

THE WORD IS VERY NEAR TO YOU*

כִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מִצְוֶה הַיּוֹם
לֹא־נִפְלֶאת הוּא מִמֶּךָ וְלֹא־רְחֹקָה הוּא:
לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא לֵאמֹר
מִי יַעֲלֶה־לָנוּ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וַיִּקְחֶהָ לָנוּ
וַיִּשְׁמַעֵנוּ אֶת־הָ וְנַעֲשֶׂנָּה:
וְלֹא־יִמְעָבֵר לָיִם הוּא לֵאמֹר
מִי יַעֲבֹר־לָנוּ אֶל־עֵבֶר הַיָּם
וַיִּקְחֶהָ לָנוּ וַיִּשְׁמַעֵנוּ אֶת־הָ וְנַעֲשֶׂנָּה:
כִּי־קְרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדְּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבְלִבְבְּךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ:

For this commandment which I command you today
is not concealed from you and it is not far off.
It is not in heaven, [for you] to say,
“Who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it to us,
and make us hear it, that we may do it?”
And it’s not over the sea, [for you] to say,
“Who shall go over for us to the other side of the sea,
and bring it to us, and make us hear it, that we may do it?”
But the word is very near to you—in your mouth and in your heart—to do it.

For this commandment which I command you today—This “commandment of repentance” directs us to do teshuvah and “cleave to God” (Sforno)—the measure of which is to keep the mitzvot. [This commandment] is not concealed from you and it is not far off—The way in which the Torah has been given to us makes it possible “to learn it, to meditate on it, and carry it out” (J. Tigay); thus we have “no need for prophets” (Sforno) or an oligarchy of the wise. It is not in heaven, [for you] to say, “Who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it to us, and make us hear it, that we may do it?”—We need not ask God to clarify the mitzvot because, once given, the Torah is entirely and eternally in human hands. Since it is not inaccessible, we have “no excuse for neglect” of learning Torah and doing mitzvot (N. Leibowitz). And it’s not over the sea, [for you] to say, “Who shall go over for us to the other side of the sea, and bring it to us, and make us hear it, that we may do it?”—We can find within ourselves that which calls us to the will of our Creator, regardless of the time or space that we occupy at any moment. But the word is very near to you—in your mouth and in your heart—to do it—The alienation of our spirit tells us that we have missed the mark or gone off the path, and our mouth is capable of expressing responsibility and regret, and taking steps to ensure that we “turn toward Adonai our God with all our heart and all our soul” (30:10)—and thus we make it possible “for the entire Torah to be fulfilled” (S. Riskin).

* Deuteronomy 30:11-14 (in Nitzavim)