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57.
NITZAVEEM 1983
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Nitzaveem we learn many of the concepts for the High Holidays. We learn about Teshuva, repentance. We learn how we are to choose life, how G-d cares and is concerned about us. To my mind, perhaps the most important sentence in the whole Sedra is the sentence which reads "This command which I am commanding you today is not too hard for you neither is it far off." None of us is ever to despair. None of us should not think we can do things. We all have the power to do Teshuva. The Kotzka Rabbi said that despair is the worst of all sins. It robs us from acting. It makes us give up on life. We should never feel that life is hopeless. That's why it says "See, I have given before you today life in the good and death in the evil and you shall choose life." Today you read about so many youngsters committing suicide for no real reason. They have given up on life. Life has its problems, its drawbacks, but we can overcome them all. That's one of the purposes of our religion, to give us strength. We learn in the Torah portion Vayelach that there will come a time when G-d will hide His face. It mentions the word Haster twice. The Rabbis teach us that this means that a time will come when the people will not even know that G-d is hidden. G-d will be hidden from them and they will not even know it. They will be searching and searching and they will not even know what they are searching for. This is a terrible thing. Many of our youngsters today are searching. Husbands leave wives, wives leave husbands because they know something is wrong but they do not know what. The Torah is here to help us find our way. None of us should ever feel lost or hopeless. The story about when the hurricane came and cut off all the electricity to a 50 story building. Three roommates decided to walk up. The first 20 flights one would tell jokes. The second 20 flights one would tell riddles. The last 10 flights one would tell sad stories. Everything went well with the jokes and the riddles. When they got to the last 10 floors the last roommate said, "Oh, do I have a sad story for you! You know how the only one with a key is me? I forgot it on the first floor." Challenges we will always have. Let us all have the strength, courage to face them and overcome them. We are adequate to the challenge. That's why G-d gave us the Torah. That's why we say that Teshuva, Tefila, and Tzedakah remove the evil decree. Teshuva is our reply to the challenges which is symbolized by the Tekiah note of the Shofar. Tefila is for our prayers

NITZAVEEM 1983
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE TWO

to G-d to quickly change those things we cannot change right away. They are symbolized by the Shevorem note. Tzedakah is our capacity to hear the pleas of others and to answer them. G-d has created us to help Him perfect this world. We are adequate to the challenge. We can bring joy and happiness to others through Tzedakah and we know that G-d accepts us fully as symbolized by Tefila and prayer. May we all never despair and may we always realize that we can meet every situation and that we should do so. May we always have the strength, courage, and integrity to do so.

50.
NITZAVEEM-VAYELACH 1982
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today we celebrate a Bar Mitzvah. Bar Mitzvah means that a boy assumes responsibility for his religious actions. The word responsibility in English means to respond. In order to be responsible each of us must know how to respond to different situations. We must learn how to respond to challenges. Unfortunately, in our day and age people do not want to respond to others and to the challenges. They want to be concerned just with themselves. There is a paradox in life, though. The more you are concerned just about yourself the more you become alienated, while the more you attach yourself to others the more you find yourself. That's what the term Teshuva means, repentance. We learn about Teshuva in this week's Sedra. Teshuva does not mean repentance. The English word repentance means to be put back into a fence, to be repenned. The Hebrew word Teshuva means to learn to respond to the world and its challenges. Unfortunately, there are so many people who are only interested in themselves. The Hebrew word for life is Chayim. Chayim is plural because each of us has two lives, an inner life and an outer life. Our outer life everyone sees but it is not the most important. The most important is our inner life. We can have all the cars and swimming pools and big homes we like and still be miserable. Too often people are only concerned with externals, with fake surfaces. This leads to many perversions and many times to great selfishness. We are told "See, I have given before you today the life and the good and the death and the evil and choose life". We are to choose life. The only way we can live is to assume responsibilities to ourselves, to others and to the world. Unfortunately, too many people are only concerned about externals and themselves alone. The leading cause of death of young men in the United States is suicide. Their life is empty. They have no inner life. We are admonished to choose life, to be open to the challenges of life even though that may bring aggravation and struggle, but that also brings life. Many people in this life remind me of the fellow who went walking with his friend with an umbrella. It started to rain. The friend said, "Open the umbrella". He said, "I can't, it has holes in it ". The friend said, "Why did you bring it?". He said, "I didn't think it would rain". This, unfortunately, is the story of many people. On the surface they seem all right but their life is full of holes. They are only concerned about externals. They really cannot live because they do not know that in order to live you have to learn how to respond to the challenges of life.

51.
NITZOVEEM 1981
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In this Torah portion we learn about the third Covenant that G-d made with the Jewish people. He made it with all the people, with the men, the women, the children, the leaders, the lowly water carriers, everyone. The question is asked many times why did Moshe say to bring the infants also, the Tapchem? Why were the people to bring their infants to stand before G-d on the day of this Covenant? Did they have any understanding? The answer is that the Covenant with G-d was made with all the Jewish people. The experiences we give our young mold them and shape them. Even if they do not understand everything early experiences shape a child. Yehudi Menuhin tells how his parents took him to violin concerts when he was only 2 or 3. They could not afford a babysitter and he sat with them in the highest balcony. He says listening to the violinists at that early age caused him to be a violinist. Having early experiences shape our children. We need children even to realize ourselves. In order to be fully part of a Covenant we need our children beside us. Our children teach us how to be compassionate, how to respond to needs. In Judaism to be childless is considered a terrible thing because then one cannot even develop oneself fully because there is no one to whom we can fulfill all their needs. A baby when it is young utters a cry. The mother must recognize that cry. The baby imitates the mother and father and learns from the parents how to be human, how to feel others' needs. Every parent is the greatest artist because he shapes and molds the future generations. To be a member of the Covenant means to be responsible for others, to learn from our past, and to strive for a common future. Children teach us how to be responsible. Children are a great blessing from G-d. Today we are naming a baby. We are not just giving her any name. We are naming her after a grandmother and grandfather. A baby stands for something. A baby stands for our past. It allows us to live more humanly in the present and it is a symbol of our future and when more of our ideals of love and harmony will be put into effect. We just do not pick any name. A baby is a sign of our Covenant. The story about a boy who came to school whose name was Irving 71/8 Stone. I asked him what the name 71/8 was and he said his parents could not agree on his middle name so they put a lot of names in a hat and the mother picked out 71/8. That's not the Jewish way. Names mean something. Pretty soon it will be Rosh Hashonna when we all pray for Chaim. Chaim is plural not singular. We do not say

NITZOVEEM 1981
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE TWO

Chai. Chai in Hebrew means raw, a glob, embryonic material. Each of us if we only live for ourselves only have Chai, but if we live with others, with those who have lived before, with our children, with our spouses, with our friends, then we will have Chaim we have life, then we have meaning. Let us all hope and pray that we have this type of life in the coming year.

NITZAVEEM-VAYELECH 1996

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today we read the double Torah portion Nitzaveem-Vayelech. One of the underlying themes of both these Torah portions is the assumption of responsibility. We are told to choose, to choose between the good and the bad. We are told to choose life. We should not be fooled by choosing things which, at first glance, seem to be good but which really are not. "See, I have given before you today the life and the good and the death and the evil, and I am commanding you today to love the Lord your G-d, to go in His path, to observe His commandments, His laws, and His judgments, and you will live and you will increase and G-d will bless you in the land which you will come there to inherit." In other words, we are told to choose. That is the whole essence of these two Torah portions. "And you shall choose life in order that you shall live, you and your children."

Each of us is told that we must be responsible. Each of us has to assume responsibility for ourselves, for our families, and for our community. In fact, that is exactly what a bar mitzvah means. When a boy becomes bar mitzvah or a girl becomes bat mitzvah, it means that they now have the opportunity to assume responsibility for themselves, for their family, and for the community. That is the whole essence of Judaism. We all know that we are incomplete and we know that we have to complete ourselves. Other religions and philosophies have other ways which a person must follow in order to become complete. Some religions believe that you must be a passive recipient of the love of some individual or some god, etc. We do not believe that. We believe that what we have to do is assume responsibility for ourselves and our actions.

NITZAVEEM-VAYELECH 1996

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

What does responsibility mean? It means that we must learn how to respond to every given situation at hand. One of the most important things about a bar or bat mitzvah is that it teaches the young man or woman something about themselves. Many times they do not feel that they can do the task that is given to them. They do not know that they have the talent to do what they think they should be able to do. Therefore, they many times decide that they will not even try to do what they are not sure that they know that they can do. A bar and bat mitzvah force a young man and woman to do certain things, and, because they are able to complete these tasks successfully, they learn something about themselves. They learn that they can appear in public and they can do well, that they can master certain tasks. It is not even the tasks that they are doing which is important, whether to read a Haphtorah or give a speech to enunciate clearly before their parents and relatives and friends, to bear the family honor, so to speak, in their hands, but they know that they can now do things. In fact, I have seen it happen many times that young people will be profoundly changed by their bar or bat mitzvah, not that they are any smarter, not that they are even more diligent, but that they have more confidence. They know something about themselves. That is the mark of a good teacher. A good teacher is able to allow their students to feel confidence about themselves, to learn something about themselves that they did not know before. That is essential if a person is to grow. I think this marks off Jewish young men and women from others because they had this opportunity to prove themselves before others. They have assumed responsibility, so to speak, for their family and their family is counting on them, and this is something that is very, very important. Sometimes parents make a mistake. They give the

NITZAVEEM-VAYELECH 1996

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

child the responsibility of cleaning up their room but no other room. It is important that a child clean up their room but it is more important that a child clean up a room that is very important to the parents, like the living room or dining room, that they assume a job that the family knows is necessary because then you teach the child responsibility, and I think that that is essential. Unless you teach a child responsibility and tell the child that he counts and that the family is counting on him the child does not grow, and we know that a child has to grow, and if a child does not grow within himself, then the child will deteriorate. We all know the terrible alienation that many young people feel today. That is why they turn to dope and alcohol. They need to know that they are counted on. Many of them join gangs because only in a gang can they feel that they are really counted on. We know that assuming responsibility is what completes us and that is what the rabbis tell us. Sometimes it is very difficult to assume responsibility. In fact, as I always say, many times the difference between doing a mitzvah and doing an aveira, a sin, is the difference between when you say ah and oh. When you do a mitzvah many times it is hard in the beginning, but the next morning you say, "Ah, it is wonderful." On the other hand, when you do an aveira many times you say ah but the next morning you say, "Oh, it is terrible." A person has to feel that they have self-worth, that they have dignity, and that they can accomplish things in this world.

That's why this Torah portion starts out with the expression, "You are standing today all of you before the Lord your G-d, everyone, your leaders, your bailiffs, your children, your

NITZAVEEM-VA YELECH 1996

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

wives, your strangers, everyone, even those who hue the wood and carry the water." We all have a responsibility that we can assume. We all can only be the best parent to our child. We can only be the best child to our own parents. We have unique tasks that only we can perform, and it is not true that if a person is going to be selfish he is going to be happy. If being selfish would make a person happy then you would have a lot of happy people in the world, but most people when they know that they are not needed and that they are just acting selfishly, they are miserable. That is what Kafka talks about when he talks about man being a cockroach on this planet. We need others in order to complete ourselves. We have to assume responsibility. In fact, the Hebrew word for assuming responsibility is achraiys because the root of the word is from acher, means knowing how to relate to others, knowing how to relate to G-d, knowing that you count, knowing that you are important because people are counting on you.

There does seem to be, though, a contradiction in these two Torah portions because the first words of this Torah portion, "You are standing today," which means that you are standing before G-d and it seems that that does not seem to allow for spiritual growth, but, on the other hand, on the next Torah portion we learn, "And Moshe went." The rabbis all ask the question, where did Moshe go? It does not say in the text where Moshe went. They say that Moshe served as an example for us all. Moshe was the great leader of the Jewish people for over 40 years. Moshe led them through the desert and received the Torah on the Jewish people's behalf and had taught the Jewish people the Torah. He had allowed them to

NITZAVEEM-VAYELECH 1996

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

overcome so many trials and tribulations. This Moshe was no longer fit to be the leader of the Jewish people. The leadership was given over to Joshua. He was not going to be able to reach the spiritual goal to which he had striven. He was not going to be able to enter into the land of Israel. We might think that since this is the case, Moshe would give up. He would say, "I did what I had to do. I failed to reach all my goals so now I give up," but that was not Moshe. Moshe still went. He still was interested in attaining, and that, of course, is what we all have to have. If we are to have a good life we have to assume responsibility for those things we can, and Moshe could still do a lot. Even though he was not the leader of the Jewish people he could still help out in so many tasks among the people, give so much advice, help people in understanding a word of Torah, help them through visiting the sick and taking care of the poor, just like all of us can do. It is our responsibility to do these things, but why does it say, "You are standing today all of you for G-d"? Because we are all standing before G-d, which means we have a goal. The goal is to achieve constant greater spirituality, constant greater feelings of responsibility. Many times we will not be able to achieve that, as Moshe was not able to achieve his ultimate goal, but that does not mean we should quit. We should do that which we can do, and that, of course, is what we are talking about here in this Torah portion. We are talking about how we should try to strive continuously to better ourselves, to relate better to others, to be a better parent, a better son. We can all do these things. We are standing before G-d and this standing before G-d should initiate within us the feeling of continually growing, because G-d is perfect. G-d is above us. We are standing before Him but we should continually try to reach and to imitate those

NITZAVEEM-VAYELECH 1996

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

aspects of G-d which are life enhancing so our own life will be enhanced. We will find out that the more we attempt to do, the better off we will feel, the more happy we will be. In fact, George Bernard Shaw paraphrases this by saying that what makes for happy life is finding a good cause and wearing yourself out in it. This is actually good Jewish doctrine. Each of us should not worry so much about self-actuating and self-motivating and self this and selfish, but, instead, we should worry more about attaching ourselves to others. The paradox is that the more we get into ourselves the more alienated we become, while the more we attach ourselves to others the better we feel and the happier we become. It is like the ancient story of Narcissus, who looked into the pool and fell in love with his own image. He wanted to get closer and closer to that image until eventually he fell into the pool and drowned. What we need to do is to attach ourselves to others and to G-d and in this way we can grow. A bar mitzvah teaches a child that he has much to give, that he has talents he did not even know about, that he can give to the world. He can relate to the world and can assume responsibility for himself, for his family, for his world, and for his religion, and he can really be somebody and that is a very important lesson to learn at the bar mitzvah. We should learn that through being responsible we gain happiness, not easily. There will be frustrations along the way, but we become proud of ourselves in the positive sense. We gain self-esteem and we realize that G-d is counting on us and, therefore, we count.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a hippy type who was a good clarinetist. The symphony conductor was preparing for a concert to be given in about 12 days. He had 10

NITZAVEEM-VAYELECH 1996
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

rehearsals scheduled and he did not have any clarinetist. He looked around and there were just no clarinetists about. Finally, in desperation, he approached this hippy clarinetist who was disheveled and who looked like he did not have good work habits and he said, "Please, would you join me? I have a concert in 12 days and I have 10 rehearsals and I need you at every one of the rehearsals." The hippy agreed to come to the rehearsals. He played wonderfully. He was on time. His work habits were good. He listened to the conductor. The conductor was pleasantly surprised so after the last rehearsal he approached the hippy and said, "I want to apologize. I misjudged you. I did not think that you had good work habits and would follow my directions and that you would be so punctual. I just want you to know that I made a mistake and I am really glad that you were here for all these rehearsals." The hippy looked at him and said, "That's the least I can do since I can't make the concert." It is important that we should be responsible in all our actions because we are standing before G-d and assuming responsibility for ourselves and for others and for the community and for our fate means that we must constantly grow. We must be there for the performance. Let's all hope that we will all be there for the performance so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

NITZAVIM-VAYELECH 1997

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Haphtorah to the Torah portion Nitzavim, we read the following line, "Like a bridegroom rejoicing over his bride, so shall G-d rejoice over you." In other words, what we have here is a sentence which compares the relationship between a bride and groom to the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people. In fact, the rabbis tell us that is indeed so, that the same emotions which cause us to want to get close to G-d is also the same emotion which wants a man and woman to marry each other. We all suffer from loneliness, and we hope to dissipate this loneliness by merging with G-d and by creating a married unit, a man and a woman. Of course, we all know that we cannot completely get rid of our loneliness. It dissipates the majority of it, but still we have to remain unique and special. If the relationship is to endure and be healthy, nobody should ever submerge their relationship with another human being so that they are totally without any individuality. Those of you who know Star Trek know about the Borgs. We are not supposed to create a Borg-like society. When we merge with another, we are supposed to maintain our individuality.

This is what we learn in the Torah portion Nitzavim, itself. "You are all standing today before G-d, your G-d, the heads of your tribes, your elders, your bailiffs, every man in Israel, your children, your wives, your strangers in the midst of your camp." In other words, the Torah portion says everyone is there and then delineate everybody who is there. The rabbis ask why do we do that? Just say that everyone was there. The reason for that, the rabbis say, is that everyone is unique and special. Even though they were all there, and even though they were united as a group, they still maintained their individuality. Of course, G-d could have created us so that we would all merge with Him. In fact, eastern religions

NITZAVIM-VAYELECH 1997

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

say that is the preferred state. They talk about nirvana when a person will completely merge his individuality with a deity, but we do not believe in that. We believe we are supposed to maintain our individuality throughout all of history. We are unique and special and we have to make sure we respect each other's uniqueness and individuality. In a marriage, if one party squelches the other so that the other loses all their individuality, then what will happen is that the person who squelched the person's individuality is going to lose interest. After all, who wants to be married to a dishrag or a mirror image of oneself? Therefore, the marriage, itself, is going to be dead, even though the person seemed to have what he wanted: complete control of the other person's personality. That is not a true marriage, and that is not what G-d wants from us. After all, G-d could have created us as angels. The rabbis say the angels had no free will, that in many respects human beings are higher than angels. Angels had to do just what G-d said and had no choice whatsoever. They had no real individuality the way human beings have individuality, but we have individuality. G-d is omnipotent and omniscient and could have created us so that we have no individuality, that after we have performed certain mitzvahs we completely submerge in His presence, that we are completely absorbed in G-d, not just being close to Him but completely absorbed, but that is not what He wanted. G-d teaches us that just as the paradigm of the relationship between man and woman is the relationship between G-d and man, so the same thing is, that just as G-d does not want to destroy individuality, so in a marriage relationship spouses should not try to destroy each other's individuality.

NITZAVIM-VAYELECH 1997
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

This Torah portion teaches us also many other things about marriage. We all know, too, that if anything tries to destroy a person's individuality, that it is completely wrong. Of course, many times the body, itself, breaks down, like with mental illness. People lose their individuality. That is why it is so important that when people suffer from mental illnesses that they take their medicine because it restores their individuality, otherwise they will, themselves, crack up and even commit suicide, not want to have an individuality anymore. I have told this story often. I remember about ten years ago I was walking down the street and I reached out my hand to a man and said, "How are you, my friend?" He started to cry and said, "I was on my way to commit suicide. I didn't think I had a friend in the world." I quickly took him to my office, and it was obvious that this man was suffering from some sort of mental breakdown. I called the doctor, and, sure enough, he had some sort of hormone deficiency. He gave him the right medicine, and within a few weeks that person was again an honored member of the community and nobody knew the difference. He has probably had to take that medicine forever because he has a hormone deficiency. We are not supposed to break down individuality, and most certainly in a marriage, one partner is not supposed to break down the individuality of the other partner.

Secondly in this Torah portion, we learn how G-d forgives us when we ask for forgiveness, when we do tussive. In a marriage, you have to also know how to forgive your spouse. You have to forget the past. I remember there were two people talking and one said, "You know, last night my wife and I had a terrible fight. She got very historical." His friend

NITZAVIM-VAYELECH 1997

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

said, "No, you mean hysterical, don't you?" The man said, "No, she brought up every single thing in our relationship that was wrong from the day we met." That is not the way to have a successful marriage. You have to forgive each other and go on. After all, none of us is perfect, and all of us say things once in a while that are wrong, but we have to ask forgiveness for it and apologize for it. Once we have, we should be granted forgiveness.

The third thing we learn in this Torah portion is that we have to have commitment in a marriage. That is why it says here that, "You shall turn to your heart and all the nations which G-d, your G-d, will put you there," and then it says, "And you will return it to the Lord, your G-d." What does that mean? The rabbis say that people are not happy and at ease if they cannot make commitments. They feel empty inside. The fact of making a commitment actually completes you. Assuming responsibility is what completes a person in Jewish eyes. We know that happiness is composed of three strands. One is attaining self-set goals; one is knowing that you are loved for yourself; and the last is knowing that you can bring joy to others. All these things must be present and they all require commitment. You cannot flit from one thing to another. Fun is different from happiness. Fun is something which is outside a person, something which is nice to do occasionally. It diverts your mind from problems. However, if you just try to divert your mind continuously from your problems, your problems will get worse and worse. We know that you have to be committed. In a marriage relationship it takes total commitment. In fact, sometimes it is because of the aggravation that you are going to be happy, because you are committed and

NITZAVIM-VA YELECH 1997

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

know that you have a lasting relationship and know that you are accepted for yourself and know that you can attain things together. That's very important. In fact, people always ask, aren't trial marriages important? I say trial marriages are not worth anything. In fact, the truth of the matter is, many trial marriages end in divorce because they do not have one ingredient, and the important ingredient is commitment. The same thing is true of a person who goes to school and looks like a student and acts like a student, but he is an auditor. He does not have to take tests. If he takes them, they do not count. Therefore, there is a different psychological pressure. In a marriage, unless there is commitment, you will not be able to have happiness. Happiness comes from knowing that you have solved your problems with your spouse, that you are there through thick and thin. It is an internal feeling. It does not come from outside sources, as fun does.

The fourth element that we learn in the Torah portion Vayelech is that we have to have a dream. Why is it that the concluding words Moshe Rabbeinu said to the Jewish people were a poem? The answer, of course, is that Judaism is a dream. It cannot persist unless people feel that it is a worthwhile dream, that it is going to bring redemption to the world. A couple has to have a dream, a dream of forming a family together, a dream of doing good things for their extended family and community and religion. You have to have a dream and goals to work for and accomplish. This is required in a marriage, too, so that you are able to get over the rough spots which are going to be there inevitably. After all, there are always going to be disagreements in a marriage, but they can be overcome when people recognize

NITZAVIM-VAYELECH 1997

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

why they got married: to fulfill a dream, to fulfill the love they have for each other, to fulfill the dream of making a beautiful family, of continuing the Jewish people, of being honor to their greater family, and also doing good things for the community. Yes, this Torah portion teaches us how to have a successful marriage. First, we have to remember that each spouse has their own individuality and we cannot squash it. Second, we have to forgive each other. Third, we have to be committed. Fourth, we have to have a dream, and this dream must always be present and should never be extinguished. If we will have these things, then we will have beautiful, wonderful marriages.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a person who came to his father and said, "Daddy, I love her and I have to marry her." His father said, "Okay, I'll make you a \$50,000 wedding and give you a \$20,000 honeymoon and I'll bring you into the business so you can support her." Four months later the son came to his father and said, "Daddy, I hate her." His father asked what happened. The son said, "She uses terrible four letter words." His father said that was not so bad in this day and age. The son said, "The four letter words are work, help, baby." We all know that in marriage there has to be commitment. There has to be a dream. There has to be forgiveness. There has to be respect for each other's individuality. Let's all hope that all our young couples will realize this so that they will all have happy marriages so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

NITZAVIM 1999
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion, Nitzavim, we learn how the Jewish people reaffirm their covenant with G-d. Everyone in the world is under a covenantal relationship with G-d from Noah. We Jewish people have three added covenants: the covenant of G-d made with Abraham; the covenant on Mount Sinai; and the covenant on the plains of Moab, which we learn about in this Torah portion. We all need to be attached to G-d. Unless we are attached to something greater than ourselves, we become alienated, depressed, and lonely. Each of us has a soul which is a piece of G-d in us. The rabbis teach us that heaven is not a physical place; heaven is a spiritual place. Heaven is when you are close to G-d, and hell is when you are alienated from G-d. Hellfire are not real fires. They are the embarrassment you feel because you did not live up to your potential. We all know that we can be more than we are.

This Torah portion talks about teshuva. It talks about returning, changing, making our lives better. We can all do it. The Kotzke Rebbe said when they asked him, "Didn't you teach us that doing teshuva is like coming from east to west? Isn't that difficult?" He answered them by saying, "No, all you have to do is turn around."

NITZAVIM 1999

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

This Torah portion starts out with the words "Atem Nitzavim -- you will stand."

This is an unusual word because it only has a present tense. Some rabbis explain that Moshe was admonishing the people by telling them, "Why are you satisfied with just standing in one place? Why aren't you moving? Why aren't you trying to change? Only angels cannot grow, but you can grow. You can fulfill more of your potential." So many people try to cop out by saying, "Listen, I can hold out for so long. Maybe today I can resist temptation, but I am not sure I can tomorrow or the next day. I might as well just give in to it now." Or, others will say, "I was bad in the past. I cannot change. I have a reputation. People will never believe it."

Therefore, in the beginning of the Torah portion we say Hayom, today, three times to emphasize the fact that you should only worry about that. If you can do a good deed today, do it. If you can resist temptation today, do it. Don't worry about the past or the future. I am reminded of a true story which happened maybe 18 years ago. I was walking down the street, and I stretched out my hand to a community leader and said, "How are you, my friend?" He started to cry, and said, "I didn't think I had a friend. I was on my way to

NITZAVIM 1999

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

commit suicide." I quickly brought him to my office, and after talking to him a few minutes, I realized that something was physically wrong with him. I called his doctor, and, sure enough, he had a hormone imbalance. Six weeks later, he was back in the community and nobody knew it occurred. Just from doing the simple deed of stretching out my hand and saying, "How are you, my friend?" a life was saved. How many people have told me, "Rabbi, what will my \$5 do?" Your \$5 added to other people's \$5 will do a lot.

Other people feel that doing teshuva is too hard for them, but, as we learn in this week's Torah portion, the commandments of G-d are not in heaven, they are not in the sea. They are things that are easy for us to do. G-d did not give us impossible tasks. Many times people will pretend they do not have a problem because if they admit they have a problem, then they have to solve it, and they are afraid they cannot solve it. I remember a case of a person in our community who kept denying he had a problems. He had, though, a terrible drinking problem. During the day, he could function, but every night he would get drunk. Finally, he came to me complaining about this and that. I tried to convince him that he should stop drinking, but he said drinking was not his

NITZAVIM 1999

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

problem. Other things were his problem. Finally, after a few months of talking to him, I convinced him to go to AAA and talk to his doctor. He became sober and has stayed sober to this day. I asked him why it took him so long to admit he had a drinking problem. He told me because he was afraid that if he had a drinking problem, he could not quit. None of us should ever feel this way. G-d has given us the power to get close to Him.

In fact, in this Torah portion, we learn that if you listen to the voice of G-d, your G-d to observe His commandments, the word voice is superfluous. Why do we need the word voice here? The first time this word voice is used in the Torah, it is used after Adam and Eve sinned eating of the forbidden fruit. It says, "And they heard the voice of G-d walking in the garden according to the spirit of the day, and Adam and his wife hid." In other words, the word Kol stands for spirituality, for being close to G-d. After Adam sinned, G-d was still calling to him. After all, in the famous prayer Adoshem Adoshem Kel Rachum v'Chanun, the rabbis all ask, why is the word Hashem repeated twice? The answer is because G-d still wants to be close to us even after we have sinned. Man, by sinning, though, alienates himself from G-d and when man becomes

NITZAVIM 1999

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

alienated, he becomes, in the words of Kafka, like a cockroach on this earth.

People need to be connected. People need to dissipate their loneliness. People need to be part of a greater whole. The word Kol, then, stands for spirituality, for being connected to G-d.

The second Kol we find by the Ten Commandments. Connectedness requires responsibility. Having a relationship requires us to be there for others. I am reminded of a true incident which happened about five years ago. A doctor came to see me who is a multimillionaire. He was married and divorced three times. He was complaining he had no friends. He double-crossed everybody. He told me he was happiest in medical school when he had nothing but dreams of the future. Today, he had all the money, but was miserable. The only people who would have any relationship at all with him were sycophants. He did not realize that relationships demand responsibility, loyalty, generosity, etc.

The third time Kol is mentioned is when we talk about the voice of the herald who is going to announce the Mashiach. In life, we need three things: We need to be connected to G-d and to others; we need to fulfill the responsibilities that

NITZAVIM 1999

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

these relationships demand; and we need also to always adopt a hopeful and joyful attitude. This is what marriages gives us, too. It allows us to be connected to others. It gives us a family. It demands responsibility but allows us to look forward to the future joyfully. That is what teshuva demands, too. It asks us to reconnect to G-d, to reconnect to our family, to assume our responsibilities, and to always be joyful.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a rabbi who was standing in front of a plaque board in his synagogue. A young boy came up to him and said, "What are these plaques for?" The rabbi said, "These plaques were people who died while they were in the service." The boy asked, "Which one? Rosh Hashonna or Yom Kippur?" This upcoming High Holiday season is not meant to cause us to become depressed or alienated. On the contrary, it is to cause us to reconnect, to assume responsibility, and to regain a joyful attitude toward life. May all of us truly reconnect, assume our responsibilities, and be joyful so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.