is that we desire a spiritual life. **Rav Yisroel Reisman** connected this to the Tefillah of the Chazon Ish that one should daven on Rosh Hashana to be saved from all causes that don’t allow us to learn Torah or daven properly.

**וּבָֽחַרְתָּ֙ בַּֽחַיִּ֔ים And you will choose life (30:19)** - The Torah values life and will choose it at every circumstance. This raises a challenge to a strange debate in the Gemara (Eruvin 13b) as to whether one is better off being alive or not. How does that fit with the choice of life? The **Mei HaShiloach** explains that the Gemara is debating what is “Noach -- easier” not necessarily what is better. Would a person rather an easier life without challenges or is he better with life’s challenges? This is the Gemara’s debate. **Rav Yaakov Nagen** adds that this is the challenge that exists with the Yetzer HaRa -- it is not one of good and evil but rather good and convenient. We commit Avairos not because we are evil but rather because they are the path of least resistance.

**וּבָֽחַרְתָּ֙ בַּֽחַיִּ֔ים** **And you will choose life (30:19)** – Why does the Torah set this up as a choice and then tell us which choice to make? **Rav Noach Weinberg**  explained that man is a composite of physical and spiritual. While the spiritual side wants life, the physical – it seems – wants death. Pleasure comes to a person tackling challenges and meeting them. Comfort and complacency are a step removed from death itself. We need to realize that we make choices every day – but Hashem is cheering for us not to be complacent – to choose life.

**וּבָֽחַרְתָּ֙ בַּֽחַיִּ֔ים לְמַ֥עַן תִּֽחְיֶ֖ה** **Life and death I have placed before you – blessings and curses – so choose life (30:19) – Rav Wolbe**  pointed out that the most elementary form of Bechira is the ability to know that one need not sin and can choose not to sin. Rav Wolbe decried the fact that in our generation there is a belief that we are certainly not responsible for our actions. This is a big mistake. Integrating our responsibility will help us see our ability and in return, will help us in our Avodas Hashem as we develop strength to know that we CAN change and that we WILL.

**וּבָֽחַרְתָּ֙ בַּֽחַיִּ֔ים  And you will choose life (30:19) - Rav Yaakov Kamenetzsky** compared this choice to a worker who did some work and was owed $100. The Householder offered him fifty lottery tickets valued at $2 a piece. Instead of selling them, the worker played the lottery and lost everything. He had nothing, no money and no prize. He complained to the householder who told him that there was no reason to waste one’s time on games of chance. In this world the only way we pay for things is life. We need to use common sense to enjoy life to its entirety. Using life wisely to invest in amassing Torah and mitzvos will determine what will happen when our time is up.

**Haftara:**

**כֶּֽחָתָן֙ יְכַהֵ֣ן פְּאֵ֔ר** **As a Chosson wearing priestly glory and a Kallah beautified with her garments (Yeshayahu 61:10) – Rav Hirsch** notes that the translation is a bit contrived here as the correct Hebrew would be K’Pe’er Yichahein Chosson . Therefore he offers a different translation: K’Chosson Yichahein Pe’er – in Judaism, it is not the clothes that make the man or woman – it is the person who gives the status to the clothing. Wear clothing that is undignified and the wearer looks ridiculous. Wear a uniform that is unbecoming of one’s station and it looks like dress up. The person makes the status of everything around him.

**: לֹא־יֵֽאָמֵר֩ לָ֨ךְ ע֜וֹד עֲזוּבָ֗ה  You shall no longer say she is forsaken and your land shall not be called desolate (Yeshayahu 62:4) - Rav Schwab** explained that in the days of Moshiach not only will there never be a Churban again, the nations of the world will forget that there was ever a Galus. It will fade away. It is like a Bachur and a Bachura -- without the history.

**עַד־יְכוֹנֵ֞ן וְעַד־יָשִׂ֧ים אֶת־יְרֽוּשָׁלִַ֛ם Until He establishes and makes Yirushalayim a praise in the land (Yeshayhu 62:7)** – If one looks at the Trup for the words Yirushalayim Tehillah, one will see a Svir and a Tipcha. The implication, notes **Rav Nebenzahl** , is not that Hashem will make Yirushalayim a praise but rather that it is already a praise but that it will be finally in the land. In other words, we await the beautiful Yirushalayim Shel Maala to be brought to the status of being a reality in this world.

**מִי־זֶ֣ה | בָּ֣א מֵֽאֱד֗וֹם Who is this coming from Edom (Yeshayahu 63:1)** - **Rav Dovid Feinstein**  noted that Hashem’s vengence against Edom is described as if He were coming from outside Eretz Yisrael. This is because when Bnei Yisrael are in exile, He is with us. Thematically, this idea pervades the Haftara --- that He is with us experiencing our travails along with us.

**בְּכָל־צָֽרָתָ֣ם | ל֣וֹ צר In all of their troubles it caused Him pain (Yeshayahu 63:9) - Rav Schachter**  highlighted the difference between the way this Possuk is written and the way it is read. It is written as Lo (not) that Hashem doesn’t have distress in our distress but it is read as Lo (to him) showing that our distress in exile bothers Hashem also. The **Chida** notes that this idea -- Galus HaShechina -- is based on the idea that when someone goes into Ir Miklat (also known as Galus), his teacher needs to go with him. Hashem is our Rav, he is with us even in Galus. (Rav Schachter added that once the person can leave Ir Miklat, even if he doesn’t want to, his Rebbe does not go with him. Rav Schachter added that the idea of Galus HaShechina may also work that way and once we CAN go into Eretz Yisrael, we SHOULD because the Shechina is already staying there.)