

# WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

*by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner*

This week we read the double parsha of Nitzavim/Vayelech. "A'tem nitzavim ha'yom kulchem lifnei Hashem - You are all standing today before Hashem... L'avr'cha bivris - For you to enter the covenant... Asher Hashem koreis imcha ha'yom - that Hashem is making with you today. (29:9-11)"

What was unique about this covenant? Why did the pasuk change from the plural (a'tem -you are all) to the singular (l'avr'cha, imcha - you)? The Kli Yakar writes that the original covenant had been broken by the sin of the golden calf. We had not been bound to one another and therefore didn't feel the responsibility to stop others from erring. As long as I'm okay I needn't worry. In order to remedy that, a new covenant needed to be made. A covenant of 'arvus' - of collective responsibility - of being guarantors for one another. A covenant of the plural being transformed into the singular. "Kol Yisroel areivim zeh l'zeh" - the destiny of every member of Klal Yisroel is inextricably connected to the destiny of each and every one of us.

We are able to watch someone else make a poor investment. It's his money - it's his decision. When we know it is borrowed money, we might find it a little harder to watch, but we'd manage to stay silent. He's a big boy - it's not for me to interfere. If, however, we were the personal guarantors on the loan... FORGET IT!!! There's NO WAY I'm going to let you throw your money into that sinkhole! Once we stand to lose from the venture, we'll do everything in our power to stop him. "Kol Yisroel areivim zeh l'zeh!"

The Tanna Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai depicts it even more graphically. It can be compared to people travelling together on a boat. One passenger takes out a drill and begins to pierce the wood beneath his seat. "What do you care?", he asks his incredulous co-travelers, "I'm only drilling under my seat!".

It is not enough for us as individuals to be doing the right thing. We must look around, see who might need some help and recognize that we are responsible for all those that we are able to reach. If we don't help them, then we are lacking. "Kol Yisroel areivim zeh l'zeh."

This concept takes on halachic (Jewish law) significance. Even if I have already made kiddush (the sanctification of the Sabbath that is pronounced over wine) and have thereby fulfilled my obligation, I can make kiddush again in order to allow someone else to fulfill his mitzva along with me. The basis of this being that if someone has not yet fulfilled his mitzva, then my fulfillment is considered to be lacking. "Kol Yisroel areivim zeh l'zeh."

The whole Jewish world was in a state of panic-stricken terror as the trial of Mendel Bialus was

taking place in Russia. He was being tried for allegedly murdering a Christian child and using the blood for the baking of matzos. The prosecution was claiming that the Talmud incites the Jews to murder Christians. Their 'clear proof' was a statement made by Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai: "You (the Jewish nation) are called 'adam' (a person) and the gentiles are not called 'adam' (a person)". If the Talmud teaches that gentiles are not considered people, it is no wonder that they murder our children without any feeling of conscience!

Rav Meir Shapiro of Lublin sent to Rav Mazeh, the Chief Rabbi of Russia, the correct explanation of that gemara in order to silence the prosecution. "Kol Yisroel areivim zeh l'zeh." The fate of Mendel Bialus affects the whole Jewish nation. All of the Jews throughout the world are helping in every possible way as they breathlessly await the outcome of the trial. What would be the reaction of the gentiles if a gentile was being tried for an offense in a far away land? Those in the actual neighborhood would be somewhat actively involved in trying to help the accused. The other members of that country would be very minimally involved, if at all. Those outside the country would have no interest whatsoever.

That is the difference between the Jewish nation and the other nations. "We are called 'adam' - we are likened to a single individual - when one part of the body is in pain the entire body endures that agony. The nations are not called 'adam' - they are not likened to a single individual. When one member is in pain, the others don't experience the suffering. They are 'anashim' - people; not 'adam' - a person. "Kol Yisroel areivim zeh l'zeh."

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Parshas Nitzavim, the parsha read the shabbos before Rosh Hashana is intimately connected to Rosh Hashana. "R'eh nasati l'fanecha ha'yom es ha'chaim v'es ha'tov, v'es ha'mavess v'es ha'ra" - see, I have placed before you today life and good, and death and evil. (30:15)" Which day is today?

Rosh Hashana is the day that Adam Harishon was created. Once there were free-will subjects in the world, the Kingdom of Hashem was initiated. Every year, on Rosh Hashana, that kingdom is renewed. Man's task in life is to accept upon himself this malchus shamayim (Kingdom of Heaven) - the acceptance that we must (for our own benefit) follow the rules, and to accept that everything that occurs in this world has been directed by Hashem. The Ohr Gedalyahu explains that the judgment of Rosh Hashana is based on the degree that a person has accepted that majestic rule in the past, and his degree of willingness to accept this rule in the present and the future. This judgment determines the role he will play in this kingdom in the future.

Today refers to Rosh Hashana! On this holy day I have placed before you the choice of life or death, good or evil. Choose a life of closeness to Hashem! Choose a life which recognizes that we are living under His watchful and loving supervision! Choose life!

The Maharam of Rittenberg was falsely accused of spying and was thrown into prison. The Jews were warned that anyone even inquiring about his welfare would also be imprisoned. Nevertheless,

some Jews managed to secretly broker a deal to release their Rebbe in exchange for a phenomenal sum of money. The Maharam, upon hearing of the plan, refused to have them go against the halacha and pay more than his value. This, he felt, would only encourage further such imprisonments in the future. Ultimately, the Maharam remained there until his death, and even then, the authorities didn't allow him to be removed for burial.

Some time later, with the body of the Maharam still in its unburied state, a wealthy Jew managed to bribe the officials there to allow him to be removed for burial. The day after the burial, that wealthy Jew died. The matter was a cause of great curiosity until a few days later.

The rich man appeared in a dream to a close friend of his and told him that the night of the burial the Maharam had appeared to him in a dream. He had thanked him for enabling there to be a burial and had offered him a choice. You can either have fabulous wealth for all generations or you can come immediately and join me on my level of olam habah (the world to come). "I chose the second choice and left the physical world the next day."

Paradoxically, by choosing death he chose life.

May we merit to help others throughout our lives, recognizing the collective responsibilities that we all carry. Choosing to have our lives serve as examples of the dedication that loyal subjects must show to their benevolent King.

Good Shabbos.  
Yisroel Ciner

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The author teaches at [Neveh Tzion](#) in Telzstone (near Yerushalayim).

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