

This Week in Torah *Nitzavim-Yalech*

There is a dance that Jews do each and every time they gather for prayer. No, it is not an actual dance like the *Hora*. It is a shift in attention between engaging with the community and taking time for personal introspection. In traditional synagogues, the *shaliah tsibur* [the service leader] is in control of this--- when he is *davening*, he will pray silently then when he reaches a set piece of liturgy, he will raise his voice so that others will join in and know where they are supposed to be as part of community as they pray as individuals. That fluidity is replicated in our worship—our *siddur* has multiple readings on a double page, giving a worshiper a chance to let their mind wander as they find their place within communal worship.

The *Degel Machane Efraim* wrote of this from a mystical perspective. This week's *parasha* opens with this verse: "All of you are standing here this day before the Eternal, your God; your heads of tribes, elders..." He related an image from the *Zohar* which quotes from Ecclesiastes: "The wise have eyes in their heads, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both." He realized that the image of the eyes in the head gives a person a chance to look outward at the world and inward into the soul—sometimes at the same time! Notice the play of words-- - heads in the portion paralleling eyes in the head in Ecclesiastes then the *Zohar* steps it up adding a quote from *Pirkei Avot*: "Apply your mind to three things and you will not come into the clutches of sin: Know what there is above you: an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are written in a book." For the *Degel*, the eyes are the gift that gives perception and perspective.

As we get ready for the High Holidays, think about the eyes you possess. Use them to see around you—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Use them to see the face of God in others—whom you may or may not know. Use them to look inward at the type of person you are and who you want to be. A few weeks ago, we read these verses of Torah: "See, this day I set before you blessing and curse: blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I enjoin upon you this day; and curse, if you do not obey the

commandments of the LORD your God, but turn away from the path that I enjoin upon you this day and follow other gods, whom you have not experienced.”

This is the dance we all do as Jews! To see inwardly into our souls and to gaze outwardly around us. What we do with that vision, well—that makes us holy!