

# READING BETWEEN THE LINES

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

*(29:9) "Today you are all standing today before the Lord, your G-d"*

**1.** We must realize that we are not in this alone. We are each a part of a nation and we are each responsible for the nation's relationship with G-d.

*"your leaders, your tribal chiefs, your elders, your l Israelite man.*

**2.** The nation is a composite of many individualized talents and assignments. Some will naturally rise to positions of leadership and some will be elected by popular vote; however, no one is exempt from participating in the communal mission of serving G-d as His chosen nation. Every Israelite man is essential in accomplishing the national task.

*(29:10) "Your children, your women"*

**3.** The nation is far more than its leadership. The nation is founded upon a conglomerate of families sharing similar goals, values, and history. Families are comprised of fathers, mothers, and children. Fathers are mandated to share in the national responsibility by virtue of being "Israelite." Mothers are equally responsible to the nation by allowing their men to play at leadership while letting them know that without the women the men would be leaderless. However, the security of a nation is and will always be its children, and it's the children that must be first in line for our national and familial attention.

*"and the proselytes in your camp?"*

**4.** We do not live in a vacuum. We might be the smallest and most dispersed among the nations; however, we are also the most noticed. G-d made it so because it is essential for our accomplishing the national mission. Who we are and what we are must be noticed by the other nations if we are to teach them by example. That means that we all live in the proverbial fishbowl. It also means that they will see the bad as well as the good. They will scrutinize our integrity, challenge our social values, and be in awe of our families. If anything will attract them it will be the children and the family. There will even be those who will want it all. They will want to become Jews. Those Gayrim? critical to accomplishing the national task. Value them because without them none of us can do all that must be done.

*"even your wood cutters and water drawers."*

**5.** Not everyone will want to join us because of inherent nobility. Some, like the Givonim (Rashi 29:10),

will be motivated to convert because of fear and secondary gain. Nevertheless, they too must be numbered and valued as essential to the nation; otherwise, they would not have been included in the evolution of our history. Remember, each of us is at times like a Givoni. Not all of our reasons for serving G-d are noble. Sometimes we do what we do for public recognition or fear of failure, yet we are still included in the conglomeration of nationhood; yet we still give ourselves full credit for our efforts and participation.

*(29:11) "You are thus being brought into the covenant of G-d your Lord?"*

**6.** Moshe was not just reviewing the socio-familial makeup of the nation. Moshe was reestablishing and recommitting the nation to its task. That task was for the nation to maintain an active relationship with G-d which meant keeping G-d's Torah. However, this was the second "making of the covenant." The first covenant with G-d was at Mt. Sinai in 2448, 3316 years ago; this second covenant was 40 years later at the edge of the Jordan river. How was the second covenant different from the first?

*"accepting the dread oath that He is making with you..."*

The second covenant was different than the first. The first covenant at Sinai was made under miraculous circumstances that defied reality and demanded absolute acquiescence. It should have defined reality and embraced acquiescence. The covenant at the edge of the Jordan on the very last day of Moshe's life (see Rashi 29:9) was much different. It was with a nation ready and willing to accept the consequences of their relationship with G-d. They were a nation prepared to accept the dreaded side of the oath as well as its wondrous benevolence.

*(29:12) "He is establishing you as His nation so that he will be a G-d to you"*

**7.** The deal was simple. Be His nation and He will be your G-d. If you think about it, G-d of the universe does not need human acceptance or acquiescence; his existence is independent of all else. Whether humans believe in Him or not is irrelevant to His existence. However, the G-d of the Jews desires our acquiescence and acceptance. G-d desires our willful obedience in being His treasured nation.

*"just as He promised you, and as He swore to your ance Yitzchak, and Yakov."*

**8.** What a gift! What an opportunity! Imagine being told that President Bush wanted to get to know you better and spend time with you. As surreal as that might be we would wonder why. Why me? Why you? Why does G-d want to hang out with us? The answer is, because we are the children of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yakov and G-d promised them that He would chose their children to have a special relationship with. In fact, the notion of G-d having sworn should humble us considerably. We must all wonder whether G-d would have still wanted us as His nation had He not promised! Rest assured that He would have still wanted us as His Am Segulah (treasure). That is why the verse first states, "just as He promised you", and then, "as I promised to Avraham?" Being t Avos and Imahos got us through the front door, but being ourselves has kept us in the game.

*(29:13-14) "But it is not with you alone that I am making this? dreaded oath covenant? I am making it with? both those who are here are not yet here? "*

Just as the Avos and Imahos deserved their singular relationships with G-d and passed on the opportunity for the same to their children, so too must you do for your children and all future generations. At first you will grant them the gift of G-d and they will accept it with all the grace and dignity of the truly innocent. Each child and each subsequent generation starts innocent. They are offered the beauty of Torah and the dignity of its lifestyle. However, they grow up and soon realize that there are consequences. Part of it is a dreaded oath. They must then decide for themselves whether or not they will continue to embrace the innocence and the beauty. They must decide whether or not they will do the same for their children.

*(29:15-16) "You know that we lived in Mitzrayim? You sa idols of wood?"*

**9.** You know that there are other beliefs and practices. You know that you have choices. The Jews never lived in a vacuum. We have always been exposed to the other nations and their ways. We have always decided for ourselves what to believe in and at what price. That which they consider divine, fulfilling, and beautiful is to us "disgusting." G-d and Torah leave no room for any other beliefs.

*(29:17-18) "Today, there must not be among you any man woman family or tribe whose heart strays from G-d (and says) I will have peace even I see fit!"*

**10.** Beware of the insidious nature of idolatry. Idolatry fosters self-indulgence, selfishness, and a tagically false sense of security and confidence. You will believe that you make your own destiny and will attribute your success and gain to your own efforts. You will rationalize that as you do whatever you desire you will be somehow protected by your place within the nation. Know how wrong you are. Who you are and what you are is a product of being a part of the nation. To the extent that you identify with the nation and participate in the national mission, you will be gifted with a unique relationship with G-d and His benevolence. However, if you attribute success to yourself and deny your place within the nation, you will be subject to the dreaded consequences of the oath.

*(29:19-20) G-d will not forgive such a person, G-d will separate he will be subject to the dread curses written in this Torah*

## Preparing For Selichos

The moment we hear the Chazan (cantor) sing the hauntingly beautiful melodies of the Yomim Noraim, a hushed sense of expectation descends over the congregation. The Day of Judgment is almost here. Am I ready? Am I prepared? If not, it is definitely time to begin. This is the intended reaction to the Selichos which we will begin Saturday night, at midnight.

Chazal established two basic rules for Selichos.

**1.** Always start on a Sunday.

**2.** We must say Selichos for a minimum of 4 days prior to Rosh Hashanah. We start on Sunday to give ourselves the added advantage of starting our appeal while still cloaked in the sanctity of Shabbos. We start at midnight so as to grab every possible moment of preparation for the Day of Judgment. We say Selichos for a minimum of 4 days to imitate the 4 day process of preparation that a Korban - sacrifice underwent before it could be offered on the Mizbeach (alter).

The Selichos themselves capture the hopes and tears of generations as they beseeched G-d for continued protection, forgiveness, and benevolence. Highlighting the entire service is the repetition of the 13 names of G-d as He manifests His love, compassion, and mercy for His people and universe. The names by which we refer to G-d (Hashem = the Name) describe how we wish G-d to relate to us at any given moment. Taught to Moshe in the aftermath of the Golden Calf, this 13-name formula evokes G-d's mercy.

Rosh Hashanah means going to court, which should foster in us an overwhelming sense of vulnerability. This feeling should humble us into recognizing how much we need G-d's mercy and forgiveness. Motzoei Shabbos (Saturday night), through the words of the Selichos, we will be able to express that sense of humility and vulnerability.

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