

## Parshat Nitzavim

# All As One

*This week’s parsha opens with the statement that the Jewish people are standing together to enter into a covenant. The current Sich’a analyzes the nature of the covenant and the connection between the Chassidic explanation on the verse and its basic interpretation.*

This week’s *parsha* opens with the following verses:

### Text 1

You are all standing this day before the Lord, your G-d, the leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, every man of Israel... that you may enter the covenant of the Lord, your G-d, and His oath, which the Lord, your G-d, is making with you this day.

*Devarim 29: 9-11*

In explaining these words, there is a famous insight taught by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the Alter Rebbe, which was heard in the name of the Ba-al Shem Tov, the founder of Chassidism. It elucidates that this verse is expressive of the idea that the Jewish people are meritorious in judgment even before the day of Rosh HaShana.

The Alter Rebbe explains as follows:

### Text 2

When I was in Mezritch I heard from my Rebbe, the Maggid, in the name of the Ba-al Shem Tov: “The seventh month [which is Tishrei] is the first of the months of the year. The Holy One Himself blesses it on Shabbat *Mevarchim* (the Shabbat of Blessing), the last Shabbat of the month of Elul. And with the power of this [blessing], Israel blesses the other months, eleven times a year.

It is written [in this week’s Torah reading]: *Atem nitzavim hayom* - "You stand this day." *This day* refers to Rosh Hashana, which is the Day of Judgment (as it is written, "The day came," which Targum renders, *the day of the great judgment came*). Yet you remain standing firmly upright (*nitzavim*), meaning - you will be vindicated in judgment.

On the Shabbat preceding Rosh Hashana, the last Shabbat in Elul, we read the *parsha* of *Atem Nitzavim*, which is G-d's blessing on the Shabbat that blesses the seventh month. That seventh month (Tishrei) is itself sated - and in turn satiates all Israel - with an abundance of good for the duration of the (coming) year."

*Hayom Yom, 25 Elul*

On the same verse the commentators explain, that these words express that Moshe *Rabbeinu* entered the Jewish people into a covenant to be guarantors for one another for the fulfillment of the *mitzvot*:

### Text 3

The fact that the rest of this *parsha* is stated in the plural except for this verse, where it discusses “that you may enter a covenant,” and the verse mentions them in the singular, is a clear indicator that the primary purpose of this covenant is to be guarantors. For, because of the aspect of being guarantors, all of Israel is one, like one person.

*Klei Yakar, Devarim 29:11*

It is understood that when there are two explanations on the same verse, there is a connection between the two. Therefore, in our verse there are two questions that can be asked:

- A) What is the connection between the idea of being a guarantor and the fact that the Jewish people are vindicated prior to the “day of the great judgment?”
- B) Concerning this idea that the Jewish people became guarantors for one another the Talmud states, that in practice, it only started when the Jewish people entered the land of Israel.

### Text 4

G-d did not punish for transgression committed in secret, until the Israelites had crossed the Jordan.

*Sanhedrin 43b*

For what reason did the responsibility in practice for another Jew only begin after the Jewish people had crossed into the land of Israel?

### Guarantors

In order to understand this, it is important to preface the general concept of *arvus* (the responsibility toward one another) as it relates to the Jewish people.

Logically, the concept of being a guarantor is that the greater person becomes a guarantor for the lesser individual. Hence, by a loan, for example, when a person does business with an individual upon whom he cannot rely on to have the money to pay, he then demands that the person supply a rich guarantor. However, it does not seem to make sense that the lesser person should be the guarantor for the greater person.

Nevertheless, concerning this that the Jewish people are guarantors for one another, the Talmud states:

### Text 5

All Israel are guarantors one for another.

*Talmud, Shavous 39a*

It is understood therefore, that every Jew, from the lowest of levels, is a guarantor for the

greatest of individuals. The practical halachic<sup>1</sup> application of this is that for a blessing over a *mitzvah*, every single Jew can absolve another Jew of his obligation (ex: by reciting Kiddush for another, or blowing the shofar), even if that other person is greater than himself.

### **One body**

On the verse, “You are all standing this day,” the Alter Rebbe explains:

#### **Text 6**

The Jewish people are one corpus... they all gather together, to be united as one... therefore the rabbis of blessed memory stated, be exceedingly humble before every person. Because each individual has levels that his friend does not and each one needs the other. It comes out that there is an advantage in each individual in which he is greater than his fellow, and each needs the other. Similar to an individual that includes both a head and legs. Although the legs are the lowest level and the head is the highest and greatest, nevertheless in a certain aspect the legs have an advantage, as one needs them to walk and they hold up the body and the head...so too Israel is one complete corpus.

*Likutei Torah, Nitzavim 44a*

Every Jew can be a guarantor for another Jew, as every Jew is part of one body. As such, there is an advantage to each person that his fellow does not have.

### **Unity**

The language of the above discourse is precise. It is self-understood that the wording used is not merely to be descriptive, but that there is

specific intent in the particular statements that are made.

When the Alter Rebbe describes the unity of the Jewish people, three points are made. That the Jewish people (a) gather together, (b) for the purpose of being united, (c) as one.

In order to explain this, the Alter Rebbe expresses two ideas:

1) “Each one needs the other.”

2) “Israel is one complete corpus.”

In the unity of the Jewish people there exists various levels. There is the manner in which they are “together,” the manner in which they are “united,” and the way that they are “one.”

In explaining the latter two, their “unity” is brought out through the idea that “each one needs the other,” and the concept of being “one” is expressed through the statement “Israel is one corpus.”

The first thing that is explained regarding the unity of the Jewish people is that they are “together.” The simple definition of “together” is that disparate parts join for the sake of one common goal. There is no intrinsic, internal connection between the various individuals. All that connects them is the common goal.

It is because the connection of “togetherness” does not symbolize any depth in the relationship, that it is added that they are “united as one.” The connection between various Jews is not only that they all serve the Almighty, but that they have an actual bond with one another as well. In this connection there are two ideas—that they are “united” and that they are “one.”

### **Unity vs. Oneness**

The concept of being “united” expresses that the parts become one to a degree. Not only are there

<sup>1</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Admur HaZaken 197:6.

a multitude of separate units gathered in one locale to fulfill a goal, and on an individual level they remain separate, but rather, in their individuality which seems to separate them, this unity is also expressed, as each part fulfills the other.

To illustrate this unity, it is explained that “each one needs the other.” Understanding that each person cannot stand alone, and that they need the talents of their fellow, expresses the fundamental association that each part of the Jewish people has with the other.

However, by definition, “unity” is expressive of a multitude coming together. True, all parts are collected and are joined so that there is a symbiosis between the parts, but they still remain separate entities.

The concept of being “one” consists of a higher level of unity. The separate parts become limbs of “one corpus.”

The unity between the various body parts is not that while each one serves themselves they each need the other, but that they are *one person*. There is no true disparity between the parts, as they are all one body.

This means to say, that it is not that various *separate entities* come together to form one body, but the reverse; that *one body* has various different limbs. The oneness is primary, the separateness is secondary.

### **Advantages to each**

Once it has been explained that the Jewish people are “one,” as they are “one corpus,” it seems superfluous to explain an inferior stage of them being merely united; there the particular parts remain *separate*, except that “each one needs the other.”

If so, why did the above discourse enumerate the particular details, explaining how the parts are

indeed separate, yet need each other, when it should have simply brought out the point that they are “one,” and that seeming individuality and separateness is merely external?

It is therefore clear, that because the level of “unity” was explained as well, it is because there is a uniqueness and advantage to the concept of “unity” that is not found in the idea of “oneness.”

Although all separate limbs together are one body, nevertheless, the perfection of a body is only realized when there are 248 *separate* limbs. When an individual is missing a *particular* limb, the body is not complete.

It is understood therefore, that each limb is by definition different from another, and that there is an advantage to the concept of “united” over the notion of “oneness.”

The idea of “oneness” primarily expresses that the essence of all the individual limbs is that they are one. Meaning to say, that although they *seem* separate in their function, in truth they are all one body.

The concept of “oneness” does not bring out, however, that even regarding the external functionality of each particular limb where they *do* seem separate, that there too they are also united and fulfill one another. It rather articulates the idea to see past the separateness and *ignore* it, it doesn’t express the notion that there too unity is found.

This is the phenomenon that is illustrated in the idea that the Jewish people are “united” and that “each one needs the other.” This is expressive that even at the most external of levels where one sees separateness and differences between individuals, there too unity exists, as each part fulfills the other.

It is the concept of “unity” that is given the most attention in the above discourse, as this is the

most important aspect to be developed in a person. Every individual in his uniqueness must be humble before another person, with the knowledge that in a certain aspect, his fellow is indeed greater than himself.

### **Interdependent**

The two concepts of being “united as one” are, in truth, interdependent.

Through the Jewish people realizing that in their particular details they become united, they are able to reach the deeper realization of “oneness,” of which on a more profound level they are truly one.

For, if they are truly separate parts on an external level, they cannot be one on an internal level. The external humility that comes from the realization that each Jewish person needs the other, is a catalyst for the deeper level of humility—that their particular individuality is not their true identity, but that their true unity is the level on which the entire corpus of the Jewish people is one entity.

On the other hand, it is because in reality the Jewish people are internally “one,” that they are, on an external level, as well “united” and complement one another. For, were they to truly be separate, they would not need the other to enhance their identity. Only because the Jewish people are all parts of one entity is this expressed as well, that in their particular identity they need their fellow.

### **The land of Israel**

Accordingly, it can now be understood why the notion that every Jew is a guarantor for one another began when the Jewish people entered the land of Israel. The concept that the Jewish people are guarantors for one another is a

derivative of the fact that, in truth, they are one individual.

### **Text 7**

All of Israel are guarantors (*areivim*) one for another. Meaning to say, that they are mixed (*me'uravim*) one with the other. “For you (the Jewish people) are called man.” Just as a man has head and feet, and the head receives life from the legs, so too all the Jewish people together are referred to as one man.

*Likutei Torah, Baha-a lot'cha 33c*

The reason why in practice, this responsibility toward each other only began when the Jewish people entered the land of Israel, is since in order for the Jewish people to feel that they are one, they needed to be spiritually in tune with their unity.

Only when they came to Israel and were exposed to the light of the land of Israel, which shown upon them for the purpose of making a dwelling place for G-d, did they actually feel that they were one, to the point that they could be guarantors for one another.

### **The connection**

According to the above, the connection between the two explanations on the verse is understood—that of the Jewish people becoming guarantors for one another and the idea that they are vindicated before the advent of Rosh HaShanah.

Through the event of the Jewish people experiencing *unity* as one entity, are they meritorious in their court case and are blessed with a good and sweet year!

*(Based on Likutei Sichos 4, reworked by Rabbi  
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