

From: by way of Joshua Cypess <Netvort@aol.com>
To: <cypessJ@ckj.org>
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Subject: Netvort : parshas Netzovim - Vayeilech 5762

In the Circle

By Rabbi Joshua (ovally known as The Hoffer) Hoffman

Parshas Nitzovim begins with a description of the nation's gathering for the purpose of making a covenant with God. Moshe tells the people, " You are standing today, all of you, before the Lord, your God : Your heads, your tribes, your elders, and your officers - all the men of Yisroel ; your small children, your women, and your convert, who is in the midst of your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water, for you to pass into a covenant of the Lord, your God, etc." (Devorim, 29 : 9-11). The commentators note a seeming superfluity in these verses. First we are told that the whole nation was standing, and then we are given a list of ten different groups of people within the nation. If we already know that everyone was there, why was it necessary to enumerate all of these different elements?

Rebbe Zadok HaKohein of Lublin, in his commentary Pri Tzadik, cites a Midrash Tanchuma, which apparently was bothered by the question that we mentioned. The midrash, interpreting these verses, explains that Moshe is telling the people, in God's name, that even though there were various leaders appointed over the people, they are all equal before God. Reb Zadok comments on this midrash that the expression in verse 9, "lifnei Hashem" - before the Lord - has a certain kabbalistic significance, and, as interpreted by the midrash, carries the same message as that found in relation to the splitting of the sea when the people left Egypt. The midrash there says that the handmaiden saw, at that event, that which the prophet Yechezkel did not see. Actually that midrash is difficult to understand. Is it really possible that a simple maidservant should see a vision beyond that which Yechezkel saw. We know that he was a witness to the awesome vision of the divine chariot! , as well as other important visions.

Reb Zadok says that the idea here is similar to the one we find in yet another midrash, that in the future, the righteous will form a circle around God and each one will point to the center and say (just as the nation all said at the splitting of the sea) "this is my God and I will extol Him." What that midrash is saying is that each tzadik has his own perception of the divine and his own relationship with Him, but they are all equidistant from the midpoint from God Himself. Symbolically, the idea is that each one's approach is equally valid and valuable, because each one has a different mission to fulfill, and a different message about the divine to communicate. In a similar way, at the splitting of the sea, each member of the nation perceived the event in a way commensurate with his or her mission in life. The prophet Yechezkel did not see what the handmaiden saw because he did not have the same mission - no one did. Each person in the nation has his own unique ! contribution to make, and all of them are considered equal before God, because all are needed in order for the nation to function properly, to carry out its role in his world in the best possible way.

The message of these midrashim, as explained by Reb Zadok, should bring us to a heightened appreciation of the value of each one of our fellow Jews. Each one has his own, unique role to play within the nation, and, in this sense, the success of each member affects our own success, as well. We are now approaching Rosh Hashanah, which initiates the ten-day period of teshuvah, or repentance, culminating with Yom HaKippurim. The rabbis teach us that, in order to receive atonement for sins that we have committed against our fellow man, we must approach the person we have wronged and appease him. Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pekudah, in his classic work Duties of the Heart, writes, moreover, that someone who has not repented for the sins he committed against his fellow man does not attain atonement even for the sins he committed in the realm of transgressions between man and God. Perhaps the idea being expressed here is that since our fellow Jew has such great value before! God, as we have seen in the midrash, by breaking our relationship with our fellow Jew we are, to a degree, disturbing our relationship with God, as well. May we all come to appreciate the value of all our fellow Jews, and be inscribed for a wonderful new year.

Please address all correspondence to the author (Rabbi Hoffman) at the following address - JoshHoff @ AOL.com.

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