

Nitzavim - Rabbi Lerner - September 9, 2012

A New Bris in Arvei Moav

29:9-12: *You are standing today, all of you before Hashem your God; the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers - all the men of Israel. Your small children, your women, and your ger who is in the midst of your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water. For you to pass into the Bris of Hashem, your God, and into His covenant that Hashem, your God, seals with you today. In order to establish you today as a people to Him and that He be a God to you, as He spoke to you and as He swore to your forefathers, to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaacov.* **Rashi**: This teaches us that Moshe brought them all together to have this Bris on the last day of his life. **Sifsei Chachamim**: how did Rashi know that he had to gather them all together somewhere? Maybe he just went to the center of their encampment, with each person in his tent, and everyone miraculously were able to hear him? The point was to bring them together into a Bris - you do not enter into a Bris unless you make people move from one place to another. As **Rashi** says, this was the symbol of what it means to execute a covenant between two people - you take people separated by two partitions, and the two parties are each brought across the partition to meet in the middle; two parties enter into an irrevocable agreement by coming together in a physical way to underscore this - you do not stay in your secure place, digging in your heels - you come together to a central meeting place to unite as one, with a complete meeting of the minds.

There is a tremendous emphasis that this Bris was to be all-encompassing, to include all of the Jews, from the heads of tribes to the most lowly of people, including all women, children, infants, and gerim, even drawers of water and wood cutters. **Daas Zekenim** and **Baalei Tosefos**: they have gathered together in one assembly, including the average Jews, gerim, women, and children; the whole point was to be inducted into the covenant, because once they soon cross the Jordan river (30 days after the death of Moshe + a few days of waiting time) the battles will begin - they will win, but then each person will settle down in his own plot of land, with involvement of his own needs. There will not be another time for all of them to be together like this, concentrated together to accept the Bris. **Chizkuni**: the important and the unimportant Jews are included, without a single Jew missing.

What is the nature of this Bris - what is it all about? Wasn't the Bris at Sinai still binding? **Rabbeinu Bachya**: there were two things accomplished by this Bris. There were two promises here - the first that the Jewish people will survive forever, that there will be a last generation to the end of time, despite all of the best attempts of our enemies to destroy us. The other promise is that we will also make it into Olam Habah. **Abarbanel**: the point of the Bris has to do with Eretz Yisrael - God wanted to do another great deed for us - he wanted us to inherit the holy land. It was a new Bris specifically tied to Eretz Yisrael. The message was that it would not be by their swords and military prowess that they would inherit the land, but by the zechus of the Avos. But we will also not own the land - it is a gift with conditions, a loan to the Jewish people with a contingency that we fulfill our part of the Bris, accepting and performing all of the mitzvos.

Meshech Chachmah: when you look at the curses in Bechukosai and Ki Savo, there is a tie between the curses and the Bris. In Bechukosai it says that if we do not listen to the mitzvos, then Hashem will cause these curses to befall us - it is all written in the plural - it is directed at the tzibur. In Ki Savo everything is in the singular. So, this new Bris is therefore directed

towards the yachid, the individual, who was just warned about the curses if the do not follow the Torah.

Chafetz Chayim: This Bris is about Arevus - all Jews are responsible for each other. In 29:28 the Torah lists the famous pasuk that *the hidden sins are for Hashem, but the revealed sins are for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of the Torah*. The meforshim say that the dots above the words refer to Arevus - in the desert we had some responsibility for each other, with the open sins committed by people; but once we enter the land, we are completely responsible for each other - according to Rabbi Yehuda, even when Jews do things in a hidden way we are all responsible because we did not teach them properly - we did not reach this particular Jew as we should have. This concept was activated once we reached Eretz Yisrael. Similarly, when we come to the Aseres Yemai Teshuva, we need to envision that not only are we on a scale with our mitzvos and averos in a delicate balance affecting us - we need to envision all Klal Yisrael on that scale, where each of our actions will affect all of the nation. We should want to do things for others because of selfish reasons as well - the actions of others will affect us too. If the other person is lacking in mitzvos, we too are lacking - our fulfillment is lacking if others are not doing their best. So, this Bris is similar to a situation where a Jew approaches another for money and he loans it to him; the lender discovers that the borrower is getting involved with a shady business deal with this money, and the lender knows it is not a good deal, and the money will be completely lost - the lender will try to convince the borrower not to go into this deal for selfish reasons - the money will be lost forever and he will never be repaid. In a like manner, if you can help a Jew with mitzvos, you are helping yourself; if you can stop another Jew from sinning and lift him to a higher level, you are helping yourself as well. If you don't, Hashem will hold you responsible for the sin. If you can stop people in your community from sinning and don't, you are tied to that sin. That is why we have to stop others for sinning - it helps us as well.

Rav Hirsch: Moshe explains that the Bris is for all Israel, for all generations. The previous Bris was directed towards the nation at large, so an individual could assume that he can get away with not doing the mitzvos. In 29:17-18 it says *Perhaps there is among you a man or woman, or a family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from being with Hashem, our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations; perhaps there is among you a root flourishing with gall and wormwood. And it will be that when he hears the words of this Bris, he will bless himself in his heart and say 'Peace will be with me [that the curses from Ki Savo won't affect me], though I walk as my heart sees fit'..* - he feels this way because the Jewish people as a whole are intact in the mitzvos, so he won't be punished. But as it says in 29:19-22, God will not forgive him, the entire Bris with all of the curses will come down upon him, and Hashem will blot out this person's name forever...Future generations will say this sin caused the whole land to be caught up in a conflagration, and all the nations will ask 'For what reason did Hashem do so to this Land?' It jumps from the singular person to the entire nation - the sin of the individual will cause the entire community to be punished. The whole nation does not have to defect from Judaism to be punished - this pernicious individual's error will affect everyone. The solidarity for all is stressed so that an individual can never feel complacent that if he is fine, there is nothing to be concerned about. We must reach out to every Jew. Every single Jew is important; that is why the second Tochachah in Ki Savo has more curses than the one directed at the nation at large.

Oznayim LaTorah: you cannot compare the mission of a powerful person with that of a regular person; the person with greater talent has greater responsibility; this is the meaning of a line in the bracha of zichronos in the mussaf of Rosh Hashanah - "You remember the deeds done in the entire world, there is nothing you forget, nothing hidden from you; you take note of every

act, you judge every nation, etc. And then it says, who isn't frightened of this day since you know the deeds of each man, and each person's pekudaso - his mission. Everyone has some influence and a mission, and Hashem looks at each person. And then it says *Va'alilos Mitzadei Gaver* - one translation is the accomplishments of man's activity. But Alilos really means accusations, as with the husband who is motzei shem rah against a new bride in Ki Seitzei, making false accusations as to her purity. Here it means Hashem looks at each person's mission and the accusations of the steps that we have taken. Hashem is watching every step, if we are using all of the powers and talents given to us to accomplish our mission of helping others. Hashem is inspecting us and seeing how we measure up to our expected role. A drawer of water is not on the same level as Moshe; Hashem knows what each person is capable of - we cannot get away from our obligations, depending on others to carry us - each Jew must do his role, live up to his talents. Every person must do the best he can. And we are all tied together. **Rav Aharon Soloveitchik** - this is why we are all called Yehudim - it was Yehuda who said to his father that he is a guarantor, an Arev, of his brother Binyamin; that is what every Jew has to feel. We are each, indeed, our brother's keeper.