

Parashat Vaetchanan / פרשת ואתחנן

Shabbat Av 13, 5767, July 28, 2007
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This Weeks Reading List:

Torah: Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11

Haftarah: Isaiah 40:1-26

B'rit HaChadashah: Matthew 23:31-39, Mark 12:28-34

Parashat Vaetchanan contains some of the most important and significant passages which are found in the entire Torah. Within this parsha we find the Ten Commandments are repeated for a second time as well as the Shema. One of the most common Jewish prayers (the Shema) that is used as a centerpiece of all morning and evening Jewish prayer services and is that which most closely describes the monotheistic message of Judaism, that there is only one God. I feel the key to understanding not only our responsibility but also our relationship with the Almighty is found within the following verses:

Numbers 5:29-6:8

5:29 Oh, how I wish their hearts would stay like this always, that they would fear me and obey all my mitzvot; so that it would go well with them and their children forever. 5:30 Go, tell them to return to their tents. 5:31 But you, stand here by me; and I will tell you all the mitzvot, laws and rulings which you are to teach them, so that they can obey them in the land I am giving them as their possession.' 5:32 "Therefore you are to be careful to do as ADONAI your God has ordered you; you are not to deviate either to the right or the left. 5:33 You are to follow the entire way which ADONAI your God has ordered you; so that you will live, things will go well with you, and you will live long in the land you are about to possess. 6:1 "Now this is the mitzvah, the laws and rulings which ADONAI your God ordered me to teach you for you to obey in the land you are crossing over to possess, 6:2 so that you will fear ADONAI your God and observe all his regulations and mitzvot that I am giving you - you, your child and your grandchild - as long as you live, and so that you will have long life. 6:3 Therefore listen, Isra'el, and take care to obey, so that things will go well with you, and so that you will increase greatly, as ADONAI, the God of your ancestors, promised you by giving you a land flowing with milk and honey. 6:4 "Sh'ma, Yisra'el! ADONAI Eloheinu, ADONAI echad [Hear, Isra'el! ADONAI our God, ADONAI is one]; 6:5 and you are to love ADONAI your God with all your heart, all your being and all your resources. 6:6 These words, which I am ordering you today, are to be on your heart; 6:7 and you are to teach them carefully to your children. You are to talk about them when you sit at home, when you are traveling on the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 6:8 Tie them on your hand as a sign, put them at the front of a headband around your forehead, 6:9 and write them on the door-frames of your house and on your gates.

God is concerned with the effect the other nations would have upon Israel (and our lives). The stern words of warning should be a clear sign of the dangers.

- (i) Warning against being concerned about what the other nations think.
- (ii) Warning against trying to win favor in the eyes of these gentile nations (or unbelievers).
- (iii) Warning against allowing them to have an influence upon their lives.

These three things are closely intertwined. For example, in this parsha God directly explains how the goyim nations would have a negative impact upon Israel. Having a concern about what the other nations think leads to our desire to win favor in the eyes of our unsaved friends (or gentile nations). It is possible that our concern about what others think about us (their opinion) will lead us to the point where we might possibly compromise or modify our beliefs such that we ourselves could be viewed in a more positive light by those around us. As God's chosen people we are to sanctify God's Holy Name (Kiddush HaShem). However, if we choose to compromise our beliefs we will not be sanctifying God's Holy Name. In Leviticus 18:3, we are commanded not to emulate the other nations, and not even their social customs what would be considered accepted public manners.

Leviticus 18:3

18:3 You are not to engage in the activities found in the land of Egypt, where you used to live; and you are not to engage in the activities found in the land of Kena'an, where I am bringing you; nor are you to live by their laws. (CJB)

Notice how within the context of these verses (*Numbers 5:29-6:8*), God is warning Israel about the influence of the nations, and then after the Shema there is a heart issue about loving and serving the Lord God. In order for us to love and to serve the Lord we need to have the right heart condition. Having the right heart condition is achieved by keeping God's word always in our hearts (*Deut. 6:6*) and is the reason why it is of utmost importance to daily be in the study of the scriptures. Not only is it important for us to study the scriptures in order to feed our spirit, but also remember the importance of asking God for His help. Before studying the scriptures it is important to seek the Lord's help, not only in revealing his will for our lives, by teaching something new during the study of the scriptures, but also to ask and seek His forgiveness in Yeshua's name.

This month is a special month where we can begin to reflect upon our lives and pray for others. This month is the month of Av, and this week is Tisha B'Av (תשעה באב or ט' באב) which is a major annual fast day in Judaism. Tisha B'Av denotes the ninth day (Tisha) of the Jewish month of Av and it is called the saddest day in Jewish History. This day commemorates the various Jewish tragedies which have befallen the Jewish people which have fallen on the ninth of Av such as the destruction of the first and second temples (The first by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.; the second by the Romans in 70 A.D.).

In conclusion, the discovery that we need a savior, our realization of the sinful state which we are in, and the wickedness of our hearts all stems from personal reflection. While you reflect try to realize that God is in control and not you. We can not control the circumstances with which we find ourselves, however we can control the choices we make. By making the choice to study the word of God I personally can quench my thirsting and aching heart (Philippians 4:11-13) and I know you can too. As we approach the month of Tishri and the Jewish New Year, let's bring our hearts to a right condition with personal reflection in repentance and submission before a Holy God.

Heavenly Father,

I praise you and glorify your Holy Name; thank you Lord for being able to study your Torah and find application of your word for my life today. Lord I ask that you would create within me a new heart, a heart that is kind and patient and loving towards others. Help me and keep me from compromising my faith. Abba father, help me to go into this world and make a positive influence in the lives of others for your Glory. And please Lord; bring peace to your holy city Jerusalem. In the name of Yeshua Hamoshiach I pray. Amen.

הללויה לאדוננו מורנו ורבינו ישוע מלך המשיח לעולם ועד:

Hallelujah for our Lord, our Teacher, our Rabbi,
"Yeshua" King Messiah for ever and ever