

## Main Identity

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Standing Firm  
By Rabbi Joshua (firmly known as The Hoffer) Hoffman

This week's parsha begins with a description of a gathering of all the different elements in the Jewish nation, to enter into a covenant with God: "You are standing today, all of you, before the Lord your God: The heads of your tribes, your elders and your officers - all the men of Yisroel; your small children, your women, and your convert who is in the midst of your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water, for you to pass into a covenant of the Lord your God..." (Devarim 29:9-11). Rav Avraham Aharon Yudelevitch, famed rabbi of the Eldridge Street shul on New York's Lower East Side in the 1920s and early 1930s, and before that, in the Baldwin Place Synagogue in Boston, cites, in his commentary Darash Av, a Yalkut Shimoni to parshas Nitzavim which connects this verse with the last verse in parshas Ki Savo, in which the nation is told, "And you shall keep the words of this covenant, so that you will succeed in all that you do" (Devarim 29:8). According to the midrash, Moshe told the people that if they wish to remain standing in this world, they should occupy themselves with the Torah. Rabbi Yudelevitch explains that, as another midrash, cited by Rashi, tells us, when the nation heard the ninety-eight curses in the section of rebuke, it turned colors and wondered how it could persevere in the specter of those curses. In response, they were told that by conforming to the mitzvos of the Torah, and occupying themselves with its study, they would be able to endure, and stand firmly before God.

Rabbi Yudelevitch goes on to elaborate on how allegiance to the Torah and occupation with its study enables one to be connected to both God and his fellow Jew. On a spiritual level, the entire nation constitutes one collective soul, with no separation existing between one person's soul and another, and between God and his soul. Once the soul descends to the body, and the two must function together in the world, tensions arise, and the physical part of one's existence creates barriers between both God and himself, and between his fellowman and himself. The Torah enables man to bring peace between the physical and the spiritual parts of his existence, and therefore, occupation with the Torah removes any barriers that separate people from God and their fellow man. Thus, by occupying themselves with the Torah, Moshe tells the people, they will be able to maintain its standing in this world. Actually, this theme of the connection between occupation with the Torah and closeness to God can be found a little later in the parsha, as well, in the Torah's description of the repentance that will be done after the nation is sent into exile, following the teachings of another famed rabbi from Boston, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, in *Noraos HoRav*, volume 16.

The Torah tells us that, after the people go into exile, "It will be when all these things come upon you - the blessing and the curse that I have presented before you - then you will take it to your heart among all the nations where the Lord, your God, has dispersed you, and you will return to the Lord, your God, and listen to His voice according to everything that I command you today..." (Devarim, 30:2). The Rambam, in his *Laws of Repentance*, 7:5, writes that Yisroel will be redeemed only through repentance, but there is a divine promise that, in the end, the Jews will repent. He cites as his source this verse, which says, "and you will return." While the Rambam understands this verse as being the source of the commandment to repent, the Rambam does not. The source he cites for the mitzvah of teshuvah is found in parshas Naso (Bamidbar, 5:7), and actually deals with confessing one's sin, which is part of the teshuvah process. The verse in Nitzavim, however, is expressive of a divine promise that the Jewish nation will, in fact, return to God at the end of days, and thereby merit redemption.

Rav Soloveitchik, in the recently published *Noraos HoRav*, volume 16, which is based on a tape of a teshuvah derasha he delivered in 1966, explains that there is a level of teshuvah that is higher than the usual kind of teshuvah which a person does when he recognizes that he has sinned. This teshuvah is grounded in the connection which each person has with the Torah as contained in the oral law. This connection is implanted deep in the heart of every Jew, and originates in the new covenant that was made when God gave Moshe the second set of luchos, or tablets, after the sin of the eigel and Moshe's entreatied with Him not to destroy the nation. That connection is, according to Rav Soloveitchik, the element in the Jew that is commonly referred to as 'the pintele Yid,' the point of Jewishness that cannot be touched by any outside force. Although Rav Soloveitchik does not explicitly connect this aspect of the Jewish soul with the Rambam's teaching in the seventh chapter of the *Laws of Repentance*, I believe that this is what the Rambam means. Interestingly, Rav Yudelevitch, in expounding upon his teaching that by connecting to Torah, one becomes attached both to God and to his fellow man, cites the beraita in Avos, 6:1, which says that a person who occupies himself with Torah merits many things. Among those things which he merits, the beraita tells us, is that he is called 'reia,' or friend, and 'ahuv,' or beloved. The Rambam, in the *Laws of Repentance*, 7:6, writes

that a person who repents becomes very close to God, and is called , among other things, 'ahuv.' and 'yedid,'or dear friend. Rav Soloveitchik writes, in the lecture cited here, as well in numerous other works, that the form of repentance discussed by the Rambam in chapter seven is of a much higher level than the type described in the first two chapters. I would like to suggest that this form of teshuvah is based on a person's attaching himself to Torah, by which process he becomes beloved and a friend, as described both by the beraisa in Avos and by the Rambam.. It is this kind of repentance that God has promised will ultimately be achieved by the entire nation, thereby bring the redemption, may it come speedily in our time.

A joyous Rosh Hasahanah to all from all of us here at Netvort headquarters. May we all be inscribed for a wonderful new year.

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