



## Parshat Nitzavim

No 1085:

27 Elul 5765 (1 October 2005)

### STARTING POINT

#### "It is Not in Heaven" - by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

In this week's short Torah portion, Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael that the Torah is not beyond the abilities of man. "For this mitzva which I command you today (1) is not beyond you (2) and it is not far away" [Devarim 30:11]. (This follows Rashi's interpretation and not that of the Ramban, who feels that the mitzva referred to is the act of repentance mentioned before this verse.) Moshe then notes two examples that are the opposite of normal circumstances and that illustrate the two points that he made in the verse. As opposed to somebody who might say that the Torah is beyond the abilities of man, he declares, "It is not in heaven, so that it would be possible to say, who can rise up to heaven and bring it to us, so that we will listen to it and perform it" [30:12]. Similarly, as opposed to the possibility that it is far away, Moshe says, "And it is not across the sea, so it would be possible to say, who will cross the ocean and bring it to us, so that we will listen to it and perform it" [30:13].

After this introduction, we might have expected Moshe to explain that in contrast to these possibilities the Torah has already been given to Bnei Yisrael, so that there is no longer any need to bring it down from heaven. (This is in fact what has happened, as is written, "And G-d said to Moshe, this is what you should say to Bnei Yisrael: You have seen that I spoke to you from the heavens" [Shemot 20:19].) However, what Moshe does in fact say is, "This matter is very close to you, you can accomplish it with your mouth and with your heart" [Devarim 30:14]. This appears to be a reference to the difficulty of performing the mitzvot, and Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael that doing the mitzvot depends solely on mankind and how determined they are. But if this is indeed the message, it would have been more logical to note that the Torah does not make any demands that are beyond man's capabilities. The way the passage is written, there is a lack of symmetry. From Moshe's examples it would seem that the main issue is the availability of the Torah, while the summary implies that the main problems are the practical difficulties in observing the mitzvot. What is the meaning of this seeming paradox?

Evidently the main lesson that Moshe wanted to teach was just this apparent paradox. By its very essence, the Torah is a way of life. If the Torah would exist only across the ocean, it might very well be that its demands are beyond human capability. On the other hand, the fact that the Torah is readily available, within the grasp of Bnei Yisrael, can be seen as a proof - by definition - that it can be achieved by all the people. Thus, Moshe declares that the very fact that the Torah is not in heaven or across the sea shows that what is needed to observe

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the mitzvot depends only on the will of mankind – "you can accomplish it with your mouth and with your heart."

After he has given this message to the nation, Moshe can tell the people his message in a decisive way. "Look, I have presented you today with life and good, with death and bad. I command you today to love your G-d, to follow in His way, and to observe His mitzvot, chukot, and mishpatim. And you shall live and multiply, and you will bless your G-d in the good land, where you will go to possess it." [30:15-16]. As noted, by definition the Torah itself is the essence of life and good.

### POINT OF VIEW

#### "Rather, We and Our Fathers Have Sinned" - by Prof. Shalom Rozenberg

In this period of the High Holy Days, rabbis and preachers typically call on their followers to repent. In order to do this, they remind the people of their sins and tell them to confess, making a soul-searching personal reckoning. The common prayer, recited in alphabetical sequence, is: "We have sinned, we have betrayed..."

However, this criticism of the people is only half the task. Those who criticize others must also repent, not only for their own sins but often because they did not understand the depths of the challenges that their followers were required to meet. Rabbi Elimelech of Leszansk took this into account, and he asked: "Why do we mention the sins of our ancestors by saying, 'Both we and our fathers have sinned?'" [Noam Elimelech, Torah portion of Vayishlach]. This concept is based on the words of the verse in the "Tochacha," the warning of punishment for sins by the people, "And they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers, for the sins which they committed against me." [Vayikra 26:40]. This is similar to another verse, "We have sinned, with our fathers, we sinned and were evil" [Tehillim 106:6], and also, "We lie down in shame and are covered by our humiliation, for we have sinned to our G-d, we and our fathers, from our youth until today" [Yirmiyahu 3:25]. Rabbi Elimelech suggests a surprising reason for this approach. "Even if somebody has sinned, he should not admit in front of the prosecutor that he is a completely evil

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person. What he should do is accept some guilt but also note his justification! And this is the reason that we place some of the blame on our ancestors. We claim that the reason we sinned is because of our ancestors, who did not sanctify us with complete holiness. And this is one of the things that caused us to sin. Since our fathers are already in heaven, such accusations cannot hurt them in any way, but we put the blame on them so that the prosecutor will not be able to accuse us and make us seem to be evil. In this way, when a person admits his sins he maintains the status of being an average person and not completely evil."

The phrase "our fathers" in this sense means much more than biological ancestors who labored hard, making great sacrifices in order to transform us into good Jews who fear G-d and study Torah. "Our fathers" represents the entire world and the situation into which we were born, and in which we must continue – as our sons and daughters after us – to struggle against great difficulties and challenges.

Our sons and daughters are struggling not only in bloody battlefields but also in controversies of the spirit and issues related to our existence, which take place in the most basic dimensions of our lives. With respect to the most basic values of our lives, our sons and daughters must struggle against three things: apostasy, the rejection of faith that takes on the appearance of science but which has as its objective the destruction of religious faith; heightened and wanton sexuality, which tries to destroy the approach of simplicity and completeness; and despair in both our personal and our general political lives, which views any vestiges of hope as an unpardonable sin. These are all destructive hurricanes running wild in our society, brought upon us by recent generations that destroyed the social ecology that existed in earlier times.

There are those who disconnect from the world and lock themselves between carefully guarded high walls. However, we live within the world, without walls, surrounded by challenges, temptations, and despair. We do not want to abandon either this world or the state of Israel, and we therefore must repair them both. The Mishna describes the difficulty of living in this type of world: "Whoever sits and does not do a sin receives a reward as if has done a mitzva" [end of Makkot]. The source for this appears in the Talmud Yerushalmi: "Rabbi Abon said, 'They have not even sinned, they went in His ways' [Tehillim 119:3]. Not sinning is the equivalent of going along His path. Rabbi Yossi of the house of Rabbi Bon said: What is the meaning of the verse, 'Happy is the man who did not follow the advice of the evil ones' [1:1] – One who does not follow the path of the evil ones is considered as if he has followed the path of the righteous." [Kidushin 22:2]. During the High Holy Days, we pray for the young men and women who have not followed an evil path. They are described by the verse, "His angels, strong warriors, do His deeds, listening to the words of His voice" [Tehillim 103:20]. This corresponds to the words of Or Hachaim, "The earth needs strong warriors to dwell on it." Master of the Universe, guard over them and bless them, and especially bless them in finding a partner for life, with great and lasting love. And with respect to those who have faltered in their way – forgive them and bless them. We call out to them – and to ourselves! – to repent, for they and their ancestors have

sinned. And it is up to them to repair their sins and those of their fathers.

There are interesting parallels between the two major sermons of the year, Shabbat Shuva between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and Shabbat Hagadol, before Pesach. One of them, based on a startling link, can be found in the words of the Maor Vashemesh, commenting on the verse, "Talk to Bnei Yisrael and tell them: On the tenth of this month let each one take a sheep for each house of the fathers, one for each household" [Shemot 12:3]. The tenth of the month refers not only to Nissan and the time of Pesach, it can also be a reference to the tenth of Tishrei, Yom Kippur. And "seh," a sheep, might be an abbreviation for "sha'arei hateshuva," the gates of repentance. Let us open up the gates of repentance in our hearts to the "houses of the fathers." For "when a person wants to repent fully he must fix what he did wrong in addition to the sins of his ancestors... and that is why we say, 'we and our fathers have sinned.'" The phrase "a sheep for the household" implies that repentance is needed for every person in the house who has sinned, the master of the house and all of his children. "And if the house is too small for a sheep" [12:4] – that is, the head of the household cannot repent by himself - "let him take one together with his close neighbor" [ibid]. The solution to the problem will be found by a new "togetherness," which will help us all mend the world, which is so close to disintegrating from the point of view of ethics and values.

## SERMON BY A GUEST

### Tekiyah, Teruah, Tekiyah - by Rabbi Chaim Drukman, Head of the Bnei Akiva Yeshiva System

Blowing the shofar is the unique mitzva that is performed on Rosh Hashanah, and it is also the mitzva that is part of the definition of the holiday, as is written in the Torah, "A day of a 'teruah'" [Bamidbar 29:1]. What is the meaning of the mitzva of blowing the shofar?

According to the Rambam, "Even though the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a decree of the Torah, it contains a hint. That is, it is a declaration: Wake up, sleepers, from your sleep, and rise up from your deep sleep, take a look at your actions and repent..." [Hilchot Teshuva 3:4]. The Torah does not explicitly state why we should blow the shofar, but the reason can be understood. The sounds of the shofar serve as a wakeup call, as is written, "If a shofar is blown in a city, can it be that the people will not be afraid?" [Amos 3:6]. The fact that the Almighty commanded us to make sounds to wake us up is a hint that we should rise from our sleep, from involvement in vain things, and that we should repent.

The Sefer Hachinuch adds an important point (Mitzva 405). The Rambam mentions the sounds of the shofar in a general way, but we should not forget that the command of the shofar is not a general one. It is written, "It shall be a day of teruah for you" [Bamidbar 29:1]. The special sound of Rosh Hashanah is not a tekiyah, a single long note, but rather a teruah, a broken and divided sound. The Sefer Hachinuch emphasizes that any sound of a shofar gets the attention of those who hear it, "especially the sound of a teruah, that is, a broken sound." The

teruah has a unique effect on a person, but the broken sound should awaken us to shatter our inclinations and our desires.

The Torah commands us to blow a teruah which is preceded and followed by a tekiya, a long blast in a single note. That is, the way to observe the mitzva of shofar is with the sequence: tekiyah, teruah, tekiyah. Perhaps we can say that the first tekiyah symbolizes the original essence of man – "for G-d created man in a straight way" [Kohellet 7:29]. The first tekiyah is thus a symbol of the original righteousness and purity of a man, a symbol of the image of G-d in which he was created, of his soul: "My G-d, the soul that you gave me is pure." This quote is from the daily prayers. But what has happened? Mankind has distanced itself from its original straight path, it has become complicated, it has lapsed and has become twisted. This is symbolized by the teruah, a sound that is broken and chopped into little bits. The sound of the shofar comes to awaken man, to tell him that he should return to himself, to his true essence, to his original purity – and leading to the second tekiyah. This represents the direction that man should take. He should return to his original image, the way he was when he started out from the hands of the Creator. This explains the sequence of the shofar blasts: tekiyah, teruah, tekiyah.

The sounds of the shofar indeed awaken a person to repentance but they also teach us the essence of the repentance itself. The sequence tekiyah-teruah-tekiyah awakens us and teaches us who we are, what has happened to us, and what is demanded of us. And this explains the meaning of the sequence of the shofar blasts.

## TORAH, SOCIETY, AND GOVERNMENT

### Why Did G-d Do This to This Land? - by Rabbi Uri Dasberg

One of the worst possible actions is desecrating the name of G-d. In several places in the Tanach, there were very extreme reactions in an effort to avoid a possible desecration of the name. Examples are the insistence on honoring the oath to the Givonim, who fraudulently claimed that they came from a faraway land, and hanging seven of the descendents of Shaul because they harmed the livelihood of the Givonim. (Note that they were not executed because they killed the Kohanim of the city of Nov, but because in doing so they caused financial harm to their servants, the Givonim!) In addition, when David ran away from his son Avshalom he decided to prevent a possible desecration of the holy name by worshipping idols, so that this sin would be blamed as the reason for his punishment.

Desecration of the holy name is also a factor in practical halachic rulings. There are foods that in principle are kosher but are not eaten by Gentiles. In order to avoid desecration of the name, we also refrain from eating such foods. The Rashbash writes that we should consider removing our shoes in a synagogue, since in Algeria, where he lived, the Moslems considered it disrespectful to wear shoes in a place of worship. For similar reasons, there have been cases where smoking was prohibited on a fast day or in general in a synagogue (at a time before smoking in public was generally prohibited).

The common disturbance by people during the repetition of the Shemona Essrei by the chazzan brought the Rambam to suggest that this part of the prayers should be discontinued, since if such behavior would be seen by an outsider it would cause a desecration of the name. For the same reason, some rabbis have given permission to treat a Gentile person who is sick on Shabbat and to shave on Chol Hamoed.

The fear of desecration of the holy name is most relevant with respect to non-Jews, since it can be assumed that a Jew will try to understand the activity and see that no disrespect for G-d was intended. This is the way that the Talmud understood the difference between a Menorah donated by a Gentile (which can never be used for any purpose different from the original intent of the donor) and one donated by a Jew, who will probably understand the need to change the role of the Menorah and will not be offended.

These considerations apply in the case of an individual (such as one who donated a Menorah). When there is a danger that an entire community will misinterpret an action, it is sometimes necessary to react in a positive way. For example, if a person who is considered by the community to be a righteous man receives severe Divine punishment, it is permitted (and possibly even an obligation) to publicize the fact that he has faults, so that the community will understand that G-d is acting in a just manner. It is even permitted to talk about such a person on Shabbat, and the discussion is not considered to be weekday talk which is forbidden on Shabbat.

*(Reference: Rabbi Yaacov Charlap, "Techumin," volume 25, pages 392-400)*

## A LESSON FOR THE CHILDREN

### The Story of Rabbi Amnon - by Rabbi Yikhat Rozen, Merkaz Neria, Kiryat Malachi

This is the story of Rabbi Amnon, of Magentzia, who was the most prominent man of his generation, rich and handsome. The government ministers and the bishop began to demand that he become a Christian, but he refused. And it happened, when they began to speak to him every day but he refused, that one day the bishop was so insistent that Rabbi Amnon could not rid himself of the bother, and he finally said, "Let me have three days to think about the matter." He said this only to make the people leave him alone for a short time.

However, as soon as Rabbi Amnon left the bishop, he was very upset that he had said something which sounded as if he had some doubts about what to do. It had sounded as if he needed to think about whether to deny G-d or not. When he arrived home, he refused to eat or drink, and he became very ill. All of his relatives and friends came to console him but he refused, because he said, "How could I have spoken in this way? I will not be consoled until the day I die." And he wept and was very sad.

On the third day, the bishop sent for Rabbi Amnon, but he refused to go. And the bishop sent other messengers and ministers, more honorable than the first ones, but still Rabbi

Amnon refused. So the bishop commanded, "Bring Amnon here quickly, even if it is against his will!" And he was brought to the bishop. He said, "What is this, Amnon? Why did you not come to me in the time you promised in order to fulfill my request?" And Amnon answered, "Let me tell you what my judgment should be: My tongue, which spoke to you and led you to believe that there was some chance I would agree to your demand, should be cut out!" Rabbi Amnon wanted to sanctify G-d's name as a penitence for the way he had spoken. But the bishop replied, "No, I will not cut out your tongue, for it spoke well. Rather, I will cut off your legs, which did not bring you to me when you had promised, and I will cause you suffering in the rest of your body."

And the bishop commanded the guards to chop off Rabbi Amnon's fingers and toes. Before cutting every joint, they asked him once again, "Would you like to become a Christian?" And he replied, "No!" When they finished their evil labor, the bishop commanded that Rabbi Amnon be put in a bed alongside all of his fingers and toes, and to send him home. And this is the reason he was called "Amnon," from the word "emunah," faith – because he believed in G-d, and as a result of his faith he endured harsh suffering because of the words that he had spoken.

After all this happened, Rosh Hashanah approached. Rabbi Amnon was very ill, because of his missing joints. He asked his relatives to bring him to the synagogue, along with all the severed pieces of his hands and feet, and to put him next to the chazzan. When the chazzan reached the point of the Kedushah, Rabbi Amnon told him to pause, and he raised his voice. And Rabbi Amnon recited the prayer, "U'netaneh tokaf," about the sanctity of the day. "It is true that you are a judge... It will be written down on Rosh Hashanah and sealed on Yom Kippur – who will live and who will die, who at his proper time and who before his time, who will die by the sword and who will be attacked by an animal, who will die of hunger, and who of thirst..." This was his way of accepting the judgment against him, which had been sealed in heaven the previous year. When he finished reciting the prayer he died, in front of the entire community in the synagogue.

This prayer has been repeated every year with great feeling, especially in the Ashkenazi communities. It also appears in the Sephardic prayer books, and many of these communities recite it also.

*(Source: Or Zarua, Rosh Hashanah, 276)*

## THE WAYS OF THE FATHERS (Pirkei Avot)

### Chapter 3 Mishna 2 - by Rabbi Yehuda Shaviv

"Rabbi Chanina, Deputy of the Priests, says: Pray for the peace of the government, because if not for fear of them every man would swallow his colleague alive."

The prophet Yirmiyahu told the people in exile something similar: "Pursue the peace of the city where I have sent you in exile and pray to G-d for it, for if it has peace you will also have peace" [29:7].

Comparing these two declarations can teach us something about the difference between two periods of destruction, that of the First Temple and that of the Second Temple. Yirmiyahu, who predicted the destruction of the First Temple, takes a positive approach – "if it has peace you will also have peace." But Rabbi Chanina, who was a witness to the destruction of the Second Temple, who was clearly aware of the real reason for the disaster, unfounded hatred (see Yoma 9b), can no longer talk about peace. Having a government that is at peace will at most decrease the damage caused by the hatred, making the people afraid to swallow each other up alive.

Another prayer related to government is the one that we will say during the coming holidays, a prayer to Our Father in Heaven: "Reign over the entire world with your glory... Let every creature know that you created him... Let everybody with a soul say, the G-d of Yisrael is King, and his kingdom rules over everything." This is not a prayer for peace in heaven, which would be unnecessary, since G-d is the king of ultimate peace, and He makes peace in heaven. Rather, we are praying that the peace should be revealed to us. Only peace from this source can promise us a true peace which will include human love, joy on the earth, happiness in the cities, and the return of the dynasty of David.

With respect to government authority, Reish Lakish commented, "Behold it is very good" [Bereishit 1:31] – this refers to the kingdom of heaven. But he also said, "Behold it is very good" – this refers to the government of Rome. Can it be said that the Roman government is very good? This is an amazing statement. The answer is that "it demands law and order from its subjects." [Bereishit Rabba 9:13]. Divine authority is certainly very good. But even a government like that of Rome has its good points, by virtue of the order it imposes on society. (On the other hand, previous comments in the Midrash compare the government of Rome, as an example of a bad form of human authority, as parallel to the evil inclination, the trait of suffering, Gehenom, the angel of death, or to the trait of punishment.)

## LAND OF MY BIRTH

### Blowing Shofar at the Wrong Time - by Zev Wallack

The elders of Jerusalem tell a startling story related to the blowing of a shofar, something that happened more than a hundred years ago. The author Shmuel Avidor wrote the story down (Machanayim, 5618), and here is a summary of the tale.

Starting from the day that the renowned Rabbi Yehoshua Leib from Brisk came to live in Jerusalem, not a week passed by that there was not a sound of the shofar heard in the city. Rabbi Yehoshua Leib was very zealous, and the fanatic service of G-d burned in his bones. Even though he had holy and desirable objectives, some of the argumentative and divisive people in the city found their way to his heart. Every day these "zealots" would bring him stories of hatred and jealousy.

"The son of so-and-so has turned to bad ways. Such-and-such is inciting the Jews to take part in vain activities. Ben Yehuda

sits and delivers faulty sermons, Michael Pinnes has joined the free thinkers (nonreligious), French is taught in Nissim Becher's school, Reb Akiva wants to make the students of the yeshiva into farmers."

Rabbi Yehoshua from Brisk would hear their words with a heart heavy with sadness and suffering, and he would immediately put on the face of a zealot and declare: "Excommunication!" And then the sounds of the black shofar would be heard – Tekiyah, Shevarim, Teruah, Tekiyah. And the ban would be declared:

"We hereby excommunicate and ban so-and-so... Let all manner of curses fall on him, in such a way that there will be no cure."

The sound of the shofar could thus be heard day by day, while the hearts of the men of peace filled with sorrow and pain. Several of the prominent inhabitants visited the rabbi of the city, Rabbi Shmuel Salant, in his home in the "Churva" area. They asked, "Rabbi, how long will this go on?" Rabbi Shmuel sighed a deep sigh, and replied:

"Do you not know who Rabbi Yehoshua Leib from Brisk is? He is the son of the righteous man, Rabbi Binyamin'ka of Hordona, and he himself is very learned, 'a lion from Babylon.' If we say anything to him, will he listen at all?"

So the shofar of excommunication was regularly heard in the Beit Midrash of the rabbi of Brisk. There was hardly any person of the inhabitants of Jerusalem who was not singed by the heat of this shofar. Who was banned by these people and who was not? Even the respected Rabbi Moshe Nechemia was singled out. And the whole of Jerusalem was in an uproar... After Maariv the prominent men of Jerusalem went to Rabbi Shmuel Salant and demanded that he do something. Rabbi Shmuel sat with his head in his hands, tears flowing down his wrinkled cheeks, with a broken and depressed look. And then he said in a whisper:

"I fear for him, for Rabbi Yehoshua Leib. I hope that the privileges of his ancestors will protect him. I hope and pray that he will not have a problem with the sounds of the shofar at the proper time because of his exaggerated use of the shofar when not at the proper time. I am very upset about him, his father was a very righteous man, and what about the rabbi himself? Does anybody know who he really is?"

During the month of Elul, the rabbi of Brisk went to visit the Machpelah Cave in Chevron, to pray about the sufferings of Yisrael and to complain about the many breaches of the walls of Judaism. He went accompanied by his students, riding on donkeys and climbing the paths on the cliffs leading from Jerusalem to Chevron. The rabbi remained in the city of the fathers for seven days. He prayed the first "Selichot" of the year in the Machpelah Cave, and he then left in order to return to Jerusalem for Rosh Hashanah.

On the second day of their return journey, the rabbi and his students found that they had taken a wrong turn, and that they were no longer on the path to Jerusalem. It was clear that their

path would take them to the desolate desert. They were far from Jerusalem, and Rosh Hashanah was approaching very fast. In their sorrow, Rabbi Shmuel ruled:

"If it is the decree of the Almighty that we should observe Rosh Hashanah in this desert, we will accept His judgment with love. We have a Torah scroll and a shofar, we have some food with us, and we pray that the holiness of the Day of Judgment will help us return to Jerusalem quickly after the holiday."

Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchak, the one who regularly blew the shofar for the rabbi, looked for his shofar. But it was not there! He cried out, "The shofar is gone!" and he fainted. That year, Rabbi Shmuel and his students were not able to observe the mitzva of hearing the shofar at the proper time, during Rosh Hashanah. And the elders of Jerusalem understood what Rabbi Salant had meant when he declared, "Rabbi Yehoshua will not be able to observe the mitzva of blowing shofar at the proper time, because of the many times he blew shofar when it was not necessary..."

## THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

### Noga College for Women - by the Department of Education, World Mizrahi

Today we describe an interesting activity for women at the Noga College in Rechovot, a branch of the "Moreshet Yaacov" educational college, headed by Rabbi Chaim Saban. Dozens of young women and girls from the broad range of religious and traditional life in the city and the surrounding area gather for Torah study in many different fields. The objective, as we were told by Li'at, the coordinator of the college, is "to encourage in-depth study as a way to enhance the inner spiritual and philosophical world of women in the nation of Yisrael, in order to enable them to meet the daily challenges of our generation." Others involved in the initiative of establishing this college included Rabbi Chaim Fogel, Yechiel Gross, and Mrs. Margalit Tobol.

The study programs provide for a choice among several options. This includes study for personal enrichment or an academic degree and a teacher's degree, with the possibility of receiving formal credit for advanced studies. Courses may be chosen from a wide range of subjects: Tanach, oral Torah, Halachot, the works of Rabbi Kook, and behavioral improvement.

The student body of the college includes young women of the Sheirut Leumi, both those in the Aminadav Association and others who serve in the town of Negohot. The participants are able to join different study tracks. Next year a new program will be opened leading to degree work in highly creative and desired subjects, such as interior decorating, design of religious art objects, and manufacture of jewelry.

The unique character of the college can be seen in the combination of study, a life of Torah, and involvement in the community. Special activities include outings and "fun days," special gatherings at the beginning of each month, cultural evenings, a drama club for women, and volunteer activities in

Rehovot and the surrounding area. The college sees as one of its goals to encourage the ability of every woman to contribute to the weak levels of society, based on the study skills and powerful tools that are provided by the school.

## THE CHAIN OF HALACHA

### The Obligation of Women With Respect to Havdalah? - by Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon, Rabbi of Southern Alon Shevut and a teacher in Yeshivat Har Etzion

Are women obligated to recite Havdalah? According to the Talmud, in spite of the fact that the mitzvot of Shabbat are time-related, which in general would free women from the obligation to perform them, they are in fact obligated, because "Remember the Shabbat" [Shemot 20:8] and "Observe the Shabbat" [Devarim 5:12] are related verses (Berachot 2b). That is, just as women are required to observe the prohibitions of Shabbat ("observe"), they must also observe the positive commandments ("remember"). This implies that women are also required to observe the mitzva of Havdalah. On the other hand, as we saw in this column a few weeks ago, there are those who derive the obligation for Havdalah from the verse, 'to differentiate between the holy and the secular' [Vayikra 10:10]. This verse does not imply that women must recite the Havdalah, since only mitzvot that are derived from the verse "remember" are included in their obligations.

The Shulcha Aruch discusses this disagreement, and the RAMA rules that women should not recite the Havdalah themselves but that they should listen to Havdalah recited by a man. "Women are required to recite Havdalah just as they are obligated by the Kiddush, but some people disagree. Note (by the RAMA): Therefore they should not recite it themselves, it is better that they hear Havdalah recited by a man." [296:8]. The BACH finds this statement difficult to understand, since the RAMA rules in general that women can recite a blessing for time-related mitzvot in spite of the fact that they are not required to observe them. The Magen Avraham explains that according to the RAMA women can recite a blessing only for mitzvot which entail some action. Since there is no action involved in the mitzva of the Havdalah, as the act of reciting the blessing itself is the essence of the mitzva, the women cannot perform the act. He feels that this also explains why women do not bless the new moon, since this is also a time-related positive mitzva that does not entail any physical action. In the end, the Magen Avraham rules in accordance with the BACH, that women may recite the Havdalah by themselves, while the TAZ accepts the opinion of the RAMA.

According to the Mishna Berura, the best practice is for a man to recite Havdalah for a woman, but if the husband has already recited it the woman can perform the blessing herself. This second option is preferable to having the man repeat a blessing which he has already said.

The Magen Avraham writes that the custom is for women not to drink from the wine of Havdalah, and for this reason they are not able to recite the Havdalah themselves. However, as noted above, the Mishna Berura rules that a woman should recite the Havdalah if her husband has already fulfilled the

obligation, and he writes in that case "she should recite the Havdalah herself and drink the wine, in order not to miss observing the mitzva."

### The Blessing Over the Candle for Women

In Bi'ur Halacha it is written that women are not required to recite the blessing over the candles (296). The author adds that if a person has recited the blessing, "He who creates the lights of the fire," over an improper thing (such as a flame which was used for prohibited labor) he must repeat the other blessings, since an improper blessing constitutes an interruption between the blessings of the wine and the Havdalah itself.

This implies that women should not recite the blessing of a flame during Havdalah, since it would be an interruption for them (assuming they are indeed not required to recite this blessing). If they want to, they can recite the blessing of a flame after the Havdalah, since then it will no longer be an interruption. This opinion is quoted in "Shemirat Shabbat K'Hilchata" (61:24). However, according to Rabbi S.Z. Auerbach, a woman can recite the Havdalah in the normal sequence, since the blessing on the flame does not contain the phrase "you have commanded us to perform a mitzva" but is a blessing of thanks. Women can also be thankful for the light, and there is no reason to refuse their right to observe the full mitzva.

צוותי מדע ותורה



This publication is distributed by the RELIGIOUS ZIONISTS OF AMERICA - MIZRACHI and by THE ZOMET INSTITUTE OF ALON SHVUT. It is an extract from SHABBAT B'SHABBATO, a weekly bulletin distributed in hundreds of synagogues in Israel and has been translated by Moshe Goldberg. If you are interested in sponsoring an issue of Shabbat B'Shabbato, contact the RZA Mizrahi office at 212-465-9234 or [mizrachi@rza.org](mailto:mizrachi@rza.org).



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