

פרשת ניצבים

Lately, when I am driving and listening to the news on the radio, I hear a new advertisement that is repeated pretty often. The person talking says he is making an on-line transaction at his bank and the notice comes on and writes, 'There is a 10 shekel charge for this transaction. Press 'continue' if you are willing to pay this charge'. The speaker says, 'Can I not press continue? What choice do I have? I need to do the transaction and what alternative is there?'

So much is imposed upon us by others, what do we think about that which is imposed upon us by the Ribbono Shel Olom, the Master of the Universe?

In our Parshas Nitzavim we encounter the final covenant that is made between Israel and the Ribbono Shel Olom.

It follows the other covenants that Hashem made with Israel about which the Torah speaks.

A *Bris* is a covenant, a mutually agreed upon declaration of mutual relationships and interactions entered into by two (or more) parties who have agreed to form such a partnership. We find such covenants throughout the Torah.

Avraham Ovinu made a covenant with his neighbors. We do not know the details of that agreement – but it was made as we read (B'reishis Perek 14/Posuk 13):

וַיָּבֵא הַפְּלִיט וַיִּגַּד לְאַבְרָם הָעֵבֶרִי וְהוּא שָׁכַן בְּאֵלֶינִי מִמְּרָא הָאֲמֹרִי אַחִי אֶשְׁכַּל וְאַחִי עֶנְר
וְהֵם בְּעָלֵי בְרִית אַבְרָם:

The one who escaped came and he told it to Avram the Ivri and he dwelled in the planes of Mamrei the Emorite, the brother of Eshkol and the brother of Oner; they were members of the covenant of Avram.

Avraham and Avimelech entered into a covenant as we read (ibid. Perek 21/Posuk 27):

וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם צֹאן וּבָקָר וַיִּתֵּן לְאַבְיִמֶלֶךְ וַיִּכְרְתוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם בְּרִית:

Avraham took sheep and cattle and he gave them to Avimelech and they both made a covenant.

And there are other examples as we know.

However, it is difficult to talk about an agreement between individuals in the same way that we talk about a covenant between Man and G-d.

The first such covenant between Man and G-d appears in Parshas Noach after the devastating *mabbul*. We read there (ibid. Perek 9/Posuk 12):

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים...לִּקְיָם זֹאת אוֹת הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר אָנִי נֹתֵן בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין כָּל נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר
אֶתְּכֶם לְדֹרֹת עוֹלָם:

G-d said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I am placing between Me and between you and between all living beings that are with you for eternal generations.'

Now, not only is this covenant not produced by mutual discussion between the two parties, it is given as a statement of fact. It is true that the rainbow of this verse is positive for mankind – G-d will never again bring a devastating flood upon humanity, but it does not appear to have an aspect of mutuality. Why is it referred to as a *covenant*?

And, thus, that *bris* is unlike the covenant of Avraham Ovinu and Avimelech above where we read:

ויכרתו שניהם ברית

They both made a covenant,

We read, regarding the rainbow, that Hashem says

אָנִי נֹתֵן

I am placing.

Where is the mutuality?

And when Hashem makes his covenants with Avraham Ovinu at *Bris bein HaB'sorim*¹ and *Bris Milah*², Hashem imposes the covenant. This does not mean that Avraham Ovinu would have rejected the covenant, not at all. Avraham could have refused to do G-d's command as an expression of his free-will. Nonetheless,

¹ B'reishis Perek 15/Posuk 18.

² B'reishis Perek 17/Posuk 11.

it was not the same as the covenant between two people and yet the Torah uses the same term – ברית - for both.

Famously, the central and most important covenant between Hashem and Israel took place at Sinai, at *Mattan Torah* and regarding that most fundamental of covenants between Hashem and Israel we read (Sh'mos Perek 24/Posuk 8):

וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת הַדָּם וַיִּזְרֹק עַל הָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה דַם הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת ה' עִמָּכֶם עַל כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה:

Moshe took the blood and he cast it upon the people and he said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that Hashem made with you about all of these things.'

They, Israel and Hashem did not make the covenant. *Hashem* made the covenant.

Furthermore, Chazal interpreted one of the P'sukim of *Mattan Torah* to teach us a lesson which should be surprising in the context of *covenant*. That verse reads (ibid. Perek 19/Posuk 17):

וַיֹּצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת הָעָם לְקִרְאֵת הָאֵל...לִיקִים מִן הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּתְּיָצְבוּ בְּתַחְתִּית הָהָר:

Moshe took the people out from the encampment to meet G-d and they stood themselves erect at the bottom of the mountain.

Chazal's interpretation of this verse is well-known. We read in Masseches Shabbos (88 a):

וַיִּתְּיָצְבוּ בְּתַחְתִּית הָהָר, אָמַר רַב אַבְדִּימִי בַר חַמָּא בַר חַסָּא: מִלְמַד שְׁכַפָּה הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עֲלֵיהֶם אֵת הָהָר כְּגִיגִית, וְאָמַר לָהֶם: אִם אַתֶּם מְקַבְּלִים הַתּוֹרָה - מוֹטֵב, וְאִם לֹא - שֵׁם תֵּהָא קְבוּרַתְכֶם.

They stood themselves erect at the bottom of the mountain – Rav Avdimi bat Chama bar Chasa said, 'This verse teaches that Hashem placed the mountain over Israel as if it was a barrel and He said to them, "If you accept the Torah, fine. If not, there will be your burial."

The mutuality seems quite distant when the threat of death hovers over the agreement of the other side to the covenant!

And that brings us to our Parshas Nitzavim which is always the final Sidra that is read before Rosh Hashanah.

The beginning of the Parsha is remarkably reminiscent of *Mattan Torah* as is evidenced by its first verse (D'vorim Perek 29/Posuk 9):

אַתֶּם נֹצְבִים הַיּוֹם כְּלָכֶם לִפְנֵי ה' אֵלֵינוּ... לִיקֹם רְאִשֵׁיכֶם שְׁבֻטֵיכֶם זְקֵנֵיכֶם וְשָׂרֵיכֶם כָּל
אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

You [Israel] are standing erect today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d, your heads of tribes, your elders and your officers, every man of Israel.

Just like Israel stood erect at *Mattan Torah* for the inimitable Covenant at Sinai, so they stand erect at the very end of their sojourn in the wilderness as their four decades there come to their conclusion.

How does the Torah describe the event that is about to occur, the event that calls upon Israel to stand erect? We read the next three verses (P'sukim 10-12):

טַפְּכֶם נְשִׁיכֶם וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ מִחֹטֵב עֵצִיךָ עַד שֹׂאֵב מִיַּמִּיךָ: לְעַבְדְּךָ בְּבְרִית ה' אֵלֵינוּ... לִיקֹם וּבְאֵלֵינוּ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֵלֵינוּ... לִיקֹם כִּרְתַּת עֲמֻךָ הַיּוֹם: לְמַעַן הִקִּים אֶתְךָ הַיּוֹם לֹא לְעַם וְהוּא יְהִי לְךָ יָא... לִיקֹם כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לְךָ וְכְאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב:

Your children, your wives, your convert who is in the midst of your camp from the woodchopper to the water-drawer. For you to pass into the covenant of Hashem your G-d and His oath that He makes with you today. In order to establish you today as a People for Him and He will be G-d for you as He spoke to you and as He swore to your Fathers, to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Yaakov.

Hashem calls upon Israel to enter the covenant with Him. Again, mutuality is absent. The Divine covenant is inherently different than that covenant that individuals or nations agree upon.

In fact, on the face of it, the absence of mutuality in our Parsha would seem to be greater than in that of *Mattan Torah*³.

³ Earlier we referred to the Gemara in Masseches Shabbos that teaches that Israel was threatened with death if they did not accept the Torah.

And although we pointed out the obvious – the close relationship between וּיְתִיצְבוּ that is written in Parshas Yisro regarding Mattan Torah and נִצְבִים that is written in our Parsha, the words are not the same.

וּיְתִיצְבוּ is in a reflexive form. Just like וּיְתַלְבְּשׁוּ would mean ‘they dressed themselves’ so וּיְתִיצְבוּ means that they stood themselves up. The action of standing erect, or ‘at attention’ was not forced upon them at all. Moshe took them out ‘to meet G-d’. Undoubtedly they arranged their external posture and their internal mind-set to be appropriate for the situation.

On the other hand, the fact that it says נִצְבִים in our Parsha and does not imitate וּיְתִיצְבוּ from *Mattan Torah* implies that the posture of standing erect and at attention was imposed upon them.

This time they were not taken ‘to meet G-d’ and the reason is simple. The Revelation of Mattan Torah could not be repeated; it was unique. And therefore, Moshe imposed upon Israel so that they should know that the covenant into which they were entering was binding.

On the other hand, that approach does not seem to be consonant with the Midrash that Rashi brings at the beginning of Parshas V'zos HaBracha.

We read there (D'vorim Perek 33/Posuk 2):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' מִסִּינַי בָּא וְזָרַח מִשְׁעִיר לְמוֹ הוֹפִיעַ מֵהַר פָּאֶרָן וְאַתָּה מִרְבֶּבֶת קִדְשׁ מִיַּמִּינוֹ אֵשׁ דָּת לְמוֹ:
Moshe said, ‘Hashem came from Sinai, He shone from Seir, He appeared from Mt. Paran; he came from the myriads of sanctity; from His right was the fiery law.

Rashi writes:

זרח משעיר למו - שפתח לבני עשו שיקבלו את התורה ולא רצו:
מהר פארן - שהלך שם ופתח לבני ישמעאל שיקבלוהו, ולא רצו:
He shone from Seir – He opened up to the descendants of Eisav that they should accept the Torah and they did not want to.
From Mt. Paran – Hashem went there and opened up to the descendants of Yishmael that they should accept it; they did not want to.

The paradox is dealt with by the various commentators. Maharal suggests that only regarding Torah She'b'al Peh were Israel placed in a situation of duress but regarding Torah She'biChtav they said, נעשה ונשמע – they accepted it unconditionally.

Let us now examine the covenant of our Parsha and see how it fits in with the pattern of the other Divine covenants which we have noted.

To gain a perspective on this question we must read Rashi's two explanations for the opening Posuk of our Parshas Nitzavim and proceed from there.

Rashi adds to the dimensions of *nitzavim* and writes (Posuk 12):

והוא יהיה לך לא...ל'קים - לפי שדבר לך ונשבע לאבותיך שלא להחליף את זרעם באומה אחרת, לכך הוא אוסר אתכם בשבועות הללו, שלא תקניטוהו אחר שהוא אינו יכול להבדל מכם. עד כאן פירשתי לפי פשוטו של פרשה.

He will be G-d for you – Because Hashem spoke to you and swore to your Fathers that He would not switch the seed of Israel with another nation – and therefore He forbids you with these oaths [that are in this Parsha] not to anger Him because He is unable to separate from you.

Up until this point I have been explaining according to the *pshat*.

The idea that Rashi presents to us here is fascinating. It makes HaKodosh Boruch Hu subservient to us, *kavayachol*. He Yisborach is attached to us by the inviolable oath that He has made to us and He 'cannot' extricate himself from it. And therefore, to express these ideas colloquially, He is commanding us not to place Him in a situation where He would want to sever His ties with us but would be unable to do so because of the sacrosanct pledges that He made.

But, as difficult as it is to express these ideas, we do remember that this is not the first time that we have learned of G-d's 'dependence' on us.

In Parshas Bo, prior to the Exodus, we read Hashem's words to Moshe Rabbenu (Sh'mos Perek 11/P'sukim 1-3):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה עוֹד נִגַע אֶחָד אָבִיא עַל פְּרַעֲהַ וְעַל מִצְרַיִם אַחֲרָי כִּן יִשְׁלַח אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה כְּשִׁלְחוֹ כְּלָה גֵרֶשׁ יִגְרֶשׁ אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה: דִּבֶּר נָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיִּשְׁאַלוּ אִישׁ מֵאֵת רֵעֵהוּ וְאִשָּׁה מֵאֵת רְעוּתָהּ כְּלִי כֶסֶף וְכִלְי זָהָב: וַיִּתֵּן ה' אֶת חַן הָעָם בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם גַּם הָאִישׁ מִשָּׁה גָדוֹל מְאֹד בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּעֵינֵי עַבְדֵי פְרַעֲהַ וּבְעֵינֵי הָעָם:

Hashem said to Moshe, 'One more plague I will bring upon Par'o and upon Egypt and afterwards he will send you from this place; when he sends you it will be finished; he will surely drive you out from this. Speak please in the

ears of the people and they should ask⁴ each man from his neighbor and each woman from her neighbor silver vessels and gold vessels. Hashem gave Israel favor in the eyes of Egypt; also the man Moshe was very great in the Land of Egypt in the eyes of the servants of Par'o and in the eyes of the people.

There does not seem to be a connection between the pronouncement that Moshe will make before Par'o and G-d's command for Israel to take the possessions of the Egyptians. Why are these two events placed together?

Rashi explains:

דבר נא - אין נא אלא לשון בקשה, בבקשה ממך הזהירם על כך שלא יאמר אותו צדיק אברהם (בראשית טו/ג) ועבדום וענו אותם קיים בהם, (שם יד) ואחרי כן יצאו ברכוש גדול לא קיים בהם:

Speak 'no' – 'No' is an expression of a request. Hashem said to Moshe, 'Please, I have a request from you – warn them about this [regarding asking the Egyptians for the silver and gold vessels] in order that the Tzaddik Avraham will not say, "G-d fulfilled His promise that they would be enslaved and afflicted but He did not fulfill His promise of 'afterwards they will go out with great possessions.'"

And thus, Rashi is teaching that, *kavayachol*, Hashem is beholden to us and this covenant comes to preserve the equilibrium of His relationship with Am Yisroel.

And Rashi gives us a second *p'shat* in reference to the purpose of this gathering and of the *bris* that would take place there. He writes:

ומדרש אגדה למה נסמכה פרשת אתם נצבים לקללות, לפי ששמעו ישראל מאה קללות חסר שתיים, חוץ מארבעים ותשע שבתורת כהנים, הוריקו פניהם ואמרו מי יוכל לעמוד באלו, התחיל משה לפייסם אתם נצבים היום, הרבה הכעסתם למקום ולא עשה אתכם כלייה והרי אתם קיימים לפניו:

⁴ The word וישאלו can be translated either as 'asked' or as 'borrowed'. 'Asking' could also be interpreted as borrowing. We chose the term 'asking' which is more ambiguous so as not to deal with the question that would need to arise from 'borrowing': If Israel told the Egyptians that they were 'borrowing' the various objects – how is it that they did not return them?

Of course the *meforshim* deal with that question but that is not our subject here.

Midrash Aggadah writes: Why does Parshas Nitzavim follow immediately after the curses – the *tochechah* of the previous week's Parshas Ki Sovo?

The answer is that when Israel heard the ninety-eight⁵ curses in Ki Sovo, in addition to the forty-nine in Sefer Vayikro [in Parshas Bechukosai] their faces lost their color and they said, 'Who can manage to withstand these curses?'

Moshe began to assuage them and said, "You are standing erect here today". You have done much to anger Hashem and He did not destroy you. You are standing before him.'

This Rashi also presents us with a serious question. Imagine a principal lecturing a class about the strict rules and regulations that cover test-taking. And the principal warns that even a suspicion of cheating will lead to immediate expulsion. 'Keep your eyes on your paper only. If you even appear to be looking at someone else's test, your paper will be confiscated and you will fail the course!'

And then a student raises his hand and says that it is almost impossible that someone won't stretch a little bit and turn his head and it may appear that he is looking when he was just loosening up his tight muscles.

And then the principal says, 'Yes you are correct, that does happen – and it has happened and we ignore it.'

It is not difficult at all to imagine that by giving such a response, the principal has undermined his whole standing.

Didn't Moshe Rabbenu, with his words of assuagement, undermine the ferocity of the curses that he said in Parshas Ki Sovo and those that Hashem said in Parshas Bechukosai?

Furthermore, the continuation of the Parsha would seem to contradict any assuagement that may have been realized. We read some of the P'sukim (ibid. 17, 19, 22) that follow immediately.

⁵ Rashi did not write 'ninety-eight'. He wrote 'one hundred, minus two'. Of course that number is 98. Nonetheless '100 [minus 2] is more emphatic because it mentions '100'!

פֶּן יִשׁ בְּכֶם אִישׁ אוֹ אִשָּׁה אוֹ מִשְׁפָּחָה אוֹ שִׁבְט אֲשֶׁר לָבְבוּ פָנָה הַיּוֹם מֵעַם ה' אַ...לִּקְיָנוּ
 לְלַכֵּת לְעַבֵּד אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַגּוֹיִם הֵהֵם פֶּן יִשׁ בְּכֶם שָׂרֵשׁ פָּרָה רֹאשׁ וְלַעֲנָה:
 לֹא יֵאבְדָה ה' סֶלַח לוֹ כִּי אָז יַעֲשֶׂן אִף ה' וְקִנְאָתוֹ בְּאִישׁ הַהוּא וְרִבְצָה בוֹ כָּל הָאֱלֹהִים
 הַכְּתוּבָה בַּסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה וּמָחָה ה' אֶת שְׁמוֹ מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:
 גְּפָרִית וּמֶלַח שֶׁרְפָה כָּל אֶרֶץ לֹא תִזְרַע וְלֹא תִצְמַח וְלֹא יַעֲלֶה בָּהּ כָּל עֵשֶׂב כְּמַהֲפַכַת
 סֹדֶם וְעַמֹּרָה אֲדָמָה וְצִבּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר הִפָּךְ ה' בְּאִפּוֹ וּבְחִמָּתוֹ:

Lest there be in you a man or a woman or a family or a tribe whose heart turns today from being with Hashem our G-d to go and to worship the gods of those nations; lest there be among you a root that grows large and is bitter.

G-d will not desire to forgive him because then the anger of G-d and His zealousness will smoke against that person and all of the oath that is written in this Book will crush upon him and Hashem will erase his name from under the heavens.

Sulfur and salt will burn all the land; it will not be able to be planted and it will not grow anything, a blade of grass will not come up in it; like the overturning of Sedom and Amorah, Admoh and *Tzevoyim* that Hashem overturned with His anger and His fury.

And thus each of the two explanations that Rashi brings raise their own questions.

The first explanation portrays HaKodosh Boruch Hu as being weak and needy. It is as if Hashem *needed* Israel to bind themselves to the covenant into which they were entering.

The second explanation that he presents seems to take away the impact that the two *tochechos* are supposed to have and at the same time reinforces it with harsh warnings and prophecies.

But, I believe that we can suggest that these two explanations serve to give us a perspective upon the nature of our covenant with HaKodosh Boruch Hu, from the covenants that He made with Avraham Ovinu to those with our entire people. Since all of those covenants are binding upon us no less than they were millennia ago, we are required to understand them, particularly as we approach the Yomim Noraim.

Let us think about a covenant, a vital agreement, between two parties, a *bris* that isn't with the Almighty.

If we are dealing with respectable individuals, honest and fair, while they are certainly interested in their own welfare, they will not seek to cause harm to the other party.

However, since a *bris* is to be a long-lasting agreement, it certainly is reasonable to think that the participants will err in their judgment. As time goes on they may see that the stipulations that were made were not in their best interest and thus, despite their sincerity and good-will upon entering that agreement, may wish to end it. If the other side is pleased with the covenant, they may feel that the very attempt to conclude the agreement is an abrogation of the *bris*, in and of itself. The mutual trust upon which the covenant was based may deteriorate quite rapidly. 'Brothers' may now become enemies.

And, if one or both of the parties are manipulative when they enter into the agreement, beside the above, it is quite likely that one or both might attempt to cheat the other by knowingly making conditions that will be harmful in the long run.

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, our Kri'as HaTorah will conclude with an episode involving Avraham Ovinu and Avimelech, King of Plishtim. We read (B'reishis Perek 21/Posuk 27) that they made a covenant:

וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם צֹאן וּבָקָר וַיִּתֵּן לְאַבְיִמֶלֶךְ וַיַּכְרֹתוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם בְּרִית׃

Avraham took sheep and cattle and he gave them to Avimelech; the two of them made a covenant.

If you review the situation there, you might find it strange that Avraham gave all of the animals in order to make the covenant. Since Avimelech was requesting Avraham's good will and not vice-versa, it seems that at the very least the former should have given all of the animals, or at least have offered half of them.

But, we must understand that Avraham was quite sincere and looking to make peace and to assuage Avimelech and he contributed the entire amount.

However, we read in Midrash B'reishis Rabba (Parshata 54/5) that HaKodosh Boruch Hu was not pleased with Avraham for entering such a covenant. Alshich

HaKodosh explains that the reason for the Divine displeasure with Avraham was because he should have first consulted with Hashem before making that covenant.

But we can ask – Avraham Ovinu was the paradigm of an איש חסד – wasn't it an appropriate expression of his love for others that led him to make such an agreement?

The answer is that Avraham Ovinu should have been aware of the limits of his foresight and his ability to anticipate all that could occur in the future. Divine acquiescence to the Bris would have been a validation of its propriety. In the absence of such Divine acquiescence, it was wrong for Avraham to pledge⁶ himself in such a way to Avimelech.

And thus we are able to now contemplate the nature of a covenant with HaKodosh Boruch Hu.

Those who enter into such a covenant have innate trust in G-d's good will. It is true that He imposes covenants upon people – but only upon those who wish to accept the fact that He is interested in their good.

No one protested the covenant of the rainbow in Parshas Noach, because G-d promised that He would no longer bring floods upon the people and such a promise could not hide any negative outcome that could have come from it.

Israel did not protest the threat of הר כגיגית, the mountain that threatened to decimate them at Sinai, because they had already indicated their willingness to accept G-d's covenant sight unseen. That is the meaning of the verse at the end of Parshas Mishpotim (Sh'mos Perek 24/Posuk 7):

וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע:

Moshe took the Book of the Covenant and he read it in the ears of the people and they said, 'All that Hashem spoke we will do and we will hear'.

It was specifically within that context of the covenant that they said that we will do without first hearing all that is incumbent upon us.

⁶ We read in that section (Posuk 31):

עַל כֵּן קָרָא לְמָקוֹם הַהוּא בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע כִּי שָׁם נִשְׁבְּעוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם:

Therefore they called that place 'B'er Sheva' because they both swore an oath.

Israel trusted G-d to deal with them fairly and thus they entered into that covenant that was imposed upon them in a willing⁷ fashion.

When Hashem offered the Torah to the nations⁸, they did not trust Him to deal appropriately with them – that He should first appreciate *their* cultural milieu and *their* values and so they first wanted to know what the covenant entailed and rejected it when it was understood by them to be antithetical with their morals.

And even though the Divine covenant is imposed, it is not biased and skewed. There is no manipulation; the Divine side of the covenant does not seek to take advantage of the human side.

How do we know that?

That is what Rashi writes:

שלא תקניטוהו אחר שהוא אינו יכול להבדל מכם.

Not to anger Him because He is unable to separate from you.

In the jargon of our modern day, we would say that HaKodosh Boruch Hu was completely transparent in His agreement. He pledged His unwavering and unswerving loyalty to Israel, ‘hoping’ that He would receive the same in return.

Because the Divine covenant is not manipulative and is interested in the welfare of the human side, we find ourselves with the paradoxical situation in which, on the one hand, Israel receives multiple curses and on the other hand, their impact is muted because despite those curses, Israel remains ‘standing erect’ and intact before G-d.

And then, after emphasizing their endurance, terrible curses are uttered once again.

The explanation is clear. The Divine covenant with Israel has Israel’s welfare in mind. There is no hope or intent or sinister plot that Israel should fail. The covenant

⁷ At the same time, the Gemara in Masseches Shabbos as above says that the imposition gives Israel some type of defense for their violations of the Torah. They could always say, ‘we never said we agreed’. See the Gemara there and the many meforshim.

⁸ See note 3 above.

has built-in encouragement and reassurance, while at the same time emphasizing that G-d 'means business'.

And, thus, Parshas Nitzavim is most worthy to prepare us as we are about to enter Yom HaDin and Yom HaKippurim.

After all, doesn't the combination of the 'Day of Judgement' and the 'Day of Atonement' sound paradoxical? What message is sent to us when we are told we are being judged and then told that forgiveness comes a week later?

But that is precisely the message. The judgement of Rosh Hashanah is part of our covenant with Hashem. It tells us that Hashem 'means business'. The atonement of Yom HaKippurim informs us that when Hashem imposed His covenant upon us it was with our very best interests in mind, interests that we would have never been able to contemplate on our own with our limited knowledge, understanding and perspective.

As we enter the Yomim Noraim in the next days, G-d's imposition of His Will upon us is an undeniable example of His ongoing Providence that reflects His love for His People and His hope for Am Yisroel to reach its potential in its loyalty to Him and to ourselves.

Shabbat Shalom

Ksiva Vachasima Tova

Rabbi Pollock