

Parashat Nitzavim
Deuteronomy 29:9-30:20
Isaiah 61:10- 63:9
Matthew 28:16-20

Law & Order (doink-doink)

In therapy you learn about surface feelings and the deeper (real) feelings/issues. Surface feelings are the emotions that you often see first, but that don't necessarily really tell the whole story. For example, when you encounter someone who is very angry, and possibly lashing out... it's easy to focus on the anger alone. But if we take a minute to stop and think... we can usually find out that the anger is the surface emotion for a deeper hurt or fear.

I very much found this week's portion to be similar. It's really easy to JUST focus on all the things we're supposed to do... on the laws and what happens if/when we don't follow them. But if we take a minute to digest it all... I think that we'll begin to see something different.

Maria Montessori said that "order is one of the needs of life which, when satisfied, produces real happiness". So when I slowed down, instead of feeling bogged down by what I am supposed to do or not do, I began to see the beauty in what HaShem was asking from me. Ultimately, all of these commands aren't meant to bog us down... they're meant to enable us, empower us.

To do what?

I'm in my 11th year of teaching... and in my experience I've found that when I create order and processes for my students to stay organized that things run much more smoothly. Some kids are MUCH better at this than others... and some need a LOT of help to get through the day, week, month, and year. For those that require more assistance, I create processes and work hard to drill them in, so that that particular student might be more successful. I create these processes not only for students' executive skills (tangible organization) but in their mental processes as well. Those that are at least physically organized have a head start...

This year, whoa! My class as a whole struggles to maintain organization and order. They have SO MUCH ENERGY! It's both a blessing and curse really... they have a joie de vivre...but need a lot of help focusing that energy.... So that they can ultimately access the learning and grow.

So too in this week's portion. We read about all of these laws... and i was stuck thinking, "what's the point G-d? Why is so much of Torah and the Bible about laws and following them? I mean... i get it... You want us to be good people.... To spread the news about your love...and sure some of these help us do that... but maybe a bit overboard, no?"

And then I wondered if we're being altruistic... are we doing this so that we can get something? Or are we, am I doing this so that I can simply worship HaShem because he is simply put, worthy? Am I doing these things simply because "it's what i'm supposed to do"? Or because when you love someone, you do things to bless them, to show them that you care... you make sacrifices for them?

The Choice of Life and Death

11 "For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. 12 It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' 13 Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' 14 But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.

15 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. 16 If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God[c] that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules,[d] then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. 17 But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, 20 loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length

of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

But then, I stopped to look deeper than the surface level. What WAS the real purpose of all of these statutes that we're supposed to follow. Was it really about the actual rule...or was there something deeper?

"Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance, order, rhythm, and harmony"
-Thomas Merton

Love. Love is the reason he has given us these statutes... love is the reason that I follow them...

Love. (pause with wait time)

Isaiah 60:1-4

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;[d]
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;[e]

2

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;

3

to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.[f]

4

They shall build up the ancient ruins;
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,

the devastations of many generations.

He is constantly at work. Working to bring ALL his creation to Him. From the beginning of time to now... Like any relationship... you work hard... He has never stopped, and thankfully never will stop working to bring redemption to all.

The order of it all is meant to help us draw near to him. There is freedom within the order... "Good order is the foundation of all things." -Edmund Burke. He has created law and order so that we may draw close to him. So that we may find joy in His works and be a contagion of His love.

The law isn't meant to follow just because... it's meant so that we can be a light. So that we can be empowered... enabled to be heralds of HaShem's love. 1 Corinthians 13: 1, "If I speak in tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or clanging cymbal".

"Love is patient, love is kind, It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (1 Corinthians 13: 4-7)

We are called to something deeper...bigger than just following rules. There is a deeper purpose than just doing it to save ourselves... we do it to bring about His kingdom. To work hand in hand with what G-d is doing and with what Yeshua has done.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,
and her salvation as a burning torch.

2

The nations shall see your righteousness,
and all the kings your glory,
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will give.

3

You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

You shall no more be termed Forsaken,[h]

In my classroom, once I know that they're ready and able, I assign my students jobs. A classroom should function like a family, where everyone pitches in and does their part. The goal in helping them be organized is so that we can focus on the things that matter. But to do that I must empower them to be organized and follow some semblance of order. Once we've done the nitty gritty work of learning processes and organization, then we can get to the REAL work.

That's how I see this week's portion. We must learn about the nitty gritty... but ultimately it's because it's about HaShem enlisting us to work with him. To be his hands in this world.

“16 Now the eleven disciples went to the Galilee, to the mountain *Yeshua* had designated. **17** When they saw Him, they worshiped; but some wavered. **18** And *Yeshua* came up to them and spoke to them, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. [a] **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the *Ruach ha-Kodesh*, **20** teaching them to observe all I have commanded you. And remember! I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:16-20 Tree of Life Version- TLV)

So when you go about your day, your week, your year... and you come across a verse or chapter that might seem harsh... or too focused on what you should/shouldn't do... stop to think about what the deeper calling is...don't get distracted by the surface "feelings". Take time to look deeper... to see that ultimately G-d is calling us through law and order to usher in His kingdom...His love.

Afterall, if we are meant to follow *Yeshua's* example... that's exactly what he did... he saw past just the "rule" and looked deep into people's souls to what they needed... passed what was happening on the surface and spoke to what was really happening.

May we be blessed with the patience to look deeply, to see HaShem in situations and people, and with the knowledge that we have been given a beautiful and wonderful

calling to spread his light and love, so that all may turn toward HaShem and see His greatness and praise Him.