

Kol Mevasser

SHABBAT NITZAVIM-VAYELEH

23 Elul 5769

September 12, 2009

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Delve Into It

Rabbi Yosef Benarroch

In this week's Torah portion of *Vayelekh* there is a law that as far as I know is unique only to Judaism. In chapter 31 we are commanded as follows, "*And now you shall write for yourselves this song*" (*Devarim 31:19*). Who is the "you" that the verse is referring to, and what is the song? There are various opinions regarding these questions. Nahmanides explains that the "you" refers to Moses and the song refers to the portion of *Ha-azinu* that follows in chapter 32. Since Moses was passing on the leadership of the Jewish people to Joshua he had to write down the song and personally pass the torch on to Joshua while he (Moses) was still alive.

Our Rabbis have another understanding for this verse. Unlike Nahmanides they explain that the song refers to the entire Torah, and the "you" refers to every Jew. They conclude the following, "*Rabba said: even if ones parents leave them a Sefer Torah, it is still a Mizvah for every person to write their own Sefer Torah as it is written, And now you shall write for yourselves this song. (Talmud Sanhedrin 21b)*". In other words according to this dictum it is every Jewish person's responsibility to at some time in their life write the entire Torah. It is because of this statement that many families hire a scribe to write a Torah scroll for their families.

As I read this statement of our Rabbis I was struck by how unique this law is to Judaism. The Torah is basically the manual of Jewish living. It is for lack of better terms, our code of conduct that not only contains nice stories,

PRAYER SCHEDULE

SHABBAT NITZAVIM-VAYELEH

22 Elul / Friday, September 11th

Shaharith	6:30 am
Minhah & Arvith	6:30 pm
Shabbat Candlelighting	6:47 pm

23 Elul / Shabbat, September 12th

Shaharith.....	8:30 am
Minhah & Arvith	6:30 pm
Motzei Shabbat	7:49 pm

24 Elul / Sunday, September 13th

Selihoth.....	6:30 am
Shaharith.....	7:30 am
Talmud Torah	9:30 am

Rosh Hashanah Model Seder with Parents

WEEKDAYS

Selihoth.....	5:45 am
Shaharith.....	6:30 am
Talmud Torah	Tuesday/Thursday 4:00 pm

EREV ROSH HASHANAH

29 Elul / Friday, September 18th

Selihoth.....	5:45 am
Shaharith.....	6:30 am
Minhah & Arvith	TBA
Shabbat & Yom Tov Candlelighting	6:37 pm

but comes complete with laws and legal matters. It is the Jewish people's "Book of Law". I cannot think of any other nation or country that obligates its adherents to personally write out the law manual of that country. For that matter I do not know of any country that obligates citizens to even have a copy of the laws of that country in their homes. But Judaism is different. Every Jew is obligated to write the entire Torah and what's more to have a copy with them in their homes.

Maimonides codifies this principle in his "Sefer Hamizvot" (Book of Commandments).

continued on page 2

continued from page 1

He writes the following, *"We were commanded that every Jewish individual is required to have his own Torah. If they wrote it themselves this is praiseworthy... and if they are unable to write it themselves then they should at least buy one or hire someone else to write it for them."* (Maimonides Sefer Hamizvot 18)

How are we to understand this strange obligation? I believe there are a number of very important principles here. The first is that our Rabbis wanted us to understand that the Torah belongs to the entire Jewish people. It is not the monopoly of any individual or certainly any group of individuals. By obligating every person to write their own Torah and to have the Torah in their home the message is clear that the Torah belongs to everyone.

But there is a second message that is just as important. By obligating every person to write their own Sefer Torah the message is that we must be active participants in the study of the Torah. Passivity is an anomaly to Judaism. The way to grow as Jews is to study the Torah, to grapple with its words and to constantly seek out new interpretations. It is for this reason that the preferred mode of studying the Torah is not by oneself but with a study partner (*Hebruta*). In this way we actively engage in study, questioning one another and often times disagreeing until the correct answer is derived.

It is interesting that in the morning blessings, the blessing that is recited before the study of Torah is *"Blessed are you Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, that you have commanded us to be involved (La-asok) in the words of the Torah"*.

Why do we formulate the blessing as being *"involved in the words of the Torah"*? Wouldn't it have made more sense to say *"that you have commanded us to study the words of the Torah"*? Is there a difference between "study" and being "involved"? Yes there is, to be "involved" is active. It means being engaged and busy in the study of the Torah. When it comes to the study of the Torah the approach we are encouraged to take is that of active participants.

There is a third explanation to the commandment that each person has to personally write their own Sefer Torah. How beautiful are the words of *Rabbi Yehiel Halevi Epstein* in his famous work entitled *"Arukh Hashulkhan"*. Regarding why the text refers to the Torah as a song he gives the following explanation, *"This is the beauty of our holy Torah for all of the Torah is called a song. The beauty of a song is that the voices are different one from another. This is the Torah's beauty"* (*Arukh Hashulkhan*).

Rabbi Epstein addresses the question of why the verse in our *Perasha* refers to the Torah as a song. He explains that a song is sung by many people and each one sings differently. No two voices are the same. So too, he explains, it must be regarding the Torah. Like a song the final melody is beautiful and harmonious, but it is made up of many voices. So it is with the Torah. It too is beautiful and harmonious, but it is made up of many voices and interpretations.

In the end what all of these commentaries have in common is that the Torah is the personal property of every Jew. It is what allows us to be called Jews and it is what has carried us for thousands of years through thick and thin. The more we guard it and study it the more it guards us. As one of my Rabbis once said to me, "There is one thing that our holy books do not like and that is dust". May we all merit to fulfill the words of the Mishnah, *"Ben Bag Bag would say: Delve in it (the Torah) and continue to delve into it, for everything is in it; look deeply into it; grow old and gray over it, and do not stray from it, for you can have no better portion than it"* (*Ethics of Our Fathers 5:22*). Wishing you Shabbat Shalom.

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TORAH READINGS

Nitzavim-Vayeleh p. 878 Haftara p. TBA

Shabbat Kiddush
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in memory of
Daisy Ezra, z"l

by
her family

Thank You
to all the ladies and men
who devoted their time
this past Sunday
to cleaning the Torahs
for the holidays

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In Memoriam

These anniversaries occur from Shabbat, the 23rd of Elul (September 12, 2009) to Shabbat, the 1st of Tishrei (September 19, 2009). It is customary to light a memorial candle in the evening and donate tzedakah. Family members are encouraged to attend services.

Sunday / 24 Elul
Khazam bat Farha

Monday / 25 Elul
Yosef Acoca ben Nissim
Sasson Ephraim Yonah
Marsel Kemareh bat Shaul v' Gazala Levi

Tuesday / 26 Elul
Rahma Chatoon bat Simha
Hanina Saleh Shamash bat Farha

Wednesday / 27 Elul
Ester bat Morvarid

Thursday / 28 Elul
Moondani bat Bonjan
Moshe ben Moondani

Friday / 29 Elul
Berindal bat Riba Rahel
Ezra ben Aharon
Itzhak ben Shlomo

Shabbat / 1 Tishrei
Chana bat Rachel
Mozelle Elisha
Yacob Rahamin ben Saleh Moshe Kadoorie
Edward Sassoon
Farha bat Aziza

Refuah Shlemah

Please include these individuals in your prayers :
Yonatan ben Alizah ▪ Mazal Tov bat Sulha Mitana
Matilda Louisa ▪ Jack Wickett ▪ Yaheskel ben Regina
Ayala bat Naomi ▪ Khayah Noa bat Sara ▪ Victor
ben Pauline ▪ Haim ben Mordechai ▪ Moshe ben Naji
▪ Pnina bat Esther ▪ Yosi ben Esther ▪ Victor ben Latif
Ramah Regina bat Farha ▪ David ben Silas

**High Holy Days
Children's Room**
will require wristbands.

**Members may obtain wristbands
free of charge in the office. Non-
members may purchase
wristbands for \$50.**