

Dear Friends,

Parashat Nitzavim takes place on the last day of Moshe's life. Before sunset he will ascend Mount Nevo, look out over the Promised Land, and dissolve into God's embrace. A moment before, though, he gathers all of the people - men, women, and children, without a Mechitza - and brings them into a renewed covenant with the Eternal One!

"You stand **today**, all of you, before the LORD your God...all the men of Israel, your children, your wives, even the stranger within your camp... to enter into the covenant of the LORD your God, which the LORD your God is making with you **today**... that He may establish you **today** as His people and be your God, as He promised you and as He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I make this covenant, with its sanctions,... with those who are standing here with us **today** before the LORD our God and with those who are not with us here **today**." (D'varim 9-14)

Who are these people who are "not with us here today" and still signed on the covenant?

Most commentators agree that the reference is to all Jews who will be born in the future and those who will choose to join the Jewish People. This covenant is different from others mentioned in the Torah. It is timeless, and therefore eternal. The paradox is that the word that best expresses eternity in this parasha is "today."

The word "today" appears several times in the verses quoted earlier, and it seems to describe a specific unit of time, but this is not the case! "Today" is outside the domain of time, and therefore not part of our linear division between past and future.

[My mom, who edits my drashot in Hebrew every week, sent me the following comment: "In many languages there are indeed three tenses - past, present, and future. In Hebrew there are only two - past and future. A verb in the present tense - in Hebrew - becomes a noun: he who "is guarding" becomes "a guard" in Hebrew... Additionally, there is no distinction made by pronouns for verbs in the present tense. There is only first person, singular and plural, masculine and feminine."]

While we, humans, bind ourselves with our self-imagined sense of time, God is beyond time and therefore not bound by it.

Nitzavim means: standing present. Therefore, in our Parasha, Moshe is reminding us that in making a covenant with the Eternal One, we need to be fully present.

The first to be fully present and fully engaged with Eternity was Abraham, who said: "I am!", or, "Hineni".

Human beings are not always present, in fact, they are usually not. But God is. Any place in the Torah when God wishes to draw our ever-wandering attention to His

never-wandering presence, He does so using the word “Anochi”, translated as “I am”. Not surprisingly, this is the opening word of the Ten Commandments.

A wonderful Chassidic explanation claims that all God really said on Mount Sinai was “Anochi” - I am, nothing else! The rest of the commandments - and the entire Torah, both written and Oral, is concealed within this one word, “Anochi”. On a metaphorical level, it is like a sperm and an egg (yes, back to sperm and egg...). The genetic data they carry can turn, potentially, into infinite options (just Google “epigenetics”), not to mention the infinite number and varieties of human beings that may emerge from it.

Moshe’s greatness as a prophet, and the reason he was the greatest among them, was his ability to hear the infinite possibilities concealed within this one single word, “Anochi”. The Oral Law, continues to be revealed to us to this day, from within that one word that Moshe heard. Every discovery that a person will ever make is simply a fresh realization of that which was kept concealed all these years, deep within this one revealed word: “Anochi”.

This understanding is the key to renewal. How fitting for Parashat Nitzavim to lead us into the new year.

On the eve of Rosh Hashana we are asked to stop our frenetic journey in time, to stand and be present, here and now. By doing so, we can release ourselves from the binding chains of time.

This is the covenant that Moshe asks us to accept.

But how is it done, you might ask?

There is no magic formula, drug, or supplement that can do the work for us. Only deep understanding can bring about a radical change in consciousness. Only humans have a frontal-lobe-cortex, and it is relatively new. We have been wasting energy in vain hoping to master the domain of time by figuring it out. Instead, we are called upon to transcend time, and use our brain to grasp the Eternal. Time imprisons us. Our Sages say that Mitzrayim is the dominion of time, and that the way out of Egypt is through comprehending and internalizing the eternal and the timeless.

Avraham, the first Hebrew, was also the first to respond to God’s “Anochi” with the human “Hineni”. In the time-bound culture of Egypt these words were forgotten. They were rediscovered by Moshe at the Burning Bush when the eternal God appeared before him as Y.H.V.H. - which literally “collapses” all time into one word. With this discovery Moshe led the people out of Egypt, and brought them to the same mountain where he himself heard this truth for. There, they too entered into the covenant with the Eternal One. Forty years later, in this week’s parasha, the pact

between God's "Anochi" - His eternal presence - and the human "Hineni" - our shot at presence - is renewed.

Elul is almost over. 5778, 5779... It is time to transcend time, and re-enter into the covenant with the Time-less, Infinite One.

Shabbat Shalom and Shana Tova!

Elisha