

Nitzovim & Vayelech are usually a unit. They discuss the bris we made with Hashem. But Chazal ask: Klal Yisroel already made a bris with Hashem at Har Sinai. What is the need for a second bris in Arvos Moav before they enter Eretz Yisroel?

There are two types of bris. One is the bris Hashem made with each individual. Each Jew committed himself as an individual to keep the Torah he received at Har Sinai. As we learned in Meseches Shevuos, every Jew is 'mushbah v'omeid' from Har Sinai to keep every mitzvah in the Torah, and no subsequent shevuoh can affect the original shevuoh.

But then there is a collective bris with the entire Klal Yisroel. We exist as a single organic unit. The gemara says that this bris with the entire nation collectively produces a situation of arvus between Jews. What does this mean? In a democracy, everyone minds their own business – no-one is supposed to interfere with anyone else regarding how they want to live their life. But this is not the way Klal Yisroel functions. Once there is a bris which created arvus between Jews, each Jew is responsible to see to it that every other Jew keeps Torah and mitzvos.

Each Jew's personal obligation to fulfill the Torah includes every other Jew's personal obligation to fulfill the Torah. If I can do something to support your fulfillment of the Torah and I don't do it, my fulfillment is lacking. We are one organic unit and an infection in one area of the body negatively affects all areas of the body.

This is the idea behind the gemara in Rosh Hashono. There is a rule that one can only perform a mitzvah for another if they share the same level of obligation. It would stand to reason that if I already fulfilled my mitzvah, I am no longer obligated and I would not have the power to be motzi another Jew who has yet to fulfill his mitzvah. But the concept of arvus allows me to be motzi him anyway. Because arvus dictates that if I can help another Jew fulfill a mitzvah, then until I help, my own mitzvah is incomplete. This is why even after I have fulfilled my mitzvah, I am still considered under obligation and I can be motzi other people.

We are one organic unit and it applies on two levels – on the sub-tzibbur, and on Klal Yisroel in its totality. Every yeshiva, every community, is a single unit. If you see a colleague or a neighbor who is lagging behind and isn't keeping up, and you can make a difference, you can't just turn away and tell yourself it's his business and not mine. That's not the way it works with the bris we made. Each one of us is responsible for everyone else. The right hand can't say the left hand isn't his business.

This is the new element in the bris in Arvos Moav. We are a single nation entering a bris as a unit.

It doesn't matter if you personally weren't present or even alive at Har Sinai or at Arvos Moav. All members of Klal Yisroel are connected throughout the generations as one organic unit. This gives each of us tremendous responsibility.

The Gemara in Shabbos tells about what happened right before the churbon of Bayis Rishon. Hashem told the angels of destruction to put a letter tav on the head of every Jew. Put a black tav for Torah on the heads of tzaddikim, and a red tav on the wicked for toevoh. Surprisingly, the middas hadin came to complain about this discrimination! He argues that the tzaddikim do not deserve to be spared from the destruction of the churbon. But why? Aren't they tzaddikim? Yes, but they did not make an effort to rebuke the wicked and encourage them

to do teshuvoh.

Hashem responded that He can personally attest to the fact that the tzaddikim would not have been successful in turning things around – even if they tried. The middas hadin responded that only Hashem in His infinite wisdom could know that. The tzaddikim themselves could not have known that and were obligated to try because of their arvus. Since they didn't care to try, they too deserve destruction. Hashem agreed with the middas hadin and He instructed the angels of destruction to place a red tav on all Jews' heads – even the tzaddikim.

We are responsible for everybody in the tzibbur – we are one organic unit.

The gemara asks: how can the masses be punished for sins in private that no-one knows about? Hashem answers that for those sins, the tzibbur is not responsible – only for the sins that are known.

This is the same theme we discussed last week. Cursed is the person who can fortify the Torah and fails to do so. Yoshiyahu Hamelech realized this obligation of arvus and made a tremendous campaign to wipe out avodo zoro in Klal Yisroel. If we are one organic unit, we rise together or we fall together. In a yeshiva, everyone affects the growth of everyone else.

There is another idea of these parshiyos – about the unbreakable connection we have to Talmud Torah. In Parshas Vayelech there is a nevuoh about future days. We will undergo tremendous tragedies and difficulties. People will wonder why it is happening, but the answers are right there in the parsha. And despite all the hardships and persecutions, the Torah gives an eternal guarantee that the Torah will never be forgotten from Klal Yisroel.

In recent history, Klal Yisroel experienced a great crisis between the First and Second World War. The Jewish world in Europe was destabilized and in total disarray, and the level of limud haTorah was in sharp decline. Then WWII came along and all the great yeshivos were destroyed. A handful of yechidei seguloh came to Eretz Yisroel and the United States and created a tremendous revival of limud haTorah. The Ponevezer Rav in the middle of the churbon in Europe came to a deserted hill in Bnei Brak and said there will be thousands of bochurim learning here. They thought he was out of his mind. But he said there is a guarantee that the Torah will never be forgotten.

This played out in the U.K in Gateshead and in the U.S. These gedolei Yisroel were simply out of their minds to think it was possible for Torah to be rebuilt under such circumstances. They believed what the Torah said and the Torah gave a guarantee. They began building Torah against all odds and predictions of failure. This is the only way Klal Yisroel can continue to exist. They planted the seeds not knowing of the forest that would grow now because of their commitment to the guarantee of the Torah.

It continues as an unbroken chain. At times it may be very weak and is about to fall apart, but Hashem guaranteed that it would continue forever.

The pesukim in Nitzovim according to Rashi says the Torah is not too difficult to be understood. It is not in the heavens nor over the sea. It is right here, available for all to learn. The Chumash is an amazing book – a five year old and a fifty year old and an eighty year old can all understand the Torah on their level. The Rambam says everyone can understand the Torah – young, old, man, woman, intelligent and

simple-minded.

I had a talmid at the early years of the Yeshiva who applied himself to learning, made a serious effort, but it wasn't working. He wanted to give up. I took him to Rav Shach to get his advice. The bochur tried to explain multiple times that he isn't successful despite all his efforts in learning. Rav Shach refused to believe him. Why? The gemara says clearly: if someone tells you he tried to learn but didn't succeed, don't believe him! Rav Shach took the gemara at its word. This young man ultimately became a Rosh Yeshiva.

Torah is a unique body of knowledge.

What degree of effort does a person have to make? The posuk says in reality, Hashem will make it easy. But if it is not, you have to be willing to go to the heavens and over the sea to get it. The Torah is accessible to everyone. It is very close. Hashem created the human mind and He wrote the Torah to fit the human mind. They are very compatible.

The gemara in Niddah says every child is taught the entire Torah in the womb by an angel before he is born. When he is born, the angel gives him a slap and makes him forget all the Torah. What are Chazal trying to teach us with this? The idea is that the Torah is not foreign to any Jew. It comes naturally. He already learned the entire thing in-utero and he just has to re-learn it after he is born. This is why everyone can learn. You don't have to climb the heavens to understand the Torah. But even if it doesn't come easy, you need to try your utmost. Knowing this reality obligates everyone.

We try to make Torah as easy as we can, but when it gets hard, you can't give up. You have to be totally committed to understanding it no matter what it takes. Talmud Torah is not some elective course – it is not something you do during your gap year in between running around on tours. There can be no obstacle for Torah that is too hard to overcome. Even if it is in Heaven, or on the other side of the world, get on an airplane and get there. This is what the pesukim are telling us.

Some people simply give up. There is this phrase that is thrown around all the time: "not everyone is cut out for learning". These pesukim contradict that. The Rambam contradicts that. It's not true.

There is another important posuk in the parsha – 'uvochartoh bachayim'.

Rabbeinu Yonah in Shaarei Teshuvah tells us an amazing thing. Bechiroh chofshis is a mitzvah. You might think free-will is built into our personality. After all, we can always choose to do what we want! But Rabbeinu Yonah says most people don't really choose to do what they do. They just get pushed around by all kinds of pressures and drives and habits which they are not in control of. So it is a mitzvas asei to overcome those forces and get a hold of your life and truly choose what you are doing with your life. You have to take control of your life and then you choose Torah. If these pressures and habits control you, then you are just chasing after trends and what's fashionable, running after all the foolishness people obsess over.

Rabbeinu Yonah says it is a mitzvah to break free and take control.

These are the parshiyos which put us in the proper framework for the yom hadin. We can choose to change the course of our lives. Chazal tell us that the wicked are in the power of their hearts. The tzaddikim have their hearts in their hands. Tzaddikim have their hearts under their power. This view of Rabbeinu Yonah contradicts a lot of pop psychology. Psychologists like to tell people to discover your 'inner self'. They claim that once you 'discover yourself' you can then live an authentic life as an individual and achieve fulfillment. The Torah doesn't believe there is a static 'inner self' waiting to be discovered. You can create yourself anew by the behaviors and attitudes that you choose to adopt and mold yourself by. You can make yourself, and the Torah guides us into what kind of person we should make ourselves into. 'Uvochartoh bachayim'.

There are no excuses.

It has been very hot in Yerushalayim recently – hotter than it's ever been in recorded history – 109 degrees Fahrenheit! The power goes out and there is no air conditioning! But there are no excuses. We try to make it easier, but when it gets hard, you try harder.

Chazal tell us that Torah is a natural chochmoh for every Jew to understand. Hashem created the world with the Torah and He created our minds and our lives to be compatible with Torah. Unlike other chochmos, it is the only thing that everyone can know. You can't clam "I'm not cut out for learning".

This, and the fact that we have a mitzvah to put our lives in our hands and choose Torah, are among the great principles of these parshiyos.