YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT DELIVERED BY THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

PARASHAT NITZAVIM

SICHA OF HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

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Today marks the thirtieth anniversary of the resettlement of Gush Etzion after its fall in Israel's War of Independence. Yeshivat Har Etzion, founded in Kefar Etzion in 1968 and subsequently pioneering the town of Alon Shevut in 1970, has played an integral role in the rebirth of Gush Etzion. Please join us in wishing Gush Etzion a flourishing future - "Ve-shavu banim li-gevulam!"

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"All of Israel Are Guarantors for One Another"

Summarized by Danny Orenbuch

"The hidden things are limited to the Lord our God, but the revealed things are ours and our children's forever, to perform all the words of this Torah." (Devarim 29:28)

"Lest you should say: We are powerless - You punish the many for the thoughts of the individual... but how can a person know the private thoughts of his fellow?!

"[Therefore God says:] I do not punish you for the hidden things. These are 'limited to the Lord our God,' who will punish the individual appropriately. But the revealed things - these are [the responsibility of] 'us and our children,' to destroy the evil from our midst; and if we do not perform justice with the evil ones - the many will be punished.

"The punctuation above the words, 'us and our children' comes to teach: even for the revealed things the community was not punished until they passed over the Yarden, and accepted upon themselves the vow on Har Gerizim and Har Eival, and became guarantors for one another." (Rashi)

Rashi's unequivocal statement here regarding 'hidden things' is in contrast with the debate on this topic in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 33b), but with regard to 'revealed things' all agree that from the time that the nation crossed the Yarden, there is communal responsibility. The basis for this responsibility, according to Rashi, is the fact that all are guarantors (arevim) for each other. In monetary matters, a guarantor is someone who bears responsibility for a debt, and here too the term 'arev' is used in the sense of bearing responsibility.

This responsibility has a double significance: on the one hand, it refers to a person's responsibility to perfect himself, and on the other hand this responsibility extends to those around him.

The aspect of responsibility in the sense of perfecting oneself can be understood if we bear in mind the halakha which states that "yatza motzi" - someone who has already fulfilled his obligation with regard to a certain mitzva (e.g. reciting kiddush on Shabbat) can repeat it (including the berakha) in order to help someone else to fulfill his obligation in the same mitzva, even though it would seem that once he has completed his performance of the mitzva, he no longer has any connection to it. The reason for halakha permitting him to repeat the performance of the mitzva is that so long as others have not yet fulfilled the mitzva, he himself has not performed it properly, and there is still something lacking in his personal fulfillment. Hence his obligation has not yet completely ceased, and he is able to repeat the mitzva for the sake of helping someone else to fulfill the obligation. The individual's responsibility here is in fact towards himself - his own mitzva is still lacking, and he is responsible for completing it.

On the other hand, the responsibility of being a 'guarantor' is also towards society. This involves not particular mitzvot or particular individuals, but rather the responsibility of being alert to problems and defects in the society around him, and taking steps to correct them.

We are all aware of the debate between the philosophy which holds the individual as life's central player - with the aim of society being the realization of his individual goals, and the opposite philosophy, which maintains that it is in fact society which should be regarded as the highest priority, with the individuals representing the cells comprising this great body and bearing responsibility towards this one great unit. Judaism combines these two views. On the one hand, each individual is regarded as a whole world in himself; on the other hand, we find in many places an emphasis on the idea of Am Yisrael as a single unit. Clearly, the existence of this unit, this great community, can be fully realized only when Israel dwells in its land, and not when they are outside of it, dispersed and scattered among the nations. This, therefore, is the reason why collective responsibility for 'revealed things' - for the openly apparent problems plaguing the nation and its constituent individuals - came into effect only when the People of Israel crossed over the Yarden and entered the land.

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