

Last week we spoke about the great *bracha* and privilege we enjoy when we can drive our own spiritual growth. In building on last week's theme, I would like to look at an uncharacteristically reassuring *pasuk* which appears in this week's *parsha*:

*For **this commandment** which I command you this day is not beyond you nor is it far off... But it is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it. (Deuteronomy 30:11-14)*

This *pasuk* tells us that "this commandment" is within our reach. The commentators are divided as to which *mitzvah* this is referring to.

The first interpretation, that of Rashi, is that it is the pursuit of **Torah** learning and Torah knowledge, which is accessible to all of us no matter our skills and background.

The second interpretation, that of the Ramban, is that it refers to our ability to do **teshuva**. His evidence is that it follows naturally from the previous *pasuk*, which deals with our repentance and ultimate return to *Hashem*.

These two interpretations are not mutually exclusive. Both Torah and *teshuva* are within our grasp. We need not ask "who will go up for us to heaven and bring it to us," but should realize it is within our reach to grasp it ourselves. While this is encouraging, it also puts the onus on each and every individual in Am Yisrael to be owners of our own spiritual growth.

We have now embarked on this quest for *teshuva*, starting with the beginning of Elul and continuing today, on the cusp of the Aseret Yemei Teshuva. We need to encourage our students and our children to strive for *teshuva* this Rosh Hashana -- to be present in davening, to say the words, to reflect on their *middot*, and to fulfill the *mitzvah* of hearing the *shofar*.

We also must encourage them to reach for Torah. This year, the Upper School is learning Mesechet Megillah. As a result, both the Middle and Upper Schoolers have a unique opportunity. Rabbi Jaffe's Thursday afternoon "Mishmar and pizza" group will provide our students with a chance to finish the entire Mesechet Megillah and make a *siyum* at the end of the year. This is a truly special opportunity, and you should encourage your children to take advantage of it.

My *bracha* to our *talmidim* and *talmidot* is that they find success both in their **Torah** and in their **teshuva**, and remember that both are "near to you, in your mouth and in your heart."

Shana tova!

Discussion for the Shabbos Table

1. What was your takeaway from the *d'var Torah* this morning?
2. If *teshuva* is so accessible, why do we find ourselves with the same struggles every year?
3. In what ways is Torah "in your mouth and in your heart"? Which parts of Torah are most accessible to you?