

United as One: Pre-Rosh Hashana Reflections

Deut., Ch. 29

9. You are all standing this day before the L-rd, your G-d the leaders of your tribes, your elders and your officers, every man of Israel, 10. your young children, your women, and your convert who is within your camp both your woodcutters and your water drawers, 11. that you may enter the covenant of the L-rd, your G-d, and His oath, which the L-rd, your G-d, is making with you this day, 12. in order to establish you this day as His people, and that He will be your G-d, as He spoke to you, and as He swore to your forefathers to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. 13. But not only with you am I making this covenant and this oath, 14. but with those standing here with us today before the L-rd, our G-d, and [also] with those who are not here with us, this day.

You are all standing this day before the L-rd your G-d (29:9)

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov

“This day” is a reference to Rosh Hashanah, the day on which we all stand in judgment before G-d (the Torah reading of Nitzavim is always read on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah).

You are all standing:

Rashi

The verse says, “this day,” teaches us that on the day of his death, Moses assembled Israel in the presence of the Holy One, Blessed is He, to bring them into His covenant.

You are... standing this day:

Rashi

You have provoked the Omnipresent to anger many times, yet He has not made an end to you. Indeed, you still exist before Him [“standing... before the L-rd”].

This day

Rashi

You exist now just as this day exists. For although it becomes dark for a period, nevertheless it shines again. So too, here, G-d has made light for you, and He will again make light for you in the future. And the curses and sufferings preserve you and enable you to stand before Him--the curses, by preventing you to stray from serving Him, and the sufferings, by cleansing you of your sins.

And [also] with those who are not here:

Rashi

Also with future generations.

...Your tribes, your elders, and your officers, and all the men of Israel; your little ones, your wives, and your stranger that is in your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water

Alshich

The Talmud (Pesachim 50a) tells the story of Rav Yosef the son of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, who fell ill and was at the brink of death when his father’s prayers brought him back to life. When he came to, his father asked him: “My son, what did you see (in heaven)?” Rav Yosef replied: “I saw an upside-down world. Those who are on top here, are on the bottom there; and those who are here regarded as lowly, are



פרק כב

ט. אתם נצבים היום בקלכם

לפני ה' אלקיכם ראשיכם

שבטיכם זקניכם ושטריכם

כל איש ישראל: י. טפכם נשיכם וגרף אשר בקרב מחנהך

מחטב עציך עד שאב מימך: יא. לעברך בברית ה' אלקיך

ובאלתו אשר ה' אלקיך כרת עמך היום: יב. למען הקים

אתך היום לו לעם והוא יהיה לך לאלקים פאשר דבר לך

וכאשר נשבע לאבותיך לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב: יג. ולא

אתכם לבדכם אנכי כרת את הברית הזאת ואת האלה

הזאת: יד. כי את אשר ישנו פה עמנו עמד היום לפני ה'

אלקינו ואת אשר איננו פה עמנו היום:

exalted in heaven." That the leader or the sage is superior to the wood-hewer or the water carrier is only from our earth-bound perspective, which sees a "hierarchy" of roles. But when "you all stand before G-d" there is no higher and lower -- what seems "low" here is no less lofty and significant in G-d's eyes.

Ohr Chaim

Moses divided the people into categories to suggest that everyone is responsible according to how many others he or she can influence. Leaders may be able to affect masses of people, individuals, their immediate families or neighbors, children, only a few friends. G-d does not demand more than is possible but He is not satisfied with less.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi

Like the various organs and limbs of a body, each of which complements, serves and fulfills all the others, so, too, the Jewish people: the simple "wood-hewer" or "water-carrier" contributes something to each and every one of his fellow Jews, including the most exalted "head."

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

How can we truly unite? After all the Torah implies that there are differences between Jews, some being "your leaders" while others are "your water drawers"?

Firstly, who is to say who is ultimately higher on the ladder of achievement. Appearances can be deceiving and we tend to over-evaluate ourselves while under-evaluating others. Secondly, even if we have evaluated ourselves correctly, just because we are a leader in one particular aspect of life does not mean that there are not other aspects of life in which others are leaders. Our sages have said: "All Israel are guarantors for each other" (Talmud, Shevuot 39a). But a person cannot serve as a guarantor unless he is more resourceful in some way than the one he is guaranteeing. For example, a poor man obviously would not be accepted as a guarantor for a rich man's loan. So if the Talmud says that all Jews serve as guarantors to each other, this means that in every Jew there is a quality in which he or she is superior to all others. Thirdly, the conceptual distance between any creature and the Creator is infinite. Thus, when we set out to evaluate ourselves in terms of our relationship with G-d, the profundity of our own worthlessness in the face of G-d's absolute reality will neutralize any presumptions of superiority. The union of all Jews is possible because, as a matter of fact, they are already united by virtue of their soul, the Divine soul, which is actually a part of G-d above, and which is found in every Jew without exception. The profound reflection that you stand "Before G-d" who is "Your G-d", your strength and your life must actualize the union of each of us, in the fullest measure.

SUMMARY

- Our covenant with G-d, as His people, applies equally to each of us, at all times, for all generations.
- Each of us is responsible to do whatever we can, according to our level, to teach and reach out to another.
- We have no way of evaluating our own value or another's value; compared to G-d, we are all infinitely "small".
- Every person has a quality that is unique that only he or she can contribute.
- We all possess a Divine soul, a part of G-d, which unites us all and provides us with the strength to do what we need to do.

