



5779 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Nitzavim / פרשת נצבים

## Teshuva and the Return to Yerushalayim

Our parsha takes us on a dramatic overview of Jewish history. The beginning of the parsha predicts that after the Jews enter the Land of Israel they will eventually sin and be forced to leave the land. Then, the parsha shifts to discussing the Jewish people's final return to the Land of Israel and the onset of the messianic era.

Rav Kook notes that in this section, the Torah uses the word "return" in two different contexts. First, as a call for sincere repentance: "and you will return (*VeShavta*) to the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul."<sup>1</sup> Then, immediately following this verse, the Moshe speaks of the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel: "then, the Lord, your God, will return (*VeShav*) your exiles, and He will have mercy upon you."<sup>2</sup>

At first glance these forms of "returning" are disparate. One refers to a geographic and physical ingathering of the exiles while the other to an inner and spiritual process of returning to God. However, Rav Kook argued that the Torah's usage of a single word to depict both "returns" is extremely significant.<sup>3</sup> In his thought, the process of "teshuva" means returning to one's true nature. Naturally, a person is pure and connected to God, and it is sin that unnaturally temporarily weakens that relationship. When one engages in teshuva, one is simply returning to one's true self – to the self that God intended the person to be.

Rav Kook argued that the return to the Land of Israel has a similar function – the return of the Jewish people to their true selves. In the diaspora, the Jewish people are perforce not able to tap into their true selves and are ever so slightly tainted by the impurity of exile. It is only in the Land of Israel that the Jewish people can access the deepest recesses of their souls and live life in the natural

<sup>1</sup> Devarim 30:2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 30:3.

<sup>3</sup> Inspired by Orot HaTeshuva 17:2.



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way that God intended for them. In short, both “returns” are a return to the most elemental aspects of one’s identity.

After reading the parsha we then turn to the haftorah for the completion of this process. Instead of just describing the messianic return to the entire Land of Israel, Yeshayahu focuses on the return of the Jewish people to the city of Yerushalayim: For the sake of Zion, I will not be silent, and for the sake of Jerusalem I will not rest...No longer shall "forsaken" be said of you.. On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all day and all night, they shall never be silent; those who remind the Lord, be not silent.”<sup>4</sup> The return to Yerushalayim, to the heart of the Jewish people, is also part of the teshuva process. It is a return to our true selves.

May we merit a complete teshuvah and a happy and sweet new year!

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<sup>4</sup> Yeshayahu 62:1-6.