

BUILD YOUR OWN COVENANT

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d. The heads of your tribes, your elders, your officers, all the men of Israel...from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water, for you to pass into the covenant of Hashem...

Be'er Mayim Chaim: The Zohar^[2] observes that elsewhere in Tanach, the term *hayom*/ today points to Rosh Hashanah, and it does as well here. It is not immediately apparent, however, how Rosh Hashanah ties in with the sense of these *pesukim*.

A quirk in the calendar offers us a breakthrough idea that will explain this passage in the Zohar. We call the Shabbos before Pesach Shabbos HaGadol/ the great Shabbos, in commemoration of a great, miraculous event in the early history of our people. On the tenth of the month of Nisan, our ancestors responded to Moshe's instructions regarding the *korban Pesach* which would be offered a few days from that day. Fearlessly, they set out to take a lamb for each household, effectively announcing their intention to commit mass sacrilege. They were intent on slaughtering the Egyptian god and devouring it! Miraculously, an enraged Egyptian populace watched the drama unfold, but did nothing to protect the honor of their deity.

That year, the tenth of Nisan fell on a Shabbos. We mark the occasion by calling it the Great Shabbos, and reading a *haftorah* that speaks of another great day that will be the harbinger of Moshiach.

It is a lovely thought, disturbed only by the realization that the tenth of Nissan does not always fall on Shabbos, and the Shabbos before Pesach does not always coincide with the tenth of Nisan! Why do we mark the day of the week of the original event, rather than the calendar date, as we do on other occasions?

A different passage from the Zohar^[3] contains a clue. "And Hashem blessed the seventh day."^[4] This blessing took place not once, at the time of Creation, but every Shabbos. All the blessing of all days of the week derives from what Hashem bestows upon Shabbos. Hashem provides all the *berachah* that He intends to give on Shabbos, and from there it flows to the week that follows. There is no difference between blessings meant for the community as a whole, and those sent for the individual. It all happens on the Shabbos before.

Shabbos Hagadol distinguished itself, then, in that regard. All the great miracles associated with the Exodus had already flowed from Heaven on that day, placing them in position for the fifteenth of Nisan when they would become manifest.

Each Rosh Hashanah is awesome – literally – albeit in a different way. The detailed fate of everything in Creation is determined on Rosh Hashanah. All kinds of blessings, their form and their quantity, are fixed by the judgment of Rosh Hashanah.

Shulchan Aruch^[5] specifies that the *parshah* of Nitzavim should always be read on the Shabbos preceding it. Now we know why. All those blessings are set into motion and fixed into the earthly scheme of things on the Shabbos before. The first verse of the *parshah* is dead-on. "You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem." *Hayom* – on the day of Rosh Hashanah all things stand before Hashem – but what they will receive in their judgment has already taken up residence in the lower worlds on the Shabbos before.

The *pasuk* addresses everyone, but stresses those who heard Moshe's words. Everyone and everything is judged on the great *Hayom* – but the overall nature of the judgment is determined by the position of Klal Yisrael, to whom is entrusted Hashem's strategy for the future. The *pesukim* convey some of the seriousness of the day. It reminds us that everyone is scrutinized. Everyone's life hangs in the balance, beginning with the greatest and most important. They continue the inventory of the community, ending with the wood-choppers and water –drawers. They are called out not to imply that they are less important or more menial than other vocations. Great *tzadikim* worked at these jobs, and became giants of Torah. Rather, the Torah wishes to convey that all the service industries ultimately are important for how they tie into the progress of the Jewish people, which remain at the center of His judgment.

In the final analysis, the judgment on Rosh Hashanah is meant to determine who the individual can "pass into the covenant of Hashem." We are here for a purpose; our lives are contingent. We are in covenant with G-d. Part of our responsibility is to accomplish particular tasks He has assigned to us. Each Rosh Hashanah we stand before Him, and He determines what set of circumstances are most suitable for us to achieve what He expects of us. For some, a life of plenty will facilitate maximum efficiency. Others will be spoiled by it, and their efforts hampered. They will do better under pressure or even deprivation. If that be the case, their judgment will reflect it.

In effect, what we have made of ourselves, especially the refinement of our personalities, will determine on Rosh Hashanah the parameters of the coming year. We are assigned the conditions that are best suited to our pursuing our main careers as servants of Hashem and His mission.

^[1] Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Devarim 29:9-11

^[2] Zohar, Pinchas 231A

^[3] Zohar2 88A

[4] Bereishis 2:3

[5] Orach Chaim 428:4
