

A Standing Leap to the New Year

This week's Torah portion, *Nitzavim*, is always the final one before the New Year. Its placement in the flow of Torah readings is not simply a matter of coincidence. Rather, the message of *Nitzavim* fits perfectly as we prepare for the New Year.

The portion begins:

Atem nitzavim hayom, You stand this day, all of you, before Adonai your God -- your **tribal heads, your elders and your officials, all the men of Israel, your children, your wives, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to waterdrawer -- to enter** into the covenant of Adonai your God, which Adonai your God is establishing with you this day, along with its obligations. This is for the purpose that you will be God's people and the Divine will be your God. This is in keeping with oath God swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Deuteronomy 29:9-12)

This passage is also read on Yom Kippur. Again, its theme reinforces the idea that we are a family. This idea is elaborated in the Babylonian Talmud with the famous dictum *Kol Yisrael Arevim zeh ba-zeh*, "All of Israel are responsible for one another." (Shavuot 39a)

It is not an easy concept for us to get our heads around. Even if we Jews are like a family, in what way am I responsible for another? In what way should I feel a natural allegiance with a person just because he or she comes from the same family tree? Should DNA trump ideology? Should religious affiliation supersede my personal inclination to associate with whomever I choose? Of course not.

Judaism has always celebrated diversity of thought and opinion. The Talmud and the great law codes of Jewish tradition faithfully record and honor the minority opinions of sages whose perspective did not carry the day. Indeed, the passage we read above from the beginning of *Nitzavim* carefully lists the spectrum of society, from the leaders and home born, to the stranger in our community. All are to share in the covenant. The significance of the message is to push us beyond our clique and comfort zone. We are more than the close group of friends we keep. As a part of community we are urged to see that we all stand together. The potential of

our collective association pushes us beyond our individual and private needs. We see that our lives are not confined to the boundaries of our personal interests. We see that others need us. And though we are modernly self-reliant and confident and self-sufficient and proudly independent, we are ultimately better off when we can admit that we also need others.

As we enter the New Year 5779, let us reaffirm our bonds to one another.

This Friday, Rabbi Susan and I will lead the Erev Shabbat service in the Abrahams Family Chapel (6pm). Concurrently, Cantor Nesis and Dan Yolles will lead Tot Shabbat (5:15pm) and “Experience Shabbat” (6pm) at Silo Park. On Shabbat morning, the service begins at 9am and will be in the Abrahams Family Chapel.

Come to a service and stand with us as we celebrate Shabbat!

Shabbat Shalom,

Rick

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