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In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag**

PARSHAT NITZAVIM

Can man return to Gan Eden?

Even though Parshat Breishit may have left us with the impression that the Garden's gates (guarded by the 'keruvim' and a fiery sword / see Breishit 3:24) remain inaccessible to man forever, Parshat Nitzavim may allude to the possibility of 'return'.

To explain how (and why), this week's shiur discusses the significance of the speech delivered by Moshe Rabbeinu in Parshat Nitzavim, and how it fits beautifully into the rubric of Sefer Devarim.

INTRODUCTION

In case you hadn't noticed, Parshat Nitzavim contains yet another speech given by Moshe Rabbeinu, the last of his four speeches in Sefer Devarim. In fact, this final speech actually began at the end of Parshat Ki Tavo (see 29:1-8, noting how 29:1 forms the introduction to this speech).

In the following shiur, we first discuss how this final speech relates to the 'tochacha' (in Parshat Ki Tavo); afterwards we will focus on what's so special about its 'finale'.

FOUR SPEECHES

The following table will help clarify the location of Moshe Rabbeinu's speech in Parshat Nitzavim in relation to the rest of Sefer Devarim, as it summarizes his four speeches:

<u>CHAPTERS</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>
1) 1->4	Introductory speech (why 40 years have passed)
2) 5->26	The main speech - the mitzvot to keep in the land
3) 27->28	Brit Har Eival and the tochacha
4) 29->30	The final speech = Parshat Nitzavim

Even though our shiur will focus on the 'final speech' (#4), to appreciate its content, we must first review the primary topic of speech #3.

Recall how chapter 27 described a ceremony that Bnei Yisrael are instructed to conduct on Har Eival, upon entering the land. That ceremony was to include both the teaching of the laws (i.e. those of the main speech) and some festivities. The Torah's description of that ceremony continued in chapter 28 with the tochacha, i.e. the 'blessing and the curses', as they were to be read in public at the conclusion of that ceremony.

Hence, the order of Sefer Devarim up until this point makes perfect sense. Speech #2 details the laws that Moshe taught, while speech #3 explains how these laws were to be taught once again when Bnei Yisrael enter the land, at a special ceremony that concluded with a public warning of both the reward and punishment should Bnei Yisrael obey / or disobey these laws.

However, when one reads the fourth speech, it appears to be superfluous, for in it we find once again Moshe's rebuke of Bnei Yisrael - in a manner which doesn't differ much from the numerous rebukes in his earlier speeches. [For example, compare 29:11-14 with 5:2-3; 29:4-5 with 8:4; and 30:1-3 with 4:26-29.]

However, if we take a closer look at its content, we can explain its function and the reason for its location.

THE STARTING & FINISH LINES

Our first step is to delineate more precisely where this speech begins and ends. Note how it begins at the end of Parshat Ki Tavo in 29:1 and concludes at the end of Parshat Nitzavim (as indicated by the sudden shift to third-person narrative right at the beginning of Parshat Vayelech (31:1).

Using a Tanach Koren, note as well how it contains five distinct 'parshiot': 29:1-8; 29:28; 30:1-10; 30:14 & 30:15-20.

Let's take a look at each one of these parshiot, and explain what is problematic about each. Afterward, we will explain the logic

of their internal progression, and how each of these parshiot relates to the previous speech, and overall theme of covenant in Sefer Devarim.

PARSHIA #1 (29:1-8)

Moshe's opening statements in this 'parshia' raise numerous questions. To understand these difficulties, let's take a look:
"Moshe called together Bnei Yisrael and said to them: You have seen with your own eyes what I did to Pharaoh in the land of Egypt... **yet**, until this day, God has not given you a 'heart to know,' 'eyes to see,' or 'ears to listen.' I led you for forty years in the wilderness...[Therefore] observe faithfully the words of this covenant [**divrei ha-brit ha-zot**] in order that you succeed in all that you now undertake" (see 29:1-8).

First of all, why is he talking to this generation as though they themselves left Egypt? Granted, some of the elder members of the nation may have been under the age of twenty at the time of the Exodus (and hence not included in the punishment). However, the vast majority of the current generation did not witness those events. But even more puzzling is 29:3. How can Moshe possibly say, "Until this day, God has not given you a 'heart to know,' 'eyes to see,' or 'ears to listen'?" To what could Moshe Rabbeinu possibly be referring?

Finally, why does Moshe conclude these comments by once again reminding Bnei Yisrael of the 'brit' (see 29:8)? Was that not the topic of his previous speech? [See 5:2-3!]

PARSHIA #2 - see 29:9-28

In this section, Moshe reiterates the purpose of this gathering - i.e. to establish the covenant through which Bnei Yisrael are to become God's nation. He then emphasizes the eternal nature of this covenant, i.e. its mandatory application to all future generations as well (see 29:9-14).

But once again we must ask, is this not the same point that Moshe Rabbeinu had already stated in the opening remarks of his main speech? (See 5:2-3, read carefully.)

Furthermore, why does Moshe suddenly raise the possibility that an individual, family, or possibly an entire tribe may consider 'breaking out' of this covenant (see 29:17-25)?

PARSHIA #3 - see 30:1-10

Moshe now 'comforts' Bnei Yisrael, telling them that even in the event of exile, there will always remain the possibility for 'teshuva' and the nation's return to the Promised Land. Why would Moshe, while addressing the people prior to their entry into the land, prematurely inform them of their return to the land from exile? They haven't reached the land yet, and already they are being promised the ultimate gathering of the Diaspora? Furthermore, why aren't Moshe's earlier comments on this topic (see 4:25-31 & Vayikra 26:41-45) sufficient?

PARSHIA #4 - see 30:11-14

Here we find Moshe Rabbeinu's famous insistence that keeping the Torah is 'not as hard' as it seems. Again, although this constitutes a most critical message, the question remains: why now and why here in Sefer Devarim?

PARSHIA #5 - see 30:15-20

As we will explain in Part Two, these soul-stirring psukim depict life in Eretz Yisrael as comparable to the ideal, spiritual environment of Gan Eden. But once again, why is this topic mentioned specifically in this speech, and at its conclusion?

POTENTIAL 'CONCLUSIONS'

To resolve these questions, we must consider the centrality of the concept of 'covenant' [brit], which has emerged thus far as a primary theme in every speech thus far in Sefer Devarim.

Recall that Moshe Rabbeinu began his main speech by underscoring the relevance and application of the covenant of Sinai to the present generation:

"The Lord your God made with you a **covenant** at **Sinai**. It was not [only] with your fathers that God made this covenant,

but with **us**, those of us who are **here, alive today...**" (see Devarim 5:1-3).

[Notice that the opening phrase of that speech (5:1) is identical to that of ours (29:1), thus suggesting a thematic connection between the two.]

In both his main speech and finale, Moshe Rabbeinu addresses the new generation as though **they** themselves left Egypt and stood at Har Sinai. He emphasizes their inclusion in the covenant of Har Sinai. Yet, in his third speech Moshe had instructed Bnei Yisrael to enter into a similar covenant at this time (see 28:69 - the final pasuk of that speech!). Why is another covenant necessary if 'everyone' was considered to have participated in the covenant at Har Sinai?

In fact, this 'extra' covenant at Arvot Mo'av, as detailed in chapter 27 in Parshat Ki Tavo, could easily lead Bnei Yisrael to several incorrect conclusions:

1) The necessity of a new covenant for this generation implies that the covenant at Har Sinai does not bind all future generations. Why else would they require a 'new' covenant at Arvot Mo'av?

Evidently, one could conclude, the laws of the Torah are binding only upon a generation (or individual) who formally accepts this covenant, but not upon subsequent generations (unless formally accepted)!

2) An individual (or possibly even a larger group) may decide that he doesn't want either side of the covenant - neither its reward **nor** its punishment! Some people may gladly forego any potential reward for keeping the mitzvot of the brit, so long as in turn they would not be bound by its strict demands or threatened by the harsh punishment for its neglect.

In other words, Bnei Yisrael may conclude that each person or family in any generation has the 'option' to either be part of the brit or to 'back out' ('chas ve-shalom!').

3) Just as any given individual may reserve the right to 'back out' of the covenant, God as well may be enabled to exercise His right to 'retract' His covenant should He see fit. In other words, Bnei Yisrael could potentially infer from the closing section of the tochacha in Ki Tavo that exile signifies the very annulment of this covenant. In other words, if exile is understood as God 'nullifying' His side of the covenant, then Bnei Yisrael (once in exile) could reach the logical conclusion that their 'special relationship' with God is over (chas ve-shalom!).

[See Yechezkel 20:32 and its context, where Bnei Yisrael in the Babylonian Exile raise this very possibility!]

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

With this background, let's now take another look at the various components of Moshe's final speech in an attempt to explain why they from this 'finale'.

In **Parshia #1**, Moshe Rabbeinu first explains **why** this 'new' covenant (as described in the third speech) is necessary. True, a covenant had already been made with the previous generation. However, because of their sins and subsequent demise in the desert, it is only now that the original intention of **brit Sinai** becomes applicable.

To emphasize upon this new generation that **they** must fulfill the destiny originally planned for their parents, God recreates the 'atmosphere' of Har Sinai, allowing the new generation to 'relive' the experience. Although most of them were **not** at Har Sinai, it is important that this entire generation feel as though they actually stood at the foot of the mountain. They will soon enter the land and face the challenge of establishing God's special nation, and they must therefore bring with them the Sinai experience and covenant.

As Seforno on 29:3 explains, it is only **now** that Bnei Yisrael are finally ready, for the first time, to fulfill God's covenant. Moshe thus explains to this generation that 'this is **the day**' for which He has been waiting. Now, God has a nation that can truly **know, see, and listen** (see 29:3, Seforno and Rashi).

Thus, there is nothing 'new' about this covenant. In fact, it serves an opposite function: i.e. to reaffirm the relevance and application of the original covenant at Har Sinai.

With this in mind, we can now explain the need for the second parshia.

Once this 'renewed' brit becomes necessary, Moshe Rabbeinu must disaffirm the possible conclusion that every generation and

every individual has the option of accepting or refusing the terms of the covenant (as we explained above). Therefore, in **Parshia #2** Moshe reminds Bnei Yisrael of the purpose of that covenant (to become God's nation, see 29:9-14) and then threatens severe punishment for any person or group considering the option of 'backing out' (see 29:17-25).

Afterward, in **Parsha #3**, Moshe Rabbeinu reassures Bnei Yisrael that just as this covenant is binding upon Bnei Yisrael for **all** generations, so is it eternally binding upon God Himself. Therefore, even in the advent of exile, God will (sooner or later) ensure Bnei Yisrael's return to their land to keep His mitzvot and become His nation. [Note that other religions (which evolved from Judaism) reject specifically this point!]

Moshe then proceeds to repudiate another likely conclusion of one who hears the terms of this covenant (and its almost innumerable obligations), the claim that it's simply 'impossible' to be an 'observant Jew.' Moshe Rabbeinu explains in **Parshia #4** that in truth, it's not as hard as it may seem. For if one has the proper attitude of "ahavat Hashem" (the opening theme of the main speech), then the 'way of life' which the Torah demands lies well within his reach.

Finally, in **Parshia #5**, Moshe concludes his speech with the axiom of 'bechira chofshit' (freedom of choice), the God-given ability to choose the 'path of life' [or 'death'], which will now be discussed in Part Two.

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PART TWO - Between Gan Eden and Eretz Yisrael

Before we begin Part Two, review 30:15-20, and notice that this 'parshia' forms the concluding section of this speech. As you read, note how Moshe Rabbeinu summarizes in this conclusion some of the primary themes of the main speech (which we have discussed in previous shiurim):

"See, I set before you today **chayim** (life) and **tov** (prosperity), **mavet** (death) and **ra** (adversity).

For I command you today to **love** God and walk in His ways [referring to the **mitzva** section / 6-11] and to keep His **chukim u-mishpatim** [referring to the 2nd part of the main speech / 12-26] that you may thrive and increase and that God will bless you in the Land that you are about to conquer...

Should you turn your heart (not listen)... I declare today that you shall certainly perish and not endure on the Land... that you are to conquer." (see 30:15-18).

Clearly, Moshe refers once again to the two sections of the main speech. However, these verses may relate as well to a fundamental theme in Sefer Breishit, as suggested by several key phrases in this section. Let's explain.

Recall the usage of the terms '**chayim** and **tov**' and '**mavet** and **ra**' in 30:15, cited earlier. Let's identify the precise definition of these expressions in the final two psukim:

"I call Heavens and Earth to testify that I am presenting you the **choice of chayim or mavet** - the 'bracha' or 'klala' - and you should choose **chayim** in order that you live... on this Land that I promised to your ancestors..." (30:19-20).

In this beautiful finale, the Torah equates the concept of **bracha & klala**, as detailed by the tochacha (see 28:1-7, 15-20!), with **chayim & mavet**:

Bracha = chayim (life); **klala = mavet** (death).

Recall, however, that the concepts of **chayim & mavet** as well as **tov & ra** were first introduced in the story of Gan Eden:

"And God brought forth from the ground every tree... and the **etz ha-chayim**

[the Tree of Life] in the middle of the garden, and the: **etz ha-da'at tov ve-ra**

[the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil...]
and from the **etz ha-da'at tov v'ra** do not eat, for on the day you eat from it - **mot tamut** - you will surely die!"

(see Breishit 2:8-9, 2:15-17).

This textual parallel is strengthened by yet another resemblance to the story of Creation. Note that the Heavens and

Earth - **shamayim va-aretz** - are called upon as witnesses to this covenant (see 30:19, as well as 31:28 & 32:1).

This special call upon 'shamayim' and 'aretz' to witness the brit may relate not only to the introduction of the story of Creation (Br. 1:1), but also to the opening pasuk of the Gan Eden narrative in Breishit - see 2:4!

A GAN EDEN CLOSE TO HOME

This textual parallel suggests a conceptual relationship between life according to the Torah's ideals in the Land of Israel and existence in Gan Eden. In fact, the spiritual environment of Gan Eden strongly resembles the spiritual environment that Sefer Devarim wishes to create in the Land of Israel.

Recall how the Gan Eden narrative described a special environment between man and God, with an emphasis on 'sachar va-onesh' [reward and retribution]. God promises Man a prosperous physical existence [**chayim**] should he **obey**, while threatening death [**mavet**] should Man **disobey** (see Br. 2:15-17). In a very similar manner, the tochacha describes a parallel reality in the land of Israel:

Should Bnei Yisrael keep the mitzvot, God will reward them with prosperity (see 29:1-14); if they sin, God will punish them severely (see 29:15-26).

[Note as well Devarim 11:13-20 (from daily kriyat shma).]

Furthermore, **exile** emerges in both settings as the most severe punishment. Adam is banished from the Garden as a consequence of his sin (see Br. 3:22-24). Similarly, the tochacha threatens that should Am Yisrael continue to sin they will be driven from the land by their enemies (see 28:64-68) and remain in Exile until they perform proper teshuva (repentance / see Devarim 30:1-10).

[Interestingly, God's original death sentence for eating from the Tree was translated into Adam's **exile** from the Garden (3:23) when he actually partook of the Tree's fruit. Considering that Gan Eden reflects an ideal spiritual environment, exile may be accurately equated with death. Whereas the biblical purpose of **life** is to develop a connection with God, biblical **death** refers to life without any such connection, an exile into an environment characterized by God's absence.]

This parallel takes on additional meaning when we consider the location of these two sources: at the **beginning** of Chumash and towards the very **end** of Chumash.

One could suggest that in this manner Chumash underscores the basic nature of man's relationship with God. First, we are told of God's creation of Man and his placement in Gan Eden - the ideal spiritual environment. As punishment for his sin, God expels man from Gan Eden, appointing the 'keruvim' to guard against any attempt to return (see Br. 3:24).

Nonetheless, the presence of the keruvim who guard the 'way to the Tree of Life' does not necessarily indicate the permanent closure of this path. To the contrary, it becomes man's duty to **strive** to return. The keruvim do not restrict entry; rather they protect the Garden from the intrusion of those undeserving of return. But once man proves himself worthy, the **derech etz ha-chayim** - the **path** to the Tree of Life - no matter how formidable it may at first appear, suddenly opens and invites man inside.

Correspondingly, Sefer Devarim describes Eretz Yisrael as both a physical and spiritual environment where Am Yisrael can rebuild this spiritual connection with God.

For example, Parshat Ekev illustrates how the climate of Eretz Yisrael contributes to this environment:

"...always, God's **eyes** are upon it [the Land], from the beginning of the year until the end of the year."
(see Devarim 11:10-12)

FROM GAN EDEN TO 'JERUSALEM'

But perhaps the most meaningful parallel between Gan Eden and Eretz Yisrael arises in the **chukim & mishpatim** section. Recall that Parshiyot Re'eh, Shoftim, and Ki Tavo present numerous mitzvot relating to **ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem**, the bet ha-mikdash, which will be built on the site chosen by God. As

explained in our shiur on Parshat Re'eh, Sefer Devarim demands that every Jew frequent that site regularly, be it for 'aliya la-regel' on the holidays, to offer korbanot or bikurim, to eat 'ma'aser sheni', to appear in court, etc.

Situated at the focal point of that site [i.e. the bet ha-mikdash] is the **kodesh kodashim**, the permanent location of the **aron**, covered by the **kaporet** and protected by **keruvim**, both on the **kaporet** and on the **parochet**! [See Shmot 25:16-22 & 26:31-34.]

Given that the concept of **keruvim** arises nowhere else in Chumash outside of these two contexts - the mishkan / bet ha-mikdash and Gan Eden - a thematic connection between the two is implied. Just as the **keruvim** of Gan Eden protect the path to the **etz ha-chayim**, so do the **keruvim** of the mikdash guard the path to true **chayim**: i.e. they protect the **aron** which contains the **luchot ha-eidut** - the symbol of the **Torah** and our covenant with God at Har Sinai.

By placing the **luchot** - a powerful symbol of **matan Torah** - at the focal point of our lives in Eretz Yisrael, Sefer Devarim urges us to strive to return to the environment of Gan Eden by observing the laws of the **Torah**.

This interpretation is supported by the famous pasuk in Mishlei, recited each time we return the **sefer Torah** to the **aron ha-kodesh**: "**Etz chayim hi** - She is a Tree of Life - for those who hold on to her, and whoever holds her is fortunate." (Mishlei 3:18).

[Even though this pasuk seemingly refers to wisdom in general (see 3:13), in the overall context of the perek 'wisdom' refers specifically to Torah (see 3:1-8!).]

Thus, Chumash 'ends' with a theme which is quite parallel to the theme of its opening narrative. God's original intention may have been for man to enjoy a close relationship with Him in Gan Eden. Even though that goal seems to have 'failed' in Sefer Bereishit, Sefer Devarim concludes with the possibility that the Nation of Israel can indeed return to such an existence, in the Land of Israel. [For a similar explanation, see Seforno's introduction to Sefer Breishit!]

To better appreciate our discussion, I highly recommend that you study the Rashi on 30:19. His explanation of what man should learn from his contemplation of shamayim va-aretz (what we call 'nature') that surrounds us will definitely enhance your appreciation of Parshat Nitzavim. Furthermore, it is a most fitting Rashi to study in preparation for Rosh HaShana - the day marking God's creation of shamayim va-aretz.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN - on Part One:

A. The Midrash Tanchuma in Parshat Nitzavim relates that during the time of Yechezkel, a delegation of 'elder statesmen' came to Yechezkel and challenged the obligation to abide by the Torah. They asked the prophet, "If a kohen purchases a servant, does the servant partake from the kohen's teruma?" When Yechezkel answered in the affirmative, they inquired as to what would happen if the kohen then sold the servant to a Yisrael. The prophet replied that, of course, once the servant is no longer under the authority of the kohen, he has no further rights as far as teruma is concerned. "We, too", they said, "have already left His authority and we will no be like all the gentiles."

Yechezkel responds (20:32-33), "That which came to your mind shall not be at all; in that you say, 'We will be as the nations, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone.' As I live, says Hashem, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with fury poured out I will be king over you!"

Explain the relevance of these psukim and their general context to Parshat Nitzavim and the above shiur.

B. One critical question we did not address concerns the 'legal' mechanism by which the covenant of Har Sinai becomes binding upon all generations. It would seem that one cannot be born into a binding agreement - he must first express his consent to the terms thereof! This question was posed by the 'scholars of Aragon', as

recorded by the Abarbanel. See his comments in our parasha, and contrast with the Maharal, 'Netzach Yisrael' 11. According to the Abarbanel, this eternal obligation evolves directly from Bnei Yisrael's privilege of settling the Land. Needless to say, this beautifully explains the context of Parshat Nitzavim: the reenactment of brit Sinai on the eve of Bnei Yisrael's entry into Eretz Yisrael.

C. See Rashi's comments on 've-hu yiheyeh lecha l-Elokim' (29:12), and note its relevance to the bilateral quality of the brit as discussed in the above shiur. Rashi continues by citing a Midrash regarding Bnei Yisrael's sense of desperation upon hearing the curses of the tochacha. Moshe reassures them that by observing 'Atem nitzavim' - you have survived, despite many incidents of wrongdoing. Explain how this, too, relates to this above shiur. Additionally, how does this Midrash help explain the seemingly irrelevant historical review presented at the end of Parshat Ki Tavo (29:1-8)?

Explain how the final clause of 29:5 reinforces the equation between this generation and their parents. [See Shmot 6:7.]

D. Different mefarshim have come up with different approaches to explain 29:3: "Yet, until this day, God has not given you a 'heart to know,' 'eyes to see,' or 'ears to listen.'" In the shiur, we mentioned the explanations of Rashi and Seforno. Other mefarshim explain this pasuk as a continuation of Moshe's 'mussar'. For example, Abarbanel places a question mark at the end of the pasuk. Before you see his commentary inside (which I suggest you do), how does his punctuation change the meaning of the pasuk? Others understand 'ad ha-yom ha-zeh' as meaning, 'even until...'. What does the pasuk mean according to this reading?

Other mefarshim, however, try to explain that Bnei Yisrael arrived at a unique awareness of Hashem's power on 'this day', the conclusion of their sojourn in the wilderness. Rav David Tzvi Hoffman explains that the forty years of wandering and the recent battle against Sichon and Og magnified this awareness far more effectively than the wonders and miracles of Egypt.

E. Moshe describes the potential attempt by an individual or group to breach the covenant as follows: "Perhaps there is among you some man or woman... When such a person hears the words of these sanctions, he may fancy himself immune [JPS translation; note the difficulty in interpreting these words] thinking, 'I shall be safe, because I follow my own willful heart'..."

Many mefarshim address the problematic word 'ki' (translated here as 'because') in this pasuk. Ibn Ezra [and JPS] translate 'ki' as 'even though', while the Ramban, in his first suggestion, interprets the word as similar to 'ka'asher'. How may we maintain the standard interpretation of 'ki' as 'because', based on the second erroneous conclusion Moshe feared, as we discussed in the shiur? See Ramban's second interpretation.

F. As we saw, the psukim in 30:11-14 remind the people that Torah observance is not as hard as it may seem. Nowhere do we find such an explicit reassurance to the generation of Yetziat Mitzrayim and Matan Torah. Why would this younger generation in particular require these words of encouragement?

G. Note the difference between the simple reading of 30:12 and that of the Gemara in Eruvin, as cited here by Rashi. Show how the Midrashic reading of the pasuk addresses the first two incorrect conclusions that, as we discussed, Moshe feared, and contrast this approach with our understanding in the shiur.

[Point of methodology: Explain the difficulty understanding the transition from 30:11 to 30:12 according to the Midrashic interpretation. On the other hand, what other difficulties does this Gemara resolve? Does the Gemara necessarily negate the simple understanding? How do your answers to these questions reflect the general relationship between pshat and drash?]

FOR FURTHER IYUN - on Part Two

A. We mentioned above that the psukim at the end of Parshat Nitzavim (30:15-20) that allude to Gan Eden could be considered the denouement of Moshe's speeches in Sefer Devarim. Pay

careful attention to the literary style from chapter 31 onward. In which person is the narrative written (1st or 3rd)? What about the previous sections of the sefer? Is the style of this concluding section more similar to Sefer Devarim or to Bamidbar? Might this unit be considered a continuation of Sefer Bamidbar? Explain your answer.

B. A famous dispute among the commentators surrounds the psukim just prior to these that we have discussed. To what does 'mitzva ha-zot' (30:11) refer? See 30:11-14, Rashi (on pasuk 14), Ibn Ezra (also pasuk 14), Ramban (pasuk 11) and Seforno (pasuk 11). If we view these pesukim as continuing the previous discussion of teshuva, then perhaps the pesukim discussed in the above shiur (30:15-20) also relate to this theme: the choice between 'life' and 'death' in the aftermath of sin. Explain how this enhances our association between these psukim and the return to Gan Eden. Bear in mind the Midrash that Hashem banished Adam from Gan Eden only after having first offered him the chance to do teshuva (Bereishit Rabba 21, Bemidbar Rabba 13).

Furthermore, compare 15-20 with the opening psukim of Parshat Re'eh. Note the difference in terminology: bracha and klala as opposed to chayim and mavet. [Notice that Moshe makes a point of associating bracha / klala with chayim / mavet in 30:19.] Try to explain this difference in light of our suggestion that our psukim refer to the situation after sin, rather than before sinning. [See Meshech Chochma.] What 'choice' is presented in Re'eh, and which does Moshe present here, in the aftermath of sin? Why is the wrong 'choice' in our context called 'death' (perhaps more accurately, the 'curse' translates into 'death') while in Re'eh it's merely a 'curse'?

C. The Sifrei in the beginning of Parshat Re'eh (54:27) associates the psukim there (as we cited in B.) with Hashem's comment to Kayin: "Surely, if you do right you will be forgiven [see Targum, as opposed to Ibn Ezra]; but if you don't do right, sin couches at the door" (Bereishit 4:7). Why would God have to impress this notion upon Kayin particularly in the aftermath of Adam's banishment from Gan Eden? Why must Moshe repeat this same message to Bnei Yisrael before they enter the land?

D. In 29:12-14, we find once again the concept of Bnei Yisrael's destiny to become a special nation. Relate this to our entire series of shiurim on Devarim. [Note as well the reference to God's promise to the patriarchs, and recall our shiur last week regarding 'mikra bikkurim' and 'vidui ma'aser'.]

E. Read the Rambam's comments concerning the laws of Hakhel in Hilchot Chagiga perek 3. Note particularly his remarks in halacha 6 concerning 'gerim'. (If you have a chance, read also the seventh perek of mishnayot Sota.) How do these halachot relate to the above shiur? Why do you think we skip from shma to ve-haya im shamo'a in kriyat shma? What is the final word read by the king at Hakhel? How might this be significant in light of this shiur? In halacha 6, why does the Rambam emphasize that davka the 'ger' must feel as though he is standing at Har Sinai during the hakhel ceremony?

F. Regarding the association of Torah with 'life' (end of the shiur), see Targum Yonatan on 30:20.

G. We noted the function of Torah as the 'Tree of Life', the means by which we 'return to Gan Eden'. See Midrash HaGadol in Bereishit: "That tree from which whoever would eat would live - God hid it and gave us His Torah, the tree of life..." See also Tanchuma Yashan, Bereishit 25 that identifies the 'lahat ha-cherev' (the 'fiery sword'), which guarded the entrance to Gan Eden together with the keruvim, as Torah (based on Tehillim 149:7, which we say in Psukei DeZimra).

The parallel between Gan Eden and both the mikdash and Torah study becomes especially apparent in the Midrashim that interpret Adam's responsibility in Gan Eden of 'le-ovdah' in reference to korbanot and Torah study. See Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 12, Bereishit Rabba 16, and especially Sifrei Ekev 41.