

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week, the last Shabbos before Rosh Hashanah [the Jewish New Year], we read the double parsha of Nitzavim/Vayelech. "Atem nitzavim [You are standing] ha'yome [today] kulchem [all of you] before Hashem your G-d. [29:9]"

On the day of Moshe's death, he gathered the entire nation to stand before Hashem and enter the covenant with Him. The commentators explain that this was a covenant of 'arvus', literally defined as being a guarantor. Taking collective responsibility for one another.

This parsha is always read on this Shabbos because it alludes to Rosh Hashanah. The Zohar teaches that when the passuk [verse] said: "You are standing before Hashem ha'yome [today]," this refers to the judgment day.

The Nesivos Sholom pursues this thought further. The word 'nitzavim' means standing in a strong, firm manner. Furthermore, as the passuk later states that Moshe spoke to all of Yisroel [Israel], the word 'kulchem' [all of you] seems to be unnecessary.

He explains that, on a deeper level, the passuk is teaching us how we'll be able to confidently stand strong and firm before Hashem on Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgment. The advice given is 'kulchem'--by seriously accepting the responsibility of a guarantor through connecting oneself to the nation at large, one has the collective merit and national assurances to back him up. As such, he can stand confidently before Hashem on Rosh Hashanah.

This explains Rabi Akiva's famous statement: Love your neighbor as yourself; that is a great fundamental of the Torah. What is so unique about this precept more than the many others taught by the Torah? He explains that living by and adhering to this concept is the strength of the Jew throughout all generations and situations. Only by connecting to the klal [nation at large] does one qualify for the special compassion that Hashem, Avinu Shebashamayim [our Father in Heaven], feels and acts upon toward His children.

The Mir Yeshiva had set up temporary quarters in Shanghai during their escape from the murderous clutches of the Nazis. It was a time fraught with constant dangers and split-second life and death decisions were being made on an almost daily basis.

In the synagogue where the yeshiva was based, there were some boys who preferred sitting with their study partners in a less crowded side room rather than in the main study hall.

When the matter became known to Rav Chaim Shmuelovitz zt"l he reproached them in no uncertain terms. "Everyone must realize that the yeshiva at large is being judged in heaven with the collective merit of the group. This applies to all of those who are sitting and learning together as part of that group. Anyone who separates himself will be judged as an individual and will need an incredible amount of personal merit in order to be saved."

Certainly during that period of our history, when every day was a day of harsh judgment, one had to be constantly connected to the klal in order to stand strong before Hashem.

A man once approached Rav Sholom Shwadron zt"l after he had delivered his Friday night talk and told him the following story. (Found in *The Maggid Speaks* by Rabbi Paysach Krohn.)

The time after World War I was one of relative freedom for the Jews of Russia. I was involved in diamonds and things were going very well.

Every morning I was at my office at 8:00AM and I was busy all day. One morning I went to my office a bit early to get some paperwork done, carrying, as usual, my valise of diamonds and jewelry. On the way I heard a man calling out from a small synagogue, asking for 'a tzentzer,' the tenth man to complete the minyan [quorum]. When he saw me turn towards him, he shouted to me, "Come in, come in, we need you for the minyan."

Realizing that I had time to spare I decided to help out and be the tenth man. However, upon entering I saw that there were only three other men beside myself and the man at the door who by now had resumed his search for 'a tzentzer.'

A bit upset at having been duped, I turned to the man at the door complaining that I wasn't the tenth but the fifth! "Don't worry," he called back. "Many Jews pass here and we'll have a minyan in no time."

I began reciting T'hilim [Psalms] for the next ten minutes. By that time he had only managed to find one more person so I got up to leave. "Please," he began to plead with me. "Today is my father's yahrtzeit [day of passing] and I'm trying to get a minyan together as fast as possible in order to say Kaddish [mourner's prayer]. Please stay."

"I can't stay any longer," I protested. "I must be in my office right now."

At this point he turned a bit nasty. "I'm not letting you out! I have yahrtzeit and I have to say Kaddish. As soon as I get ten together you can go."

I reluctantly returned to my T'hilim but when another ten minutes had only yielded two more people I again began to make my way toward the door. He pointed his finger at me and said: "If you were the one saying Kaddish for your father you'd want me to stay and I would. Now I want you to do the same for me!"

His pointing out how I would feel in his shoes made me view the whole situation differently and I decided that come what may, I would remain. At about 8:30 he finally got his minyan together. I

thought he would say a Kaddish and let us go but he instead began at the beginning of services. I calculated that I wouldn't reach my office until well after 9:00.

I kept hoping that an eleventh man would enter the synagogue, allowing me to duck out but it didn't happen. I was stuck there until the final amen was answered after the final Kaddish.

He then thanked us profusely, served some cake and drinks and let us leave.

When I and my valise filled with jewelry came within two blocks of my office a man I knew came frantically running over to me. "The Bolsheviks took over the government and some of them came in and killed the Jews at the diamond exchange. They're now busy looting as much as they can. Run for your life!"

I ran for my life, hid for a few days and was finally able to get out of Russia.

Love your neighbor as yourself, and as such, stand before Hashem on Rosh Hashanah.

Good Shabbos,

Yisroel Ciner

Warmest wishes of mazel tov to Moti Probkevich and Elke Fischlewitz on the occasion of their engagement. May they have much simcha and bracha together.

The merit of this parsha is dedicated to Necha Shulamis bas Esther, amongst all of the expectant women of Klal Yisroel. May their births go easily and speedily and may they and their children all be healthy and well in guf and nefesh.

Copyright © 2000 by [Rabbi Yisroel Ciner](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

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