Parashat Nitzavim: Circumcise Your Heart?

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Devarim 30:6	
וּמָל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת־לְבָבְךָ וְאֶת־לְבַב זַרְעֶךָ לְאַהֲבָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ לְמַעַן חַיֶּיךָ:	Then the ETERNAL your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your offspring—to love the ETERNAL your God with all your heart and soul, in order that you may live.

1. Circumcise Your Heart

Ibn Ezra on Devarim 30:6	
וּמָל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ. כִּי לוֹ נִתְכְּנוּ הָעֲלִילוֹת הָרִאשׁוֹנוֹת. וְאַחַר שֶׁאָמַר תָּשׁוּב לִשְׁמֹעַ בְּקוֹלוֹ הוּא יַעַזְרֶךָ וְיָמוּל לְבָבֶךָ וּלְבַב זַרְעֶךָ לֹא כְּמִלַּת הַבָּשָׂר שֶׁאַתָּה חַיָּב לָמוּל אוֹתוֹ:	For He is the first cause of all actions. After saying, you shall return unto the Lord and listen to His voice, Moses says that unlike the circumcision of the flesh, which you are obligated to execute, God will help you and will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed.

Ramban on Devarim 30:6	
וּמָל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת לְבָבְךָ, זֶהוּ שֶׁאָמְרוּ (שבת קד) הַבָּא לְטַהֵר מְסַיְּעִין אוֹתוֹ, מַבְטִיחֵךְ שֶׁתָּשׁוּב אֵלָיו בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ, וְהוּא יַעֲזֹר אוֹתְךָ. וְנִרְאֶה מִן הַכְּתוּבִים עִנְיָן זֶה שֶׁאָמַר, כִּי מִזְּמַן הַבְּרִיאָה הָיְתָה רְשׁוּת בְּיַד הָאָדָם לַעֲשׂוֹת כִּרְצוֹנוֹ, צַדִּיק אוֹ רָשָׁע, וְכָל זְמַן הַתּוֹרָה כֵּן, כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּהְיֶה לָהֶם זְכוּת בִּבְחִירָתָם בַּטּוֹב, וְעֹנֶשׁ בִּרְצוֹתָם בָּרַע. אֲבָל לִימוֹת הַמָּשִׁיחַ תִּהְיֶה הַבְּחִירָה בַּטּוֹב לָהֶם טֶבַע, לֹא יִתְאַוֶּה לָהֶם הַלֵּב לְמָה שֶּׁאֵינוֹ רָאוּי וְלֹא יַחְפֹּץ בּוֹ כְּלָל, וְהִיא הַמִּילָה הַנִּזְכֶּרֶת כָּאן, כִּי הַחֶמְדָּה וְהַתַּאֲוָה עָרְלָה לַלֵּב, וּמוּל הַלֵּב הוּא שֶׁלֹּא יַחְמֹד וְלֹא יִתְאַוֶּה, וְיָשׁוּב הָאָדָם בַּזְּמַן הַהוּא לַאֲשֶׁר הָיָה קֹדֶם חֶטְאוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן, שֶׁהָיָה עוֹשֶׂה בְּטִבְעוֹ מָה שֶּׁרָאוּי לַעֲשׂוֹת, וְלֹא הָיָה לוֹ בִּרְצוֹנוֹ דָּבָר וְהֶפְכּוֹ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁפֵּרַשְׁתִּי בְּסֵדֶר בְּרֵאשִׁית (ב ט). וְזֶהוּ מָה שֶּׁאָמַר הַכָּתוּב בְּיִרְמְיָה (לא ל- לב), הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נְאֻם ה' וְכָרַתִּי אֶת בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת בֵּית יְהוּדָה בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה לֹא כַּבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר כָּרַתִּי אֶת אֲבוֹתָם וְגוֹ' כִּי זֹאת הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר אֶכְרֹת אֶת בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל אַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים הָהֵם נָתַתִּי אֶת תּוֹרָתִי בְּקִרְבָּם וְעַל לִבָּם אֶכְתְּבֶנָּה, וְזֶהוּ בְּטוּל יֵצֶר הָרַע וַעֲשׂוֹת הַלֵּב בְּטִבְעוֹ מַעֲשֵׂהוּ הָרָאוּי. וּלְכָךְ אָמַר עוֹד (שם פסוקים לב לג)	It is this which the Rabbis have said, “If someone comes to purify himself, they assist him” [from on High]. The verse assures you that you will return to Him with all your heart, and He will help you. This following subject is very apparent from Scripture: Since the time of Creation, man has had the power to do as he pleased, to be righteous or wicked. This [grant of free will] applies likewise to the entire Torah-period, so that people can gain merit upon choosing the good and punishment for preferring evil. But in the days of the Messiah, the choice of their [genuine] good will be natural; the heart will not desire the improper, and it will have no craving whatever for it. This is the “circumcision” mentioned here, for lust and desire are the “foreskin” of the heart, and circumcision of the heart means that it will not covet or desire evil. Man will return at that time to what he was before the sin of Adam, when by his nature he did what should properly be done, and there were no conflicting desires in his will, as I have explained in *Seder Bereshith*. It is this which Scripture states in [the Book of] Jeremiah, *Behold, the days come, saith the Eternal, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers,* etc. *But this is the covenant that I will*

[1] All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

Ramban on Devarim 30:6	
וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְהֵמָּה יִהְיוּ לִי לְעָם וְלֹא יְלַמְּדוּ עוֹד אִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ וְאִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו לֵאמֹר דְּעוּ אֶת ה' כִּי כוּלָּם יֵדְעוּ אוֹתִי לְמִקְטַנָּם וְעַד גְּדוֹלָם. וּבְיָדוּעַ כִּי יֵצֶר לֵב הָאָדָם רַע מִנְּעֻרָיו, וּצְרִיכִים לְלַמֵּד אוֹתָם, אֶלָּא שֶׁיִּתְבַּטֵּל יִצְרָם בַּזְּמַן הַהוּא לְגַמְרֵי. וְכֵן נֶאֱמַר בִּיחֶזְקֵאל (לו כו כז), וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב חָדָשׁ וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה אֶתֵּן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם וְגוֹ' וְעָשִׂיתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר בְּחֻקַּי תֵּלֵכוּ. וְהַלֵּב הֶחָדָשׁ יִרְמֹז לְטִבְעוֹ, וְהָרוּחַ לַחֵפֶץ וְלָרָצוֹן. וְזֶהוּ שֶׁאָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ (שבת קנא), וְהִגִּיעוּ שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵין לִי בָּהֶם חֵפֶץ (קהלת יב א), אֵלּוּ יְמוֹת הַמָּשִׁיחַ שֶׁאֵין בָּהֶם לֹא זְכוּת וְלֹא חוֹבָה, כִּי בִּימֵי הַמָּשִׁיחַ לֹא יִהְיֶה בָּאָדָם חֵפֶץ, אֲבָל יַעֲשֶׂה בְּטִבְעוֹ הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הָרָאוּי, וּלְפִיכָךְ אֵין בָּהֶם לֹא זְכוּת וְלֹא חוֹבָה, כִּי הַזְּכוּת וְהַחוֹבָה תְּלוּיִים בַּחֵפֶץ:	*make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Eternal, I will put my Law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it*. This is a reference to the annulment of the evil instinct and to the natural performance by the heart of its proper function. Therefore, Jeremiah said further, *and I will be their G-d, and they shall be My people; and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying: 'Know the Eternal;' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them*. Now, it is known that *the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth* and it is necessary to instruct them, but at that time it will not be necessary to instruct them [to avoid evil] for their evil instinct will then be completely abolished. And so it is declared by Ezekiel, *A new heart will I also give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will cause you to walk in My statutes*. The *new heart* alludes to man's nature, and the [*new*] *spirit* to the desire and will. It is this which our Rabbis have said: "*And the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say: 'I have no pleasure in them'* — these are the days of the Messiah, as they will offer opportunity neither for merit nor for guilt," for in the days of the Messiah there will be no [evil] desire in man but he will naturally perform the proper deeds and therefore there will be neither merit nor guilt in them, for merit and guilt are dependent upon desire.

Seforno on Devarim 30:6	
וּמָל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת לְבָבְךָ וְאֶת לְבַב זַרְעֶךָ לְאַהֲבָה. יְגַלֶּה עֵינֶיךָ לָסוּר מִכָּל טָעוּת מְעַרְבֵּב הַשֵּׂכֶל מִיְּדִיעַת הָאֱמֶת כְּשֶׁתִּשְׁתַּדֵּל לִדְבֵקָה בּוֹ בְּאֹפֶן שֶׁתַּכִּיר טוּבוֹ וְתֶאֱהֲבֵהוּ בְּהֶכְרֵחַ. וְזֶה יֵעָשֶׂה לְמַעַן חַיֶּיךָ לְעוֹלְמֵי עַד:	**וּמָל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ**, He will open your eyes so as to remove every erroneous conceptions which have prevented you from recognising the theological truth of all aspects of the Jewish religion. Once these "blinds" have been removed from your eyes you will realise that everything G'd has done was out of His love for you, and had to be done למען חייך, in order to ensure that you will be part of eternal life after your body dies.

Translations of וּמָל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת לְבָבְךָ	
Targum Onkelos on Sefer Devarim	"Will remove foolishness from your heart"
The Jewish Publication Society, *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*	"Will open up your heart"
Rabbi Charles Kahane, *Torah Yesharah*	"Will support you spiritually"

2. Transforming the Metaphor

Nir Braudo, "Circumcise Your Heart," *Bina: The Jewish Movement for Social Change in Israel* (2020)
To take part in Judaism's moral destiny, we must circumcise the foreskin of our hearts; on our hearts, there is a mask, a covering that prevents us from seeing the other and identifying with their suffering, a covering that enables us to harm others, even in the name of law and justice. Moses warns us not to act with the element of providence alone and to open our hearts to human compassion.