

Trust, Believe, and Live by Faith

In this week's reading from Parshiot Nitzavim and Vayelech (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 29:9-31:30*), Moshe writes that at a future time Israel will sin and the Lord will send them to a distant nation into captivity. After having been scattered to the nations in rebellion, the people will remember the Lord their God, and He will restore them from their captivity and have compassion (mercy, רַחֲמֶיךָ) on them and gather them from all the nations. (*30:1-3*) In this repentant-remembrance of the Lord God, Moshe says, וּמַלְּיָהוּהָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת-לִבְכֶם וְאֶת-לִבְבְּנֵיכֶם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְכֶם וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם וּבְכָל-מְעַן חַיֵּיכֶם 30:6 *Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live. (NASB)* The scriptures use the term "uncircumcised heart" as a reference to those whose stubbornness and pride make it impossible to obey God's Commandments. In *Devarim / Deuteronomy 10:16* the Lord commands the people to circumcise their own hearts (וּמִלְתֶּם אֶת עֵרְלֹת לִבְכֶם) whereas in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 30:6* the Lord God says that He will be involved in the process of circumcising the heart. The Scriptures say that the uncircumcised heart does not submit to God's will and it is the uncircumcised heart that guides and directs the sinful will. This promise of God to circumcise the heart of His people illustrates the inward change the Lord will do which causes one to love the Lord God and allows the Spirit of God to guide and direct.

ספר דברים פרק ל

א וְהָיָה כִּי-יָבֹאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים
הָאֵלֶּה הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי
לְפָנֶיךָ וְהִשְׁבַּתְתָּ אֵל-לִבְכֶם בְּכָל-הַגּוֹיִם
אֲשֶׁר הִדִּיחְתָּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ שָׁמָּה: ב
וְשִׁבַּת עַד-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ וְשָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלוֹ
כָּל אֲשֶׁר-אֶנְכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם אַתָּה וּבְנֵי
נִי בְּכָל-לִבְכֶם וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם: ג וְשָׁב
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ אֶת-שְׁבוּתְךָ וְרַחֲמֶיךָ וְשָׁב
וְקִבְּצְךָ מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הִפְיָצְךָ
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ שָׁמָּה: ד אִם-יְהִי נִדְחָךָ
בְּקִצְהָ הַשָּׁמַיִם מִשָּׁם יִקְבְּצְךָ יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵיךָ וּמִשָּׁם יִקְחֶךָ: ה וְהִבִּיאֶךָ יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-יִרְשׁוּ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ
וּיְרַשְׁתָּהּ וְהִיטְבָהּ וְהִרְבָּהּ מֵאֲבוֹתֶיךָ: ו
וּמַלְּיָהוּהָ אֱלֹהֵיךָ אֶת-לִבְכֶם וְאֶת-לִבְבְּנֵיכֶם
לְאַהֲבָה אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ בְּכָל-
לִבְכֶם וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם לְמַעַן חַיֵּיךָ:

Devarim / Deuteronomy 30:1-6

30:1 'So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the Lord your God has banished you, 30:2 and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, 30:3 then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. 30:4 'If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. 30:5 'The Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. 30:6 'Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live. (NASB)

When one thinks of circumcision, generally one thinks of the surgical removal of the foreskin. The Scriptures do provide us with this type of description of circumcision, however, studying the Torah, we find a progressive revelation with regard to the Hebraic understanding of Circumcision. The books of Moshe reveals to us a very dynamic understanding of circumcision. Circumcision is used to describe the circumcision of the heart (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6*), circumcision of the ears (*Acts 7:51*), and circumcision of the lips (*Shemot / Exodus 6:9-7:13*). The circumcision of the heart is brought into the context of the uncircumcised heart, a description of the heart that is closed off, impervious to the Lord's calling, has no desire to serve God, and no interest in God's Word. The effect of an uncircumcised heart is that one is completely closed off and unyielding to the call of the Lord. The uncircumcised ear is one that does not hear the Word of God perfectly. These ears listen to only what they want to listen to and have a prejudice or bias for lies and are not interested in the truth. The uncircumcised lips are described as the kind of lips that are unholy, do not speak the Word of God, and are deceiving. According to the rabbinic literature and the Scriptures, the "*uncircumcision*" are those who are outside of the family of God, not a part of the community, not a member of the covenant, and those who are filled with sin. The "*circumcision*," on the other hand, are those who have fellowship with the Lord, who serve Him, who love Him, and who obey His commands. If we take a step back and examine the different ways in which the word "*circumcision*" is used from an objective point of view the following observations may be made:

Observations about Circumcision

- *One does not circumcise oneself on the outside; a person yields himself to circumcision.*
- *We are told to circumcise ourselves on the inside (Devarim / Deuteronomy 10:16). This is a very personal and private thing to do.*
- *Circumcision is the removal of something that is located on both the outside and the inside.*
- *Circumcision is done in private and is performed upon a personal part of the body and of the Spirit (the heart).*
- *Circumcision concerns the cutting away of something that is not necessary.*
- *Circumcision is a point of consecration before God in our hearts (Jeremiah 4:4, Joshua 3-5).*

Notice how circumcision is the removal of something that is not necessary, something that is impeding a relationship with God (the heart), and is paralleled to yielding ourselves to one another. Circumcision is performed upon a private part of our bodies, and what more private a part of our bodies than our hearts, and even our souls? Most anyone would not want someone else to know their deepest darkest thoughts.

Based upon this Torah perspective, on the usage of the word circumcise (מָלַךְ), and within the parallels that we read with regard to the heart, the ears, the lips, and the flesh, the Scriptures illustrate the concept that our lives consist of both physical and spiritual counterparts. For every physical thing we do, there is a spiritual counterpart. For every physical thing we do there are spiritual consequences. Do you think there are spiritual consequences to everything we do? According to the Torah the spiritual aspect of our lives is as important if not more important than anything else which is emphasized in the idea of circumcising the heart, the ears, and the lips. This is a very important concept when we consider the spiritual versus the physical. This concept is very similar to the idea put forward in *Midrash Tehillim 50, Part 2* (מדרש תהלים פרק נ סימן ב). *Midrash Tehillim 50, Part 2* opens saying, “*I do not reprove you for your sacrifices (Tehillim / Psalms 50:8).*” The homiletic introduction to the Midrash states, “*Rabbi Nakhman taught in the name of Rabbi Berechiah, If a man intends to do a righteous act, the Holy One blessed be He, writes it down before Him, as if already done, for the verse goes on to say your rising thoughts are continuously before Me.*” This is a very interesting midrash because Rabbi Nakhman says that he learned from Rabbi Berechiah that if a man has the intention to perform a righteous act, the Lord writes it down as if he had already performed the act. According to this interpretation, the rabbis suggest that the spiritual supersedes the physical. This sort of interpretation is not restricted to *Tehillim / Psalms 50*, we also know that Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zachai, taught the idea that G’millut KhaSaddim (*deeds of loving kindness*) may substitute for the blood atonement. The teaching is that when one reads the commandments in the Torah regarding atonement, it is as if he has performed them. This interpretation is derived from select verses out of the Tanach such as the following:

Hosea 6:6 For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. (KJV) וְכִי הֶסֶד חִפְצָתִי וְלֹא־זָבַח
וְדַעַת אֱלֹהִים מִעֲלֹת:

Hosea 14:2 Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. (KJV) אָמְרוּ וְשׁוּבוּ אֵלֵי־יְהוָה אֱמָרוּ
אֱלֹהֵינוּ כָּל־תְּשׁוּאָה עָוֹן וְקַח־טוֹב וְנִשְׁלָמָה פְּרִים שִׁפְתֵינוּ:

These interpretations most likely were the result of the destruction of the second Temple.

According to the prophets, in *Isaiah 8:20* we read “*To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*” Isaiah

suggests that our actions bear witness to our faith in the Lord. Our faith, our testimony, our walk before God is consistent with the Torah which is the testimony of God. Here we are told in the midrash that one's intention is more important than the deed and that intention secures the deed in written form before the Lord. The rabbis are elevating the spiritual above the physical aspects of one's life similar to the Torah concept of circumcision of the heart, ears, and lips as compared to the flesh. (*Read Joshua 3-5 and pay close attention to circumcision and entering the Promised Land.*)

Midrash Tehillim 50 continues comparing the intention to do good to Solomon who made provision of food, to his wives preparing food in the hope that Solomon would dine with them, and the Lord asking for a sacrifice.

And Solomon's provisions for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and three score measures of meal, and a hundred sheep, for he had dominion over all the region (1 Kings 5:2-4). Rabbi Judah said, Solomon had a thousand wives, and all of them prepared banquets, every wife, every day, for each hoped that Solomon would dine with her. Solomon had besides deer and gazelles and roebucks. Now will you fetch up a burnt offering for Me who has dominion over so much more than Solomon? Hence, I do not reprove you for your sacrifices (Tehillim / Psalms 50:8), since they are all already Mine. (Midrash Tehillim 50, Part 2)

The concept that is being put forward here is that one's intentions are enough, a sacrifice is not necessary, the Lord will not reprove the people for their sacrifices (*Tehillim / Psalms 50:8*), and the reason being He has dominion over all of the animals. *Midrash Tehillim 50, Part 2* concludes saying, "*But for what do I reprove you? For that you give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit (Tehillim / Psalms 50:19).*" This teaching that intention is more important than actions seems to follow from the Targum translation we had discussed previously (last week), that we are called to subdue the evil impulse (*Tehillim / Psalms 50:14-15*). Remember that the rabbis translate David's words to "*Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving*" as equal in weight to subduing the evil impulse. They are equating our righteous deeds to the sacrifice of thanksgiving. This is consistent with Paul's analysis in which he states to put your body to death (*Galatians 5:24*) to "*crucify the flesh with its passions and desires.*" (see also *Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23, Romans 6:6, Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:5*) Paul also says in *2 Corinthians 2:15* *For we are a sweet fragrance to God in The Messiah among those who have life and among those who perish. (ABPE)* Thus, the act of offering a sacrifice of praise is to live our lives as a pleasant aroma before God. We live our lives in the Messiah in this world, in the midst of the righteous and the unrighteous nations that surround us. The idea that one's "*intention*" supersedes one's actions is based upon the rabbinic substitution of the sacrifice of thanksgiving, the absent Temple, and subduing the evil impulse. The midrash states that the reason God does not "*reprove you for your sacrifices*" is because the sacrifices are already His. This translation brings in the concept that one does good deeds in the hopes that the Lord Himself will draw near unto us, He will

commune with us, the righteous act will somehow cause us to draw near to the Lord. The rabbinic understanding of righteous deeds based upon this midrash is that righteous deeds will cause us to draw near to the Lord, whereas sin will cause us to be separated. This is a theologically sound assumption based upon the Apostolic Writings (see the epistles of Peter and John). The only issue is how our righteous deeds may be equated with the sacrifice of thanksgiving? According to the midrash, this is dependent upon the Lord having dominion, or as the midrash states *“they are already mine”* (*Midrash Tehillim 50, Part 2*). The point is, does the Lord have dominion over your life? We are told in the Apostolic Writings that we are to give ourselves, or lives over to Yeshua the Messiah so that He has dominion over our lives. By believing upon Yeshua, His death, His resurrection, and asking Him to send His Holy Spirit to dwell in us, we are giving the Lord dominion over our lives. According to the Apostolic Writings, we MUST give dominion of our lives over to the Lord, and we must submit our lives to Yeshua in order to be Saved. Intention alone is not enough since Yeshua said *“by their fruit you will know them”* (*Matthew 7:16*). Our intention is what follows through to action. This is why King Solomon said in *Mishley / Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. (NIV)* Within the heart is the intension to serve God. If we pollute our hearts with all kinds of sin, we will destroy the desire and the intention to serve God. The Lord knows our hearts, and as the midrash states, if the intention is not right, the deed will not be regarded as righteous. This sounds an awful lot like what Yeshua was teaching of the last days before the judgment throne when he said what he did in *Matthew 7:21-24*.

Matthew 7:21-24

7:21 ‘Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter 7:22 ‘Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 7:23 ‘And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’ 7:24 ‘Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. (NASB)

Here, the intention of these peoples heart were not in line with their actions. Sure the power of God was present, but intension should not be for show or for personal pride or wealth. The fruit of a child of God is to *“Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving”* by the way one lives with the intention of bringing glory to God and not to one’s self.

What we find today in the Torah reading is with regard to the Scriptures elevating the spiritual aspect of things above the physical. This is illustrated in the gospel account of Yeshua’s life when Yeshua said how little faith people had in his home town in *Matthew 13* and *Mark 6*.



Matthew 13:54-58

13:54 Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. 13:55 "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? 13:56 Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" 13:57 And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home." 13:58 And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith. (NASB)

Mark 6:1-6

6:1 Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. 6:2 When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? 6:3 Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, a Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. 6:4 Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." 6:5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6:6 He was amazed at their lack of faith. (NASB)

The point is in this week's study, the Scriptures state that the Lord will do the circumcising of the heart (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 30:6*), and in order for that to happen we must rely upon the Lord for the work that He did in the Messiah and the work He is doing in our hearts. According to the Torah the spiritual aspect of our lives is as important if not more important than anything else that is emphasized in the idea of circumcising the heart, the ears, and the lips. The spiritual aspect may have more weighty value than the physical, however, the physical aspect of our faith still has value because this is the fruit of our faith. We are called to serve God, and our righteous deeds are a pleasant fragrance before God. Today, we with the intention of our hearts we believe in the Sacrifice Yeshua the Messiah has made so many years ago and we believe that His sacrifice does indeed make atonement for our sins just like John wrote in His epistle.

1 John 2:2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (NIV)

1 John 4:10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (NIV)

Trust, believe, and live by faith in the sacrifice the Lord brought in His Son Yeshua!