

Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

ATEM NITZAVIM HAYOM KUL'CHEM

You are standing today, all of you.

This Parsha introduces yet another b'rit: For you to pass into a covenant of HaShem... and into His oath that HaShem... forges with you today. Whereas the covenant detailed in B'chukotai is one that connects each person with HaShem and the one in Ki Tavo addresses us as a nation with responsibilities toward HaShem, this covenant is different. As the Ohr HaChayim HaKadosh explains: 'Moshe's intention in this covenant is to have them become mutually responsible for one another so that each one would try to help his peer avoid disobeying Hashem' (26:11). This covenant emphasizes our being a nation: LMA'AN HAKIM OT'CHA HAYOM LO L'AM... (26:12) - one whole unit. As R. Moshe Shapira points out, the word AM is from the word IM - with - meaning the connecting of one to another. And so we are introduced to the concept of AREIVUT. We are all responsible for one another. All of us, ...from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water (26:10).

It is unusual for the Torah to enumerate our people in such detail; it involves all of us. R Yaakov Ariel

(Mei'ohalei Torah; Bamidbar, D'varim, Mo'adim; p. 194) draws our attention to something about this that I certainly never noticed before. In enumerating the people here, it doesn't only mention the people and the GEIRIM (which is usual), it specifies as well, 'from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water' - as if these are two ends of a spectrum or opposite extremes. On the surface, this doesn't seem to be so. After all, they are both laborers, doing different kinds of jobs. Why would the Torah list them as extremes? But R. Ariel points out differences that we wouldn't notice. The jobs they have represent significantly different messages. A CHOTEIV EITZIM cuts the branch from the tree, removing it from the source of life. The SHO'EIV MAYIM, on the other hand, takes water from a living source, leaves the source as is, and proceeds to use the water to plant, grow, to enhance life. The demolisher and the builder; the uprooter and the planter; the yetzer hara and the yetzer hatov, perhaps. The verse, however, includes them as united - in describing their positions, they are connected to each other: AD SHO'EIV MEIMECHA; AD is the connecting word. There is no separation between good and bad; they are not really separate entities.

We can see this as well with the description of the ritual on HAR

EIVAL and HAR GRIZIM. The curses were said facing HAR EIVAL, and the blessings, facing HAR GRIZIM. At first glance, it would seem that they are separate - but not really. For both sides answered AMEIN to both the "good" and the "bad" while all facing one direction: the Leviyim, teachers of Torah, who stood between them. Indeed, they were connected.

Are we getting a similar message from the very blowing of the Shofar on Rosh HaShana? Every unit of T'KI'OT consists of three sections:

T'KI'A, SH'VARIM-T'RU'AH, T'KI'A;

T'KI'A, SH'VARIM, T'KIA;

T'KI'A, T'RUAH, T'KI'A.

Notice how the middle of each set is always a "broken" sounds: the T'RU'AH and the SH'VARIM. But each set is surrounded on both sides by a complete, uniform sound, the T'KI'A. The broken sounds must be placed between the two complete ones. The CHOTEV EITZIM, the one who "breaks" things, is to be placed between SHO'AVEI MAYIM, creators, for there to be the hope that the "broken" ones will become whole. The responsibility for this rests upon those who surround them. AREIVUT - the placing of those who are incomplete among those who are complete; and theirs is the responsibility to unite with them.

I find it interesting that this all takes place outside of Moav, specifically, in Arvot Moav. Could the words be hinting something to us? 'Arvot Moav' - there is an obligation of areivut on those who come mo-av - from the same father? Could be.

It's easy to see that, as is always a possibility, this Parsha contains "hidden" and not-so "hidden" messages, for this time of year especially. ATEM NITZAVIM HAYOM, we stand HAYOM - on the day that Chazal say hints to Yom HaDin, to Rosh HaShana. And exactly how can we come to stand before HaShem and hope for a year of blessing and peace? Only if we come KUL'CHEM - all of us together. ✨