

"Open my eyes so that I may see the **wonders** of Your Torah"



Wonders

בס"ד

Issue 212

Weekly Magazine of the Shiurim and Farbrengens
of HaRav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

Shabbat Nitzavim-Vayeilech 5786 🌸 Septemer 4-5, 2026

שַׁבַּת נִצָּבִים-וַיֵּלֶךְ 🌸 כב-כג אָלוּל תשפ"ו



“ Government officials entered Rabbi Natan Adler’s home by order to search for the Torah scroll. Rabbi Natan Adler took the Torah scroll and placed it in his student Moshe Sofer’s arms and stood him in the middle of the room. The officials conducted a thorough search of every nook and cranny but did not notice Moshe who was holding the Torah in plain sight. ”

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to publish your classes
in book form.
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of Harav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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STORY

RABBI NATHAN ADLER: THE BA'AL SHEM TOV OF GERMANY

Rabbi Natan HaCohen Adler was born on the 10th of Tevet, 5502 (1741), to his father Rabbi Shimon and his mother Tzirale, in the city of Frankfurt am Main, Germany. His family traced its lineage to Rabbi Shimon HaDarshan of Frankfurt, author of the Yalkut Shimoni. He was known as a gifted and diligent child. He was so absorbed in his studies that he would often arrive at prayers only after they had ended. When the Chida, Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai visited the Frankfurt community and witnessed the talented young student's lateness, he jokingly made a pun about it. Rabbi Natan Adler studied the revealed dimensions of Torah under the Pnei Yehoshua, Rabbi Moshe Rappaport, and Rabbi David Tevli Katz Schiff, and studied Kabbalah under Rabbi Avush, the rabbi of Frankfurt. Rabbi Natan Adler was the principle teacher of the Chatam Sofer, who refers to him throughout his writings with expressions of deep reverence such as, "the chasid of the priesthood," "the pathways of Heaven are more familiar to him than to an angel," and similar phrases. Alongside his simple conduct and the humility he showed every person, Rabbi Natan Adler was known for his extraordinary practices in the service of God: he would don both Rashi's and Rabbeinu Tam's tefillin simultaneously, prayed in the Ari's liturgical system with Sephardic pronunciation, and led the prayer services accordingly in every synagogue where he prayed. He also performed the Priestly Blessing daily, fasted, and practiced mortification frequently. Due to his distinctive practices, he was eventually placed under a ban by the rabbis of Frankfurt and was compelled to leave the city together with his disciples. After several years during which he served as rabbi of Boskowitz in Moravia, the ban was lifted and he returned to Frankfurt. He departed this world shortly thereafter, on the 27th of Elul, 5560 (1800), and is buried in the ancient Jewish cemetery of Frankfurt. Rabbi Natan left behind no written Torah novellae, holding that the permission granted to commit the Oral Torah to writing did not apply to someone like himself, for whom forgetting was not a concern.

Once, Rabbi Natan Adler's opponents found a pretext to act against him: a royal decree had been issued requiring all silver vessels to be surrendered for state use. The great Rabbi Natan Adler's Torah scroll possessed silver rings on its *etz chaim* (the wooden rollers), and someone informed the authorities of this.

One night, as he sat learning with his student, they heard noise and commotion from the upper story, where the Torah scroll was kept. Rabbi Natan Adler instructed his student, the young Moshe—who was none other than the future *Chatam Sofer*—to climb up to the attic and see what was causing this sound. Though the young man was afraid—what if thieves were there and would harm him—his teacher's command was binding, and he went up the stairs. From a distance he saw an elderly man with a beard white as snow, striking with a hammer. Frightened by the sight, he drew closer to see who it was and was astonished for he found the great author of the *Machatzit HaShekel*, striking with a hammer to separate and remove the silver rings from the Torah scroll. When he noticed the young Moshe, he asked him not to reveal what he had seen for he had come in secret, so that Rabbi Natan Adler would not learn of the informer's report and be grieved if the silver rings would be searched for. From this we see the great love that the author of the *Machatzit HaShekel* bore for Rabbi Natan.

On another occasion, government officials entered Rabbi Natan Adler's home by order, again based on an informer's report, to search for the Torah scroll. In his haste, Rabbi Natan took the Torah scroll and placed it in his student Moshe Sofer's arms and stood him in the middle of the room. The officials conducted a thorough search of every nook and cranny but did not notice Moshe who was holding the scroll in plain sight, for Rabbi Natan had made him one who sees yet is not seen. When the *Chatam Sofer* later recounted this event, he said that one need not be astonished that Rabbi Adler could effect this miracle but that it is a dangerous thing to perform.

On yet another occasion, the *Chatam Sofer* traveled to Vienna with Rabbi Adler on an urgent matter also connected to an informer's report. As they departed the city gates, a deep sleep fell upon the coachman, and within about two hours they arrived in Vienna. It was plainly evident that the journey had miraculously shortened. When the coachman was awakened and saw that they had already reached their destination, he could not understand how they had arrived so quickly.

from *Chut HaMeshulash HeChadash*

It is told that the Ba'al Shem Tov once said: "Polish Jews will believe in God until the coming of Mashiach; German Jews, I cannot help them until Mashiach arrives; I came for the Russian Jews—those who waver between two opinions." This expression, drawn from the words

of Elijah the Prophet, teaches that the Ba'al Shem Tov was like Elijah, the herald of the Messianic redemption. But Rabbi Natan Adler, who labored together with his disciples in Germany, was the herald of redemption for the Jews of Germany in particular, a kind of Ba'al Shem Tov

for that community. The *Divrei Chaim* of Tzanz testified in the name of Rabbi Naftali of Ropshitz, citing Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, that aside from the soul of the Ba'al Shem Tov, no soul as holy as his had descended to the world in recent generations.

The resemblance between them is indeed striking: steadfast confrontation with opponents, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, the miraculously shortened journey while the coachman slept, the transformation of communal customs in their respective communities, and more. The miracle he performed making his disciple Moshe holding the Torah scroll invisible alludes to the Ba'al Shem Tov, because the Hebrew for "invisible" (רוֹאֶה וְאֵינוֹ נִרְאֶה) equals "Israel" (יִשְׂרָאֵל), the Ba'al Shem Tov's first name. The sum of their years—the "grace" (חן), 58 years of Rabbi Natan together with the 62 years of the Baal Shem Tov—is 120, the years of Moses' life, the first redeemer and the final redeemer.

What is the secret of Rabbi Natan, who worked in so complex a setting? His surname, Adler, means "eagle," itself an allusion to Germany, where he worked to elevate the sparks of holiness. Reversed, the letters of Adler (אדלר) form the acronym *Radla* (רדל"א), which stands for the highest part of the crown, the Unknowable Head, where the "hidden strength of the Divine Essence" is found. His first name, Nathan means "given" or "gifted" alluding to his having merited the gift of serving God (see

Numbers 18:7), which is akin to serving God out of pleasurable love (אהבה בתענוגים), a gift from Heaven given to a person who has attained perfect awe of God. All of this alludes to the root of his soul being hewn from *Atik*, the Ancient of Days, within the supernal Crown, where pleasurable love refers to the emotive faculties of *Atik*, while the Unknowable Head (his surname) corresponds to the intellectual faculties of *Atik*.

In conclusion, another story about Rabbi Nathan Adler, which highlights the strong resemblance between him and the Ba'al Shem Tov:

The *Chatam Sofer* once said to his disciples: "To perform *Kefitzat HaDerech*—a shortening of distance—using Divine Names, that is no great matter. My teacher, the *chasid* of the priesthood (Rabbi Nathan Adler), performed it without any action!"

The Ba'al Shem Tov also had a special relationship with this same miracle. As a child, he once used a Divine Name to cross a river. When he matured, he was greatly pained for having done so. Despite his regret, he was not at ease until he came to the same river, this time chased by robbers. He crossed the river on the merit of pure faith alone (employing no Divine Name). Indeed, the simple faith he relied on, is itself the highest aspect of *Atik* in the crown, the source from where Rabbi Nathan's soul was hewn.

THE FOURTH REVOLUTION AND TORAH FOR ALL

REVEALED AND CONCEALED SOURCES OF CONVERSION

One of the sources for contemplating the nature of disseminating the Torah to the nations of the world is the altar that the Torah commanded be constructed on Mount Eival, on which was written “all the words of this Torah, spelled out clearly,” in the languages of all seventy nations. The Me’or Einayim on this verse connects the dispute between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon regarding the writing on the altar to the secret of conversion in general, and from his words emerges a transition from the “classic” conversion, as it was conducted throughout the years of our exile, to the innovation of what we have named the “Fourth Revolution.”

This article is based on a recording from the 21st of Iyar, 5786 and first appeared in the Ki Tavo 5786 edition of Niflaot. An unabridged English translation appears on our Patreon page: www.patreon.com/galeinai.

WRITING THE TORAH ON THE ALTAR

In Parashat Ki Tavo, Moshe commands Israel:

And it shall be, when you have crossed the Jordan, that you shall set up these stones, which I command you today, on Mount Eival, and coat them with plaster. And you shall build there an altar to Havayah your God, an altar of stones; you shall not wield an iron tool over them. You shall build the altar of Havayah your God of whole stones... And you shall write on the stones all the words of this Torah, very clearly.¹

Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon disagreed about how the Torah was written on the stones²:

How did Israel write the Torah [on

the stones]? Rabbi Yehudah says: they wrote it on the stones themselves, as it says, “and you shall write on the stones,” etc., and afterward they plastered them over with lime. Rabbi Shimon said to him: According to your view, how did the nations of the world learn the Torah? He replied: the Holy blessed One gave the nations of the world “extra intelligence,” and they sent their scribes, who peeled off the plaster and copied it. Rabbi Shimon says: they wrote it on the plaster itself, and then they [the Israelites] wrote beneath it [the verse], “Lest they teach you to do like all their abominations [of idolatry],” etc.

According to Rabbi Yehudah, they wrote the Torah on the stones of the altar and covered it with plaster, so that the Torah was not visible to the nations—except that

1. Deuteronomy 27:4–8.

2. Sotah 35b.

God gave them “extra intelligence” to send scribes who would peel off the plaster and copy the Torah. This was their opportunity to learn; it was for their sake that the words were written on the altar. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the nations were not drawn toward good on account of it, “and for this their sentence was sealed for the pit of destruction, for they should have learned and did not learn.” By contrast, according to Rabbi Shimon the Torah was written openly, in view of all the nations, with an explicit invitation to repent, so that they would be saved from destruction.

ISRAEL AND THE LEVELS AMONG THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD

The root of the dispute lies in the question of which nations the words of the Torah are addressed to. The *Me’or Einayim* writes that according to Rashi’s interpretation, both Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Yehudah agree that regarding the seven Canaanite nations dwelling in the Land of Israel we must fulfill the commandment, “you shall utterly destroy them”³ and, “you shall not let any soul live”⁴—therefore, even if they came to convert they would not have been accepted, for it is presumed that their conversion stems from their fear of death and is therefore not a genuine conversion. By contrast, members of all the other seventy nations of the world may engage in Torah and be aroused to return to God through it.

The dispute is thus limited to members of the seven Canaanite nations who do not reside in the Land of Israel: Rabbi

Yehudah says that they too are included in the commandment, “you shall utterly destroy them,” and so there is no point in inviting them to learn Torah and repent; whereas according to Rabbi Shimon, the commandment, “you shall utterly destroy them” does not apply to them, and so if they repent through learning the Torah, they can be accepted as converts.

It turns out that there are three levels of non-Jewish nations here, from bottom to top: the seven Canaanite nations that reside in the Land of Israel, who are to be destroyed (according to Rashi’s view, that there is no requirement to approach them with a call to peace⁵); members of the seven Canaanite nations that reside outside the Land, regarding whom Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon disagree; Finally, there are the rest of the seventy non-Jewish nations throughout the world, from whom converts can certainly be accepted.

Inwardly, the people of Israel represent the secret of the World of Emanation (*Atzilut*)—as they are described as “the nobles of the children of Israel.”⁶ Below the World of Emanation lie the three levels of non-Jewish nations corresponding to the three lower Worlds of Creation, Formation, and Action. The world of Creation, most adjacent to Emanation, is described as “possible being”⁷ (אפשרות הקציואת)—an unformed reality that certainly has the potential to turn to good, and ultimately, in the days of Mashiach, all the sparks

⁵ Rashi on Deuteronomy 20:10.

⁶ Exodus 24:11.

⁷ See the essay “Tzion” 5662 (*Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5662, p. 356); the discourse “Shuvah” 5686 (*Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5686, p. 30). *Sod Hashem Liyerei’av*, part 2, ch. 1.

³ Deuteronomy 20:17.

⁴ Ibid. 20:16.

found within it will surely be gathered, revealing that the father and mother principles (Abba and Imma), which dwell in the worlds of Emanation and Creation⁸ as “two companions who never part.”⁹ Corresponding to the world of Creation — also the “world” of Intellect, from where the intellectual soul that exists even among the nations emerges—are all the non-Jewish nations, the seventy nations populating the entire globe, among whom there certainly are those fit to draw close to the Torah. Of the world of Action it is said, “even that which I have made,”¹⁰ because between it and the realms of holiness there is a gap described as “the anger of the Almighty”¹¹ causing even the small amount of good found within it to be wholly swallowed up by the impure husks and even “the [pure] piece becomes [as impure as] a carcass.”¹² That is the realm populated by the seven Canaanite nations in the Land of Israel, who cannot be accepted when they leave idolatry and repent (even if they wish to convert, it is clear that their motive is to be found in the material and practical interests of the World of Action, and not because they seek a genuine relationship with God).

The dispute discussed in the section of Talmud quoted above between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon concerns the

World of Formation, which is described as half good and half evil.¹³ It is the realms of impulses and desires—to which we here correspond the members of the seven Canaanite nations (corresponding to the seven emotive impure impulses or desires of the heart) who do not live in the Land of Israel. Rabbi Yehudah argues that there is no remedy for them, whereas Rabbi Shimon says that within the balanced reality of the World of Formation, the scales of these individuals can be tipped to the right and thus they can be drawn to holiness and to God and can therefore convert to Judaism.

Emanation	the Jewish People
Creation	the Seventy Nations
Formation	the Seven Canaanite Nations Abroad
Action	the Seven Canaanite Nations in the Land of Israel

THE SECRET OF CONVERSION

After this introduction, the *Me’or Einayim* asks, “Now, the dispute is not fully understood, for according to Rabbi Yehudah, for what reason was the Torah written [on the stones]?”

According to Rabbi Shimon the purpose of writing the Torah on the stones is to enable—even to invite—the return of members of the Canaanite nations who left the Land of Israel but remain in its vicinity and might cause us to sin. Therefore, we have a vested interest in turning them away from idolatry. But why, according to Rabbi Yehudah, was the Torah written on the stones in the first place? Meaning to say

8 See *Tikkunei Zohar* 6 (23a); the opening of *Ramaz on Zohar*, vol. 2. And elsewhere.

9 See *Zohar* 3:290b; 1:123a.

10 Isaiah 43:7.

11 *Rashi* at the end of *Parashat Noach*. See also *Zohar* 1:147a; *Shelah*, Introduction (11), to “*Asarah Maamarot*”; *Shefa Tal*, *Chelek Tal*, *Sha’ar Rishon*, ch. 1.

12 *Chullin* 108a; *Yevamot* 81a.

13 *Etz Chaim*, 43, Introduction. And elsewhere.

that if the words of the Torah are addressed only to the seventy non-Jewish nations and does not even include an invitation for them to repent (and the only way they can learn about the Torah is through the “extra intelligence” they possess—because it is covered with plaster), what is the purpose of the writing?

To answer this question, the *Me’or Einayim* first explains the secret of conversion. To summarize his words, it is explicit in the Midrash¹⁴ that the first seven generations of humanity sinned and caused the Shechinah—the Divine Presence—to recede from the earth back to the highest heaven. This was the situation until Abraham arrived in the world and began to bring the Shechinah back to earth through his actions publicizing Godliness and converting converts from among the nations, as will be expounded upon. The sins of Adam and the first seven generations caused sparks of holiness to fall into the psyches of the nations of the world, and these sparks sustain the nations. The holy sparks are also a bond to the pure good—a bond to the holiness of Israel—and by the power of these holy sparks, converts find their way to Torah and to conversion.

Let us explain this a bit more.¹⁵ In everything there is a holy spark of the Divine, without which it could not exist. But this spark can be a distant *makif* [a distant encompassing light, or revelation] so distant from the person’s consciousness that it receives no expression at all in his

or her reality. In Chasidic nomenclature, when something lacks influence in this way, it is in a state called “concealment that lacks [a connection to] reality (העלם הקלם).” By contrast, the spark of holiness can also be enfolded (to use the Me’or Einayim’s language) or more integrated into one’s consciousness. It is then described as being a near *makif* [a near encompassing light or revelation]. In this state, it lies near the individual’s consciousness and affects his or her conscious mind. Still, it is not yet fully disclosed the way it is for a Jew. It is then in a state called “concealment that has [a connection to] reality” (העלם שישנו במציאות). Such a spark impels a person toward conversion. Conversion is necessary for the elevation and rectification of the world, for “none shall be cast away from Him,”¹⁶ and every such spark must compel and be part of a conversion before the Mashiach can come¹⁷—but it still requires clarification, meaning that it must be freed from the impure husks and must reach full revelation.

The entire process of conversion is meant to clarify whether a true spark has been revealed here, one that overcomes the external, self-centered husks (*kelipot*) and is prepared to draw close to God despite the intimidation. Differentiating and identifying a potential convert’s true motivation requires something of a “holy spirit” (Divine inspiration) on the part of the court that oversees the conversion. The purpose of the threats of punishment for those who transgress (as Jews) the Torah’s

14 *Bereishit Rabbah* 19:13; *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 5:1.

15. See also *Kabbalah and Meditation for the Nations*, beginning of ch. 3.

16 2 Samuel 14:14.

17 See *Likkutei Moharan* 17:6.

commandments is to repel the external husks. But once a potential convert demonstrates seriousness and overcomes superficial “threats,” we are required to convert him or her without delay. The Divine inspiration required to identify a true convert is unfortunately lacking today. As a result, the conversion of honest potential converts is drawn out, while on the other hand, even unworthy converts are accepted.¹⁸

This entire process is necessary on the way to the coming of Mashiach, but when Mashiach comes—after the final completion of the work of clarification—converts will no longer be accepted, because it is presumed that they come to convert only out of external and superficial interests.

HERETICS AND THE PERIMETER OF TORAH

The Torah that was written on the altar on Mt. Eival arouses those non-Jews who have within them a spark that is enclothed to repent and convert. But even one who has no such spark may be drawn to study the Torah, in which case, it will produce in them the opposite effect. The heretics—a term used by the Sages for Christians, to whom in particular the *Me’or Einayim* refers—are drawn to the Torah, but for the vast majority of them this only feeds the impure husks that affect them, instead of drawing them closer to the good, as they distort the verses and find in them “proofs” for their false faith.

18 See further in the class from 2 Adar Rishon, 5782 and following. See *HaMahapectah HaRevi’it*, ch. 13, at the end.

This then is the meaning of the “extra intelligence” possessed by some non-Jews, which prompts them to send scribes to copy the Torah out from beneath the plaster, and yet they too were sentenced to purgatory. The *Me’or Einayim* explains this, calling upon a process that begin with Adam’s sin—the source from which sparks of holiness descended into the far-encompassing light of non-Jews.

The Sages are commanded to, “make a safeguard around My charge,”¹⁹ and thus, they made a fence around the Torah²⁰—not as an addition to the words of Torah, but as a guardrail to protect us from feeding the forces of impurity, like the hairs that protect the limbs, i.e., the 248 commandments, which are described as the 248 limbs of the King,²¹ as it were). Any other addition to the words of the Torah—a superfluous addition, not needed for the safeguarding of the words of the Torah—is a departure from the perimeter of holiness, and constitutes a crossing over from the domain of “there is no truth but Torah”²² into the domain of human falsehood. Doing so disrupts the possibility of seeing the truth within the Torah. Thus, the additions added by heretics—particularly, the Christian faith centered on a human—are falsehoods that disrupts their grasp even of the Torah’s truth and turns their study into a source that nurtures the impure forces of reality.

The *Me’or Einayim* says that according

19 *Yevamot* 21a.

20 See *Avot* 1:1.

21 Based on *Tikkunei Zohar*, 30 (74a).

22 Jerusalem Talmud, *Rosh HaShanah* 3:8; Introduction to *Eichah Rabbah*, section 2; *Pesikta DeRav Kahana* 15:5.

to Rabbi Yehudah there is reason to write the words of the Torah for those who have within them a good, “enclothed” spark of holiness that is in a state of “concealment that has [a connection to] reality.” These are the sparks present among the seventy non-Jewish nations of the world. But there are those whose attraction to the words of Torah is motivated by an “extra intelligence,” a superfluous surplus, which, instead of drawing them closer to the Torah’s truth, only serves to feed their impure husks, dragging them down deeper toward destruction. Still, it can be argued that in Rabbi Shimon’s view—as will be elaborated shortly—that same “extra intelligence” can also be a positive force, providing them with a motivation to penetrate even beyond the revealed good spark. Case in point was the advice given by Jethro, the first convert, whose “extra intelligence” was incorporated into the Torah,²³ adding to holiness.

THE CONVERSIONS OF RABBI YEHUDAH AND RABBI SHIMON

The *Me’or Einayim*’s comments provide us with a deep appreciation for the inner meaning of the dispute between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon.

As noted above, every person’s existence, as well as the existence of every creature, depends on a Divine spark, a spark of affinity to all that is good and holy, and so, in a certain sense, this spark may be termed the “*pintelle Yid*,” the point or essence of Judaism. In a Jew, this point-like essence appears openly, while in a non-Jew it remains concealed. There are two types

of concealment, as discussed above. When the point-like essence exists as a near *makif*, it resides at the living-one (*chayah*) level of the soul, which just hovers above consciousness, touching and not touching it, acting as a potential force that strives to be revealed. When the point-like essence exists as a distant *makif*, it resides at the singular-one (*yechidah*) level of the soul, which is entirely hidden and can remain forever a mere possibility, with no necessary drive to be revealed.²⁴ The near *makif* is apt to be revealed and to bring about actual conversion, but the distant *makif* has no chance of being aroused in a natural way.

Therefore, Rabbi Yehudah, known as a master of the Torah’s revealed tradition—since his rulings generally prevail²⁵—focuses only on those potential converts who possess a concealed spark with a connection to reality. These are the sparks found in the World of Creation, close to holiness, and possessing a strong intellectual soul drawn to holiness. These converts are able to intuit that beneath the plaster, there is a message for them, because they too have a spark striving to be revealed from beneath the external husk, and the Torah found there arouses them to return to God (whereas others may be heretics who merely draw additional strength for their heresy from it, and it is better not to expose them to the words of Torah on our own initiative).

24 Only holiness has a distant *makif*. The impure forces in reality do not, which is the meaning of the Sages’ statement that “they have a reflection [a near *makif*], but no reflection of a reflection [a distant *makif*]” (*Gittin* 66a).

25 See, for example, *Eiruv* 46b. And elsewhere.

23 *Mechilta*, beginning of *Yitro*; *Rashi* on Exodus 18:1.

Rabbi Yehudah allows for conversions as they were performed throughout the millennia of our exile from the Land of Israel. These were conversions of souls drawn to the Jewish people of their own accord. No conscious effort was made on the part of Jews to draw these potential converts closer to Torah. Moreover, they had to overcome their initial rejection by the conversion court, freeing themselves of the impure husks on their own, as above).

By contrast, Rabbi Shimon is recognized as the master of the Torah's hidden tradition. In the revealed tradition (the Talmud), his rulings prevail specifically regarding the laws of Shabbat,²⁶ the time dedicated to an inward thrust and described as "a semblance of the World to Come."²⁷ He is none other than the famous Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, *Rashbi*, and he also believes that sparks in the distant *makif*, the *yechidah* level of the soul, can be revealed in reality.²⁸

26 *Shabbat* 157a.

27 *Berachot* 57b.

28 Fittingly, Rabbi Shimon was among the five great disciples of Rabbi Akiva (Maimonides, Introduction to *Mishneh Torah*). Of these five students who correspond to the five levels of Rabbi Akiva's soul, Rabbi Shimon represents the *yechidah* of his teacher, who himself was "the son of converts!" (See also the class of 18 Elul 5745, and elsewhere).

Therefore, Rabbi Shimon is not afraid to write the Torah openly, with an explicit appeal to everyone. He believes that the exposure of all the nations of the world to the Torah—including those sunk in the World of Formation, the world of impulses and desires, with no revealed affinity to holiness—will reveal a great many more sparks that can be drawn close and converted, far more than the number of converts who are drawn to the Torah of their own accord, even when it is written beneath the plaster. In his view, the only ones who cannot be accepted are those non-Jews who are undoubtedly motivated by a self-interest. These are the seven Canaanite nations residing in the Land of Israel, at the level of the World of Action, as above.

Rabbi Shimon is found to be the source of the "Fourth Revolution"²⁹—the conscious effort required as we approach the time of Mashiach, to shine the light of the Torah to all, in the expectation that it will also arouse sparks that are entirely hidden. This effort will bring close to the Jewish people millions of converts whose return to their root precedes the Redemption.

29 See *HaMahapectah HaRevi'it*, and in the classes beginning 24 Tevet 5775.

PARASHOT NITZAVIM-VAYEILECH

STANDING TODAY BEFORE GOD

The *parsha* of *Nitzavim*, begins with the following words: “And you are standing today all of you before God.”¹ While on a literal level, the Torah’s mention that Moses is talking to the people “today” does not seem out of the ordinary, the sages infer from this that the day was somehow a special day. Some suggest that this was the day Moses’ died and he had assembled all the people to transmit his last teachings. The *Zohar* suggests that this day alludes to Rosh HaShanah, when the Jewish people and, indeed, the entire population of the world stands before God in judgment.² In fact, *Nitzavim* is always read the Shabbat before Rosh HaShanah.³

The first interpretation makes sense given that Moses is clearly nearing the end of his life as the next few portions demonstrate. The second fits in with the Chassidic notion that the portion always reflects current events; thus, making it eminently sensible for the “today” in our verse to hint to Rosh HaShanah, implicitly counseling us to prepare mentally and psychologically for the upcoming Day of Judgment.

The word “today” appears in *parashat Nitzavim* 13 times,⁴ alluding to the Thirteen Attributes of Compassion we elicit with our prayers throughout the month of Elul

and the Ten Days of Teshuvah, from Rosh HaShanah through Yom Kippur.

TODAY IS EVERY DAY

Alternatively, the word “today” has also been understood figuratively to imply that every day should be treated as if it were this very unique day on which Moses is speaking to the Jewish people. This idea is derived from the interpretation of another seminal event in Jewish history – the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. When the Jews arrived in the Sinai Desert on the first day of the third month, the Torah states that they arrived “on this day.” Since the rest of the sentence is in the past tense, Rashi points out that the phrase “on this day” should have been written “on that day.” It was written in the present tense, he comments, to teach us that when we learn Torah it should feel as new and exciting to us as if we had just received it today.⁵ In other words, in both seminal cases, the Torah is teaching us that we should not relate to these unique experiences as onetime events in the past; rather, we should treat them as ongoing experiences. Each and every day the Torah should feel new and each and every day we should feel like we are standing before God.

The word “today” also reminds us that in regard to time, the past is gone, the future has not arrived and the present passes like

1. Deuteronomy 29:9.

2. As quoted in *Likkutei Torah, Nitzavim*.

3. *Sha’ashuim Yom Yom*, p.132.

4. *The Inner Dimension*, p.367.

5. *Rashi* on Exodus 19:1.

“the blink of an eye.”⁶ The Talmud teaches that Mashiach will come “today, if you listen to His voice.”⁷ Thus, every day has the potential to enable us to come closer to God as we do on Rosh HaShanah, to experience the revelation of the Torah as we did at Mount Sinai, and to reveal the coming of Mashiach.

REBIRTH AND RENEWAL

An additional aspect of “today” is expressed by King David when he states, “God said to me: ‘You are my son, today I have given birth to you.’”⁸ David felt as if he was constantly being given the gift of new life. No matter what upheavals he went through in life, David continually cleaved to God, always speaking to Him as if He was right in front of him “today.”

All these interpretations of the word “today” – the day of Moses’ death, Rosh HaShanah, how every day we stand before God, the Torah is given anew every day, and the day of Mashiach’s arrival – contain an aspect of rebirth. Moses’ death by the “kiss of God,”⁹ stresses that death is only a transition to a new level of living. On Rosh HaShanah a new year begins with the opportunity of renewal while the revelation at Sinai is ongoing. Ultimately, Mashiach’s arrival at the End of Days will lead to a total rebirth of human consciousness.

However, even before we reach that point, every day, in essence, contains the potential of true rebirth. God is renewing the creation every split second, as we

testify in our daily morning prayers: “In His goodness he renews daily the act of creation.” That ongoing process of creation, *yesh m’ayin*, “something from “nothing” is available to each person to connect to, integrate and be inspired by. Every day is also an opportunity to transform our ego (אני) into a state of selfless humility, a state of “nothingness” (אין). Notice that both these words have the same letters only inverted. This teaches us the inner spiritual work we all have to do every day.¹⁰

STANDING BEFORE GOD

The notion of standing before God “today,” wherein “today” refers to Rosh HaShanah, sheds profound light on Rosh HaShanah’s essence. When we stand before God on Rosh HaShanah, all the dimensions of time—past, present, and future—manifest themselves simultaneously. We stand in the present, “today,” asking for forgiveness for our past misdeeds and shortcomings while committing ourselves to behaving better in the future. While our future is dependent on rectifying the past, God’s final judgment on Rosh HaShanah, which affects our future, is dependent on the sincerity and level of commitment we manage to generate in the present. Further weaving together past, present, and future, Jewish tradition teaches that although God, being Omniscient, knows whether or not we will really change for the better, He compassionately judges us according to our sincere desire to change and not by what actually transpires in the future.¹¹

6. *The Inner Dimension*, loc. cit.

7. *Sanhedrin* 98a. Psalms 95:7.

8. Psalms 2:7.

9. *Rashi* on Deuteronomy 34:6.

10. *Sha’ashuim Yom Yom*, p.139.

11. This is learned from the episode when God

The level of complete awareness reached on Rosh HaShanah is alluded to in the phrase “all of you” in *Nitzavim*’s opening verse. The simple understanding is that all of the people assembled to hear Moses speak. However, a Chassidic interpretation is teaching us that when we stand before God on Rosh HaShanah, it must be with “all of you,” with the totality of our being, as we recite in the *Shema*: “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.”¹² This phrase equals 737, the same as the word *shalhevet* (שִׁלְהֶבֶת), a flame, meaning our souls need to be “on fire” when serving God.¹³

Ensuring that we stand before God with our entire beings, especially on Rosh HaShanah, when God is deciding our fate for the upcoming year is the call of the hour.¹⁴ If we are unable to muster that presence of mind and heart, the shofar’s blast is designed to awaken us and “shock” us into relating to God from the depths of our innermost beings. The searing sound of the shofar has the ability to fuse all the disjointed parts of our personality, all the inner fragmentation, into one unified plea.¹⁵

ESTABLISHING AN ETERNAL COVENANT

After describing how Moses assembled all the people, the Torah recounts why he did so – to establish the covenant

saves Yishmael, “where he was at,” not according to where he would be and what he would do in the future. *Rashi* on Genesis 34:17.

12. Deuteronomy 6:5.

13. *Sha’ashuim Yom Yom*, p.135.

14. *The Inner Dimension*, p.372.

15. For an in-depth explanation of the *shofar* see *Sod HaShem Liyerei’av*, pp. 485-490.

between God and Israel once again:

To establish you today as a people to Him and that He be a God to you, as He spoke to you and as He swore to your forefathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Not with you alone do I seal this covenant and this oath, but with whoever is here, standing with us today before *God*, our God, and with whoever is not here with us today.¹⁶

Moses’ inclusion of all subsequent generations – “whoever is not here with us today” – substantially expands the covenant’s scope, creating a bond and unity of purpose that links all Jews, in all places, at all times. Despite being dispersed to the four corners of the earth for nearly two millennia, the Jewish people were able to maintain themselves as a distinct and unique people due to the covenant between God and “all of you.”

The inclusion of “whoever is not here with us today” also has profound Kabbalistic ramifications. According to the secrets of reincarnation - recorded in many Kabbalistic texts and revealed by the Arizal, in particular – those souls that were redeemed from Egypt and stood at Mount Sinai were subsequently reincarnated repeatedly throughout history. The phrase “whoever is not here with us today” refers to the subsequent generations of Jews who would incarnate from the souls of those that did stand there. So, in a sense, these later Jews “who were not there” were also there.

16. Deuteronomy 29:12.



FOUR CIRCUMCISIONS

In the Torah portion of *Nitzavim* there is a passage referred to as *Parshat HaTeshuvah*, which describes how Israel will ultimately return to God through *teshuvah* and then be gathered from around the world to the Land of Israel. The final verse of this moving description reads: “And *Hashem*, your God, will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your offspring, [so that you may] love *God* your God with all your heart and with all your soul, for the sake of your life.”¹⁷ Parenthetically, it should be noted that four different “foreskins” of the body in need of circumcision are mentioned in the Tanach.

We are reminded of these circumcisions as we read the portion of *Nitzavim* and its call for *teshuvah* on the Shabbat before Rosh HaShanah.

17. Deuteronomy 30:6.

AN ALLUSION TO THE BA’AL SHEM TOV

We Return now to the above verse: “And *Havayah*, your God, will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your offspring, [so that you may] love *Havayah* your God with all your heart and with all your soul, for the sake of your life.”¹⁸ This verse has 18 words and 67 letters. Sixty-seven is the numerical equivalent of the name of the month preceding Rosh HaShanah, Elul (אֱלוּל), a month of introspection and *teshuvah*, the month that we read this passage. It also alludes to the Ba’al Shem Tov who was born on the 18th day of Elul.¹⁹ The content of this verse was the essence of the Ba’al Shem Tov’s mission in the world: to reveal a new path in serving God that would open the gates of true *teshuvah* and circumcision of the heart, leading ultimately to the final redemption.

18. Ibid. 30:6.

19. *Sod Hashem Liyerei’av* 34:9.



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