

B”H

Maamar Atem Nitzavim 5725

Dvarmalchus Nitzavim 5776 Sedra Nitzavim

THREE ASPECTS OF NITZAVIM

“YOU ARE STANDING TOGETHER TODAY ALL OF YOU, BEFORE THE L-RD YOUR G-D, your leaders, the heads of your tribes, your judges, your elders, every Jewish man, your children, your women-folk, your proselyte in the midst of the camp, hewers of wood and drawers of water.”

Rabbi Shneur Zalman points out¹ that this Sedra is always read before Rosh Hashana. In fact the word ‘today’ hints at Rosh Hashana, as we say in the Rosh Hashana prayers ‘today is the beginning of Your works, a memory of the first day’. For on Rosh Hashana of the individual sparks of souls of the Jewish people ascend and are connected to their root, together ‘before G-d’. The Sedra lists ten levels for the entire people has ten levels which are all connected together.

The hewers of wood and drawers of water, as explained in Chassidic teaching, do not just mean people of humble occupation. Wood *etz* in Hebrew is like the word *etzah*, counsel: one has to hew out the false counsel of the evil desire; likewise water represents lust and desire, which has to be drawn up and poured away. This means the ten levels are not only positive, but including some which are morally negative. But all are united together before G-d.

Their being united is in such a way that the highest and the lowest are joined. Each needs the other, just as in a single body the head needs the feet and is organically connected with them, so that the head can be helped medically by an injection² in the leg.

What unites them all these disparate aspects of the Jewish people together? The text continues: “so that you should be joined in a Covenant”. A Covenant joins people in a way which goes beyond ordinary kinds of relationship and feelings of affection and preference. A Covenant joins people in a way which transcends Reason.

In this case, the Covenant is the revelation of G-d’s Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, which unite together the entire Jewish people.

This theme links with another discourse on this Sedra, by the Tzemach Tzedek. He explains there that Nitzavim, ‘standing’ is actually a word in the Niphal case, passive. It therefore really means ‘you have been enabled to stand’. It is the Divine radiance of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, which enables the Jewish people to stand united before G-d.

Further, the word Nitzav has another meaning in Hebrew: leader. The effect of Rosh Hashana is that it makes the entire Jewish people into Nitzavim, leaders in their own inner world, in

¹ In a discourse in Likkutei Torah.

² In the original: ‘blood letting’.

which the Divine Soul battles with the Animal Soul. The Jewish people are called Jacob, a word which in Hebrew relates to the heel, because at the stage of Jacob the person's Divine soul might descend even to their 'heel' to enjoy the pleasures of this world and be subject to them.

But the higher form of the individual and the nation is Israel, a name they hold because 'you struggled with angels and men and you prevailed.' The exalted spiritual effect of Rosh Hashanah is to give each of us the opportunity to be master in our inner world, Israel.

The Torah text continues 'so that you can be a people together, and He will be your G-d.'

Precisely this is the theme of Rosh Hashanah. As the Talmud puts it: G-d says 'say before Me the verses of Kingship, so as to make me rule over you'.

Unified together as the Jewish people gives us the power to appeal to G-d in His exalted Essence, far beyond the worlds, that He should indeed be King over us. And then we ask further that He should rule over the whole world, by the fact that every created thing recognises their source in G-d.

Then we 'remind' G-d of the Binding of Isaac, through verses about Remembering, and about the Shofar, and we actually blow the Ram's Horn.

Through this G-d grants us a year of blessing and goodness³.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

³ The end of the discourse has not been found.