

כ"ב - ב"ח אֶלּוּל תשפ"ב September 18 - 24, 2022



מה בפָּרָשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

- ◆ Our parashah is about the בְּרִית (brit, covenant) that bonds God and Benei Yisrael. The brit includes everyone—from the leaders to the children, people who were part of Benei Yisrael at that time, and even those who weren't there! God promises to be our God, and we promise to be faithful.
- ◆ If we do what's right, we will enjoy blessings. And if we don't do what's right...we can always change our ways! The parashah emphasizes the power of תְּשׁוּבָה (teshuvah, returning to God). No matter how far away we are, God is prepared to gather us back if we choose to return.
- ◆ Moshe emphasizes that Torah and mitzvot are close by and accessible. These are neither up in the sky nor far across the sea. This is something that we can do!
- ◆ Moshe tells Benei Yisrael that they face a choice between life or death, and blessings or curses. He encourages them: וּבַחַיִּים בְּדַחַיִּים (uvaharta ba-hayyim, choose life)!





פְּרָשָׁנוֹת • Commentary

Devarim 30:11-14

This mitzvah which I am commanding you this day is not too mysterious for you, and it's not far away.

It's not in heaven that you should say, "Who can go up to heaven and get it for us and teach it to us so that we may do it?"

It's not across the sea that you should say, "Who can cross the sea and get it for us and teach it to us so that we may do it?"

Rather, it is so close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it.

דברים ל:יא-יד

בִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם לֹא נִפְלְאוֹת הוּא מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא רִחֵק הוּא:

לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא לֵאמֹר מִי יַעֲלֶה לָנוּ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְיִקְחֶהָ לָנוּ וְיִשְׁמַעֲנוּ אֹתָהּ וְנַעֲשֶׂנָה:

וְלֹא מֵעֵבֶר לַיָּם הוּא לֵאמֹר מִי יַעֲבֹר לָנוּ אֶל עֵבֶר הַיָּם וְיִקְחֶהָ לָנוּ וְיִשְׁמַעֲנוּ אֹתָהּ וְנַעֲשֶׂנָה:

בִּי קְרוֹב אֵלַיךָ הַדְּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ:

These pesukim describe a mitzvah that is so close, it's "in your mouth and in your heart" already, and we're told we really are able to do it! But what is it, exactly? What is "הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת" (ha-mitzvah ha-zot, this mitzvah)?"

Rashi (France, 1,000 years ago)

"It is so close to you" – the Torah was given to you both written down, and spoken.

רש"י

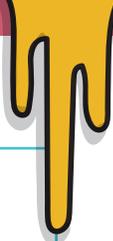
"בִּי קְרוֹב אֵלַיךָ" – הַתּוֹרָה נִתְּנָה לָהֶם בְּכָתוּב וּבְעֵל פִּה.



Send us your thoughts or questions from learning the parashah. We'll write back to you, and some will get published in future issues of Devash!

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Ramban (Spain, 800 years ago)

"This mitzvah" – this is about the teshuvah (returning to God) that was mentioned before.

רמב"ן

"המצוה הזאת" – על התשובה הנזכרת.

Ramban explains "this mitzvah" by connecting our pesukim to the ones that come just before, which are all about teshuvah (Devarim 30:1-10).

- ◆ Are there parts of teshuvah that can be described as close by and easy to do? Which ones?
- ◆ How does it make sense to say that teshuvah is "in your heart"?

Rashi thinks "this mitzvah" refers to the entire Torah.

- ◆ In what ways is Torah "very close" to you?
- ◆ What does it mean for Torah to be "in your mouth and in your heart"?



מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash

Let's look closer at one phrase from the pesukim on the opposite page: לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא (lo va-shamayim hi, it's not in heaven; Devarim 30:12). **What can we learn from these words?**

Bzzzz
A lot of midrashim are **bugged** by something unusual in the Torah text



Here's a story called תַּנּוּר שֶׁל אַחְנַי (tanur shel akhnai, akhnai's oven). In it, the rabbis are disagreeing about whether an oven was טָמֵא (tamei, impure) or טָהוֹר (tahor, pure). R. Eliezer kept trying to prove his point, but nobody else agreed with him. Look for "lo va-shamayim hi" – it's the punchline!

חלמוד בבלי בבא מציעא דף נט עמוד ב

באותו היום השיב רבי אליעזר כל תשובות שבעולם ולא קבלו הימנו.

Talmud Bavli Bava Metzia 59b

On that day, R. Eliezer gave every possible answer to support his position (that the oven was tahor), but the rabbis there did not agree.



אמר להם, אם הלכה במותי חרוב זה יוכיח. נעקר חרוב ממקומו מאה אמה (ואמרי לה ארבע מאות אמה).

אמרו לו, אין מביאין ראיה מן החרוב.

R. Eliezer said, "This carob tree will prove I'm right!" The tree uprooted and moved 100 amot. (Some say it was actually 400 amot!)

The rabbis said, "You can't bring proof from a carob tree."

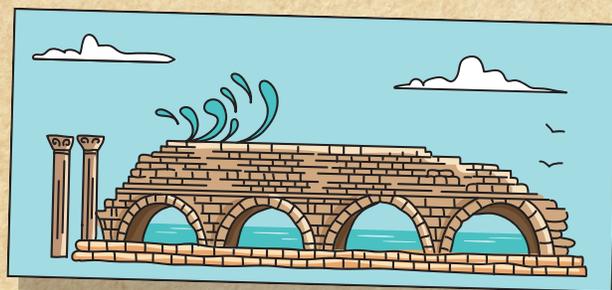


חזר ואמר להם, אם הלכה במותי אמת המים יוכיחו. חזרו אמת המים לאחוריהם.

אמרו לו, אין מביאין ראיה מאמת המים.

He said, "This channel of water will prove I'm right!" The water in the channel switched directions.

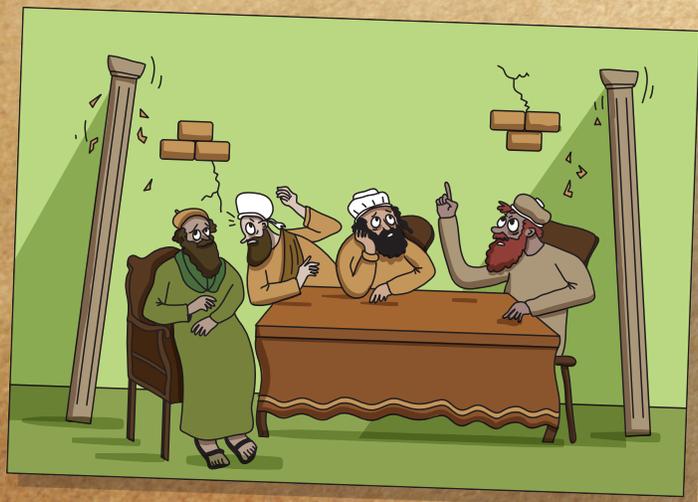
The rabbis said, "You can't bring proof from a channel of water."



חזר ואמר להם, אם הלכה במותי בתלי בית המדרש יוכיחו. הטו בתלי בית המדרש לפל. גער בהם רבי יהושע. אמר להם, אם תלמידי חכמים מנצחים זה את זה בהלכה - אתם מה טיבכם?

He said, "The walls of the beit midrash (study hall) will prove I'm right!" The walls leaned inward and began to fall.

R. Yehoshua scolded the walls and said, "This is an argument in halakhah between Torah scholars, you stay out of it!"



...He said, "Heaven will prove I'm right!"
 A bat kol (miraculous voice) went out and said:

...חָזַר וְאָמַר לָהֶם אִם הִלְכָה בְּמוֹתֵי מִן
 הַשָּׁמַיִם יוֹכִיחוּ. יִצְאָתָהּ בַּת קוֹל וְאָמְרָה:



R. Yehoshua stood up and said:



עָמַד רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ עַל רַגְלָיו וְאָמַר:

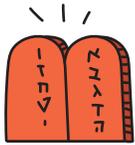
מֵאִי "לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הִיא?"
 אָמַר רַבִּי יִרְמְיָהּ, שֶׁכָּבֶר נִתְּנָה תּוֹרָה מִהָר
 סִינַי - אֵין אָנוּ מְשַׁגְּיחִין בְּבַת קוֹל. שֶׁכָּבֶר
 כְּתוּבָה בְּהָר סִינַי בַּתּוֹרָה, "אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים
 לִהְיוֹת" (שְׁמוֹת כג:ב).

What does "lo va-shamayim hi" mean?
 R. Yirmeyah said: The Torah was already
 given on Mount Sinai, so we no longer
 listen to a bat kol. You, God, already
 wrote in the Torah on Mount Sinai:
 "follow the majority" (Shemot 23:2).



The Gemara records a lot of disagreements about halakhah. The Torah teaches that one of the most important rules about those disagreements is that we have to follow the majority. From "lo va-shamayim hi" in this story, we learn that, once the majority has ruled, even miracles can't change their decision!

- ◆ What is this story saying about being "right" or "wrong" in halakhah?
- ◆ Why do you think God allowed miracles to support R. Eliezer if the Torah says to follow the majority?
- ◆ According to this gemara, what is the deeper meaning of God saying that the Torah is "not in heaven"? If it's not in heaven, where is it? What does that teach us about our connection to Torah here on earth?



הלכה • Halakhah



Nobody is perfect, and one of the main points of the Torah is to help us improve ourselves (Bereishit Rabbah 44). One word for this is תשובה (teshuvah, returning), and it can refer to three related things:



1) fixing a bad action, behavior, or habit



2) improving a character trait



3) coming closer to God

There are ten pesukim in Nitzavim all about teshuvah (Devarim 30:1-10).

The Talmud emphasizes that it's never too late for teshuvah. Even if a person only does teshuvah on the last day of their life, if it is genuine and sincere, God will accept it (Kiddushin 40b).

How to do Teshuvah

Change can be difficult. Rambam helps by breaking the teshuvah process into steps (Hilkhot Teshuvah 2:2-3):



(1) stopping to do a bad action or behavior that you did



(2) regretting that you did it



(3) confessing what you did, and



(4) promising not to make the same mistakes in the future

All of this only applies if you're doing teshuvah for something that's between you and God. But if you hurt another person, then you need to make it up to them and ask for forgiveness (Hilkhot Teshuvah 2:9).

Teshuvah is an opportunity for growth, and for learning from our mistakes. The Gemara (Berakhot 34b) says something pretty cool about it: Being able to learn from mistakes and do teshuvah is somehow even greater than never making mistakes in the first place!



שאלות השבוע • Parashah Scavenger Hunt

The answers to the first seven questions can be found in the matching numbered aliyah in the Torah reading. **The answers to the last three are harder and can come from anywhere in the parashah.**

aliyot:

- 1) Devarim 29:9 to 29:11
- 2) 29:12 to 29:14
- 3) 29:15 to 29:28
- 4) 30:1 to 30:6
- 5) 30:7 to 30:10
- 6) 30:11 to 30:14
- 7) 30:15 to 30:20

Good luck!

1 What two kinds of physical jobs are mentioned in this aliyah?

2 What surprising group of people are included in the בְּרִית (brit, covenant)?

3 What letters in this aliyah have dots over them?

4 What word in this aliyah might make you think of an eight-day-old boy?



5 What three kinds of "fruit" are mentioned in one verse?

6 In what two places are God's commands **not** located?

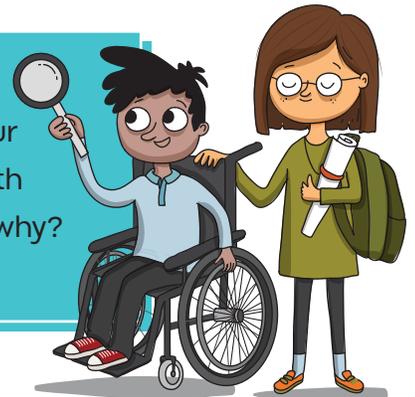
7 This aliyah lays out four kinds of opposites. What are they?

8 How many times does the root ש.ו.ב (to return) appear in our parashah?

9 There are two four-word phrases from the first paragraph of the Shema that appear in our parashah three times each. What are they?

10 Four city-kingdoms are mentioned in our parashah. Which fifth one is missing and why? (This is a hard one!)

*
Look for the answers on page 12!





בואו נדבר על זה • Tell Me More About This!

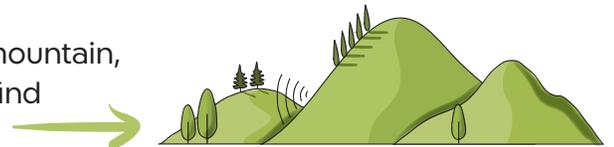
In our Midrash this week (p. 3-5), R. Eliezer calls on a voice from heaven: a בַּת קוֹל (bat kol). What is a bat kol?

It literally means “daughter of a voice.” Probably this is something like an echo—not actually a voice, but something that echoes out from a voice. According to the Tosefta (Sotah 13:4), a bat kol is the way that God communicates with us now that people don’t have נְבוּאָה (nev’ah, prophecy) anymore. It’s sometimes understood to be an angelic voice (Talmud Bavli Sotah 33a).

What might a bat kol sound like?

The Talmud has some different examples of a bat kol:

- ◆ You walk past some kids learning outside a shul, and you hear one of them say a pasuk (Yerushalmi Shabbat 6:9). It’s like that pasuk is communicating a message to you.
- ◆ You hear a voice from somewhere nearby, like on a mountain, but when you get there to see who it was, you can’t find anybody (Mishnah Yevamot 16:6).
- ◆ You overhear people talking and one of them says something deeply relevant to what you’re thinking about (Megillah 32a).



The bat kol that R. Eliezer and his colleagues heard could have been any of these...or something else.



רגע של עברית • A Moment of Hebrew

Devarim 30:2

And **you return** to God your Lord, and you and your children listen to God’s command with all your heart and soul, just as I tell you this day.

דברים ל:ב

וּשְׁבַתְּ עַד ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ וּשְׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלוֹ
כָּל אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם אֶתְּךָ
וּבְנֵיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ:

לָשׁוּב (שָׁרַשׁ ש.ו.ב.)
◆ To return or to repeat (lashuv)



דְּקָה שֶׁל דִּיּוּ • One-Minute Debate

How to play:

Here is a topic for debate along with some suggested arguments, but feel free to come up with your own.

- ◆ Assign people to the "Agree" or "Disagree" sides.
- ◆ Each side gets 30 seconds to make their case.
- ◆ At the end, the group votes on a winner.

Debate: Living your life according to Torah and mitzvot is easy.



Agree!

- ◆ Learning Torah is so sweet and rewarding.
- ◆ Nothing comes more naturally to the soul.
- ◆ When you love something, it doesn't feel hard (like Yaakov working for Rahel).



Disagree!

- ◆ There is so much to learn and practice.
- ◆ If it were easy, would it be important? Torah and mitzvot matter because they are a challenge.



= הַשְׁבַּת אֲבִידָה
The mitzvah to return something lost (hashavat aveidah)



= תְּשׁוּבָה
1. An answer
2. Returning (to God) (teshuvah)

= שׁוּב
Again (shuv)



= מְשׁוּב
Feedback (mashov)

Find the Word!

If you find your enemy's ox or donkey, you need to return it. Can you find the words that show that in Shemot 23?



טַעַמֵי הַפְּקָרָא • Torah Trop

We have learned so many notes this year! And we also learned how notes usually show us where the accents are in a word. In Hebrew, the main accent of the word is always on one of the last two syllables of the word. But sometimes that isn't enough! There are some words that have more than one accent.

Think about the English word: "conversation." If you had to pick one accent, you would say it was "con-ver-SA-tion." But, if you think about it, you pronounce the first sound a little stronger than the second sound. So really, it would be "**con**-ver-SA-tion."

The same thing happens with Hebrew words, and sometimes we actually get two notes on a word to show us how to pronounce it:

Devarim 29:9
And your officials

דברים כט:ט
וְשֹׁטְרֵיכֶם

See how there is a zakeif katon over the last syllable, but also a munah on the first syllable? That shows that this word really has two accented places, even if the main one is at the end.

But sometimes there is a secondary accent and no musical note to go with it. That's when we need the handy-dandy mark known as a **מְתֵג** (**meteg**)! Check it out in action here:

Devarim 29:25
And they bowed

דברים כט:כה
וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ

The main accent here is at the end—it's marked by the tip'ha that is under the vav. But, if you look closely, you will see two other lines under this word, one under the yud and one under the tav. Each one of those is a meteg! They are meant to tell you that you should pronounce the word like this: va-**yish-ta**-ha-VU (and not **va**-yish-ta-**ha**-VU).

Maybe you or someone you know has a name with lots of syllables? Try shifting the main and secondary accents around and see what it sounds like. If you don't like having your name mispronounced, maybe you should start writing it with a meteg!



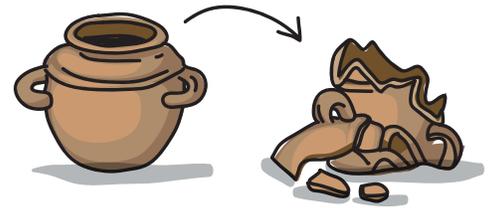


בואו נדבר על זה • Tell Me More About This!

In our מִדְרָשׁ / Midrash section (p. 3), we saw an intense argument about an oven. What was the big disagreement?

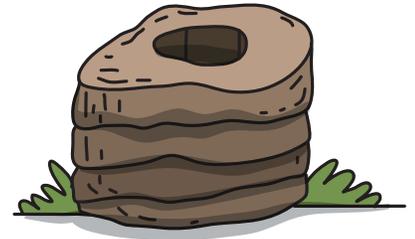
THE BACKGROUND

Many tools and objects made by people can become טָמֵא (tamei, impure). But there is usually a way to make those things pure again. The exception is that things made of clay can never be purified once they have become tamei. If they are broken into pieces, though, then that does the trick. Once it's broken, it's no longer considered to be the same object. For example, a clay pot that became tamei and then broke into pieces is no longer really a pot, so it's not tamei anymore either.



THE OVEN

Ovens used to be like huge, overturned bowls made of clay. תַּנּוּר קָשׁל (tanur shel akhnai, akhnai's oven) was a kind of oven that was made up of a bunch of different clay rings stacked on top of each other, kept together with some kind of cement or sand. The rings could be taken apart and put back together.



THE QUESTION

Since this oven can be easily taken apart, do we view it as already kind of "broken," so it can't become tamei (like other ovens that get broken), or do we view it like a regular, whole oven that can become tamei?

It's not a complete object, so even if a mouse dies in it (or something like that), it doesn't matter. It's not tamei.

It can become tamei, just like a normal oven. At the end of the day, all the pieces combine to create one oven. And if it does become tamei, you better destroy it.



R. Eliezer



The rest of the rabbis

- ◆ Does it surprise you that such a specific argument got so intense and heated? Why or why not?



קָה זָה • What's Going On Here?

Moshe tells Benei Yisrael: וּבְחַרְתֶּם בַּחַיִּים (uvaharta ba-hayyim, choose life)!

What is this command about?

When you read the whole pasuk (Devarim 30:19), it seems to be saying that Benei Yisrael should choose to follow the mitzvot, and that then they'll be rewarded with life, or maybe a good life, or maybe a long life.

R. Yehoshuah says hayyim here is Torah, and a person should choose to learn Torah before anything else (Midrash Tehillim, 1).

But R. Yishmael considers uvaharta ba-hayyim to be telling us, more generally, to make practical choices that help us stay

alive. Based on this phrase, he says that parents have to help their children gain skills to earn a living. This is how you choose life!

R. Akiva also follows this line of thinking, and he says uvaharta ba-hayyim even means that parents are responsible for teaching their children how to swim. Do whatever you can to stay alive in an emergency! (Yerushalmi Kiddushin 1:7)

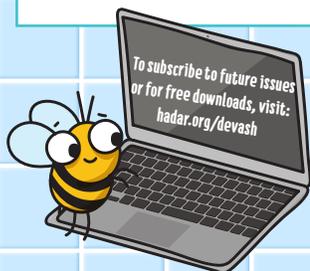


Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. Woodchopping and water-drawing (29:10)
2. People who aren't even there! (29:14)
3. לָנוּ וּלְבָנֵינוּ עַד (29:28)
4. מִילָה (umal)—it's from the same root of the word מִילָה (milah) in the term בְּרִית מִילָה (brit milah, circumcision) (30:6)
5. פְּרִי בִטְנֶךָ (pri vitnekha, the "fruit" of your belly [kids!]); פְּרִי בְהֵמְתֶךָ (pri vehemtekha, the "fruit" of your animals [baby animals]); פְּרִי אֲדָמָתֶךָ (pri admatkha, the fruit of your land [food]) (30:9)
6. In heaven, and across the sea (30:12-13)
7. Life and death; Good and evil; Heaven and earth; Blessing and curse (30:15, 19)
8. Seven for sure: וְיָשַׁבְתָּ, וְיָשַׁבְתָּ, וְיָשַׁבְתָּ, וְיָשַׁבְתָּ, וְיָשַׁבְתָּ, וְיָשַׁבְתָּ, וְיָשַׁבְתָּ—these all appear in 30:1-10. Some people think the word

וְיָשַׁבְתָּ in 30:3 also comes from this root.

9. כָּכֹל לְכַבְּדָהּ וּכְכֹל לֵבָבְךָ (bekhol levavkha uvekhol nafshekha, with all your heart and all your soul) (30:2,6,10) and אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם (asher anokhi metzavkha hayom, that I command you today) (30:2,8,11)
10. We hear about the destruction of Sodom, Amorah, Admah, and Tzvoyim (29:22). Back in Lekh Lekha, Avraham fought a war against five kings. It was the kings of these four places, plus one more: Bela, king of Tzo'ar (see Bereishit 14:2). But Tzo'ar is not mentioned here in Nitzavim because it wasn't destroyed like the other four were! God spared that town because Lot, Avraham's nephew, needed a place to take shelter while his home town of Sodom was being wiped out (see Bereishit 19:18-23).



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