is written, “You are standing today, all of you, before the L-RD your G-d: The heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers – all the men of Israel; your small children, your women, and your proselyte who is in the midst of your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water” (Deuteronomy 29:9-10).

King David wrote, “Who shall ascend the mountain of the L-RD, and who may stand in His holy place? One with clean hands and pure heart; who has not sworn in vain by My soul and has not sworn deceitfully” (Psalms 24:3-4). He also wrote, “Who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy mountain? He who walks uprightly and does what is right, and who speaks the truth from his heart. He who does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his fellow, nor casts disgrace upon his close one” (ibid. 15:1-3). From here we learn that a person cannot stand before Hashem and reside in His holy place unless he possesses the attribute of truth and distances himself from lies and falsehood. Our Sages have said, “The seal of the Holy One, blessed be He, is truth” (Shabbat 55a).

It is also written, “One who practices deceit shall not dwell in My house. One who tells lies shall not stand before My eyes” (Psalms 101:7). This teaches us that we can only stand before Hashem if we hold truth in hand. It is also written, “The L-RD hates these six, and the seventh is the abomination of His soul: Haughty eyes, a false tongue…” (Proverbs 6:16-17).

Hence Moses told the Children of Israel, “You are standing today – the word atom ("you") being formed by the same letters as the word emet ("truth"), for here Moses was giving them the Torah for the third time. As the Midrash tells us, the Torah was given in three places (on Mount Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, and in the plains of Moab), and in each case we find the term yetzivah (to stand firm): On Mount Sinai, as it is written: "Vayityatzov [And they stood] at the base of the mountain” (Exodus 19:17); in the Tent of Meeting, as it is written: “Venitzvu [And they would stand] each by the door of his tent” (Exodus 33:8); and in the plains of Moab, as it is written: “You nitzavim [are standing] today, all of you, before the L-RD.”

Since they had accepted the yoke of the Torah, they took upon themselves the attribute of truth, for the Torah is called "truth," as it is written: “Buy the truth and sell it not” (Proverbs 23:23), which the Sages say refers to the Torah. Moses told the Children of Israel, “Since you have taken upon yourselves the Torah and the truth, you can stand before Hashem.” The Sages have said, “Truth can stand, falsehood cannot stand” (Shabbat 104a), and it is written: “True speech is established forever” (Proverbs 12:19). We find in the Aggadah that when the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to create the world, all the letters immediately descended and stood before Him. One letter said, “Create the world beginning with me,” while another said, “Create it beginning with me!” The tav was the first letter to present itself before Hashem, followed by the shin, which said to Him: “Master of the universe, may it please You to create the world with me, for Your Name begins with me, as it is written: ‘This is Shemi [My Name] forever’ [Exodus 3:15], and I am also the first letter in the Name Sh-ddai.” When Hashem said no, the shin asked why, to which Hashem replied: “Because both shav [lie] and sheker [falsehood] begin with you, and sheker has no legs, nor do you. How can I create the world by a letter without legs?” Dejected, the shin immediately departed.

Why did Moses tell the Children of Israel, “The heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers – all the men of Israel; your small children, your women, and your proselyte who is in the midst of your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water”? It was because they believed that they did not have to learn Torah with those who were interior to them in wisdom. Moses explicitly mentioned “your small children, your women, and your proselyte,” meaning that everyone has the duty to learn Torah with those of lesser stature, for the Torah was not only given to the wise, but also to commoners and the feeble-minded. The duty of the wise is to study with those lacking wisdom, so that the Torah may be familiar to everyone. We learn this from Hashem's attributes, for His seal is truth, and one of His attributes is to do good to the wicked and the good. Furthermore, each day He feeds the entire world, from the horns of the reimag to the eggs of lice.

Just as Hashem does good to both small and great, whoever possesses the attribute of truth must do good to all kinds of people. The Sages have said in the Aggadah: “The heads of your tribes” – although I counted your leaders, your elders, and your officials, you are all equal before Me, as it is written – “all the men of Israel.” Hence we learn that all Jews are equal before G-d.

Of Rabbi Chiya the Sages have said, “How great are the deeds of Chiya!” In fact Rabbi Chiya said of himself: “I ensure that the Torah will never be forgotten in Israel. For I take flax seed, plant it, and weave nets. [With these] I hunt deer, with whose flesh I feed orphans and from whose skins I prepare scrolls. I then proceed to a town where there are no teachers of young children, and I write out the five books of the Chumash for five children, and I teach another six children the six orders of the Mishnah” (Ketubot 103b). This exemplifies the principle, “Whoever possesses the attribute of truth, it is a sign that he possesses the attribute of humility,” for he is not afraid to teach the truth and recognize sin. When a person is infused with humility, he learns with everyone and does not say, “How can I study with so-and-so? He hasn’t learned Chumash or Mishnah, and he never frequents Torah scholars!” Actually, the Torah is only acquired through humility. Why are the words of Torah compared to water, as it is written: “Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water” (Isaiah 55:1)? It is in order to tell us that just as water travels from higher to lower ground, words of Torah only endure with someone who is humble. Hence King David said, "Who shall ascend the mountain of the L-RD, and who may stand in His holy place? One with clean hands and pure heart; who has not sworn in vain by My soul and has not sworn deceitfully,” He also stated, “Who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy mountain? He who walks uprightly and does what is right, and who speaks the truth from his heart. He who does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his fellow, nor casts disgrace upon his close one.” Hashem placed the attribute of truth next to the attribute of humility, thereby teaching us that it is impossible to find one without the other. In other words, a person who possesses one also possesses the other, and likewise a person who lacks one will necessarily lack the other, meaning that he will be unable to stand before Hashem.
Jews are Responsible for One Another

We know that when the Children of Israel received the Torah from Hashem, it was not just for themselves that they agreed to fulfill it. Rather, each Jew committed himself to strengthening, as much as possible, the performance of Torah among other Jews, and we all became responsible for one another. Thus it is written: “The hidden things are for the L-RD our G-d, and the revealed things are for us and for our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah” (Deuteronomy 29:28). As Rashi explains, this means that they became responsible for one another, and it is the source of the Din stating that every Jew can discharge another from performing a mitzvah, even if he has already discharged himself from it. This applies, for example, to reciting Kiddush or sounding the Shofar (as the Rosh states on Berachot 20), for if one’s fellow is lacking a certain mitzvah, it is as if the person himself is lacking it. It is also our duty to prevent others from transgressing a prohibition, for if we fail to prevent them when we can, we will be punished for it. In the blessing Emet VeYatziv, we explicitly state that our acceptance of the mitzvot regards ourselves, our children, and the entire Jewish community. We say, “His words are living and eternal...for our fathers, for us, for our children and our descendants, and for all the generations of the progeny of Israel” (Shabbat 54b).

Let us think about this for a moment: If Reuven becomes a guarantor for Shimon to the tune of several hundreds of dollars – and even more so if he guarantees thousands of dollars – and he sees that Shimon wants to launch a new business that he knows will lose money, he will try by every means to prevent him from launching it. This is because he knows that if Shimon does so, Reuven will have to pay for every cent of it. The same applies here as well, for a person must realize that if, by issuing a reprimand, he can prevent another person or the people of his community from committing a sin, yet he fails to do so, he will be considered to be responsible for that sin. As the Sages have said, “Whoever can forbid his household [from committing a sin] but does not, is seized for his household. [If he can forbid] his fellow citizens, he is seized for his fellow citizens; if the whole world, he is seized for the whole world” (Shabbat 54b).

– Chomat HaDat

A Pearl From the Rav:

The Essentials of Teshuvah

It is written, “The hidden things are for the L-RD our G-d, and the revealed things are for us and for our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah” (Deuteronomy 29:28).

The commentators have said that the words Elokeinu vehaniglot lanu u’levaneinu (“our G-d and the revealed things are for us and for our children”) are an acronym for Elul. This means that teshuvah deals essentially with sins that are committed in secret, for a person will repent of sins committed in public because he knows that people are aware of them. As for sins committed in secret, he feels that he does not need to repent of them. The Torah therefore warns us by saying, “The hidden things are for the L-RD our G-d, and the revealed things are for us and for our children forever.” That is, just as every person repents of sins committed before other people and before his children, he should also wholeheartedly repent of sins that he committed against himself. Hence at the outset of the parsha we read, “You are standing today,” for which the Sages have said: “Today means Rosh Hashanah.” Furthermore: “The heads of your tribes” – although I appointed your leaders, elders, and officials, you are all equal before Me, as it is written – “all the men of Israel.” This tells us that when the Children of Israel repent, they are all equal before Hashem, and the hewer of wood has the same status as the head of the tribes. Everyone is then free of sin, which is why the verse states: “You are standing today” – when do you stand before Hashem without shame? On Rosh Hashanah, when everyones does teshuvah.

G-d Sides With the Pursued

It is written, “In order to establish you this day as His people” (Deuteronomy 29:12).

Here Rashi states, “Curses and sufferings preserve you and enable you to stand before Him.” When accusations arise against the Children of Israel due to their sins, or when calls for their destruction come before Hashem to such a degree that He can no longer, as it were, silence such accusations, what does He do to counter such calls? He stands against Israel’s pursuers, who mistreat and persecute them. This is because it is one of Hashem’s attributes to side with the pursued, even if the righteous are pursuing the wicked. Since the Children of Israel are being pursued, they are saved from their accusers, and thus Israel’s pursuers strengthen and preserve them before Hashem.

– Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman

All United As One

It is written, “You are standing today, all of you, before the L-RD your G-d” (Deuteronomy 29:9).

Concerning the Halachot of Rosh Hashanah, the Tur writes that when a person is charged with a crime, he normally wears black garments, attires himself in black, lets his beard grow, and does not cut his nails. This is because he does not know what his verdict will be. The Children of Israel, however, do not act in this way, for they wear white garments and attire themselves in white. They trim their hair and they eat and drink on Rosh Hashanah, for they know that the Holy One, blessed be He, will perform a miracle for them. The Alter of Kelm explains that each individual must fear the day of judgment and not rely on miracles. However the Jewish community as a whole can be certain that a miracle will be performed for it. Hence every individual should make sure that he is connected to the community and serves it in such a way that it needs him, for a miracle will be performed on its behalf. This is what Moses told the Children of Israel: “You are standing today, all of you” – for you are all united as one, which is why the Holy One, blessed be He, will perform a miracle of you. Even if you have greatly upset G-d, He will not destroy you, and you will continue to live before Him.

– Darchei Mussar

Worse Than the Ungodly

It is written, “I shall have peace, though I walk as my heart sees fit, to add drunkenness to thirst” (Deuteronomy 29:18).

The Torah warns, “Perhaps there is a man among you...a root flourishing with gall and wormwood. It will be that when he hears the words of this curse, he will bless himself in his heart, saying: ‘I shall have peace, though I walk as my heart sees fit, to add drunkenness to thirst.’ The L-RD will not be willing to forgive him” (vv.17-19). Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman wrote that in earlier generations, sinners felt some degree of shame and had to act in secret and find pretexts for their actions. Yet now, sinners are not content with feeling no
We Are Guilty

*It is written, “The hidden things are for the L-RD our G-d, but the revealed things are for us and for our children forever” (Deuteronomy 29:28).*

Rashi states, “Now you might object: ‘But what can we do? You punish the while community because of the sinful thoughts of one person….’ [G-d replies] ‘I will not punish you for the hidden things!’ … Yet if we do not execute judgment upon these [open sins], then the whole community will be punished.” Rashi goes on to say that G-d did not punish the whole community until Israel crossed the Jordan, for it was then that they accepted responsibility for one another.

At that point a new page opened in the life of the people. When they accepted the oath on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, the Children of Israel became responsible for one another, and from then on there was no longer “me” and “you” – there was “us,” like a single person. Everyone became responsible for everything done by others, a mutual responsibility that has direct Halachic consequences. With regards to non-obligatory blessings over food, a person who has already recited a blessing or who has not eaten cannot discharge someone else of his duty because he himself is not obligated to say this blessing. Therefore he is not responsible for what others say in this case. Let him not eat and not say the blessing. However for blessings that are mitzvot, even a person who has already performed the mitzvah can recite the blessing once again for someone who needs to recite it. Why? The Arizal was cited as stating that as long as someone else still has a mitzvah to perform, then I myself am responsible for that mitzvah. That is, my duty is to ensure that he fulfills his duty. On Yom Kippur, when a Jew bows before G-d, he confesses his sins in the plural, not the singular. He does not say, “I am guilty,” but rather, “We are guilty.” All Israel forms but a single entity, which is why an individual confesses a particular sin even if he himself has not committed it. If someone else has committed it, it is regarded as if he committed it as well, which is why the text is written in the plural.

-- U’Bah HaLevi

Overview of the Parsha

Following the introduction to the covenant in Parsha Ki Tavo, the covenant itself and the people it pertains to are addressed in Parsha Nitzavim. The Children of Israel are promised that even if they violate the covenant, they will eventually repent. At the end of the parsha, we find words that encourage the Children of Israel to observe the Torah and its mitzvot.
In a robe of righteousness has He cloaked me, like a bridegroom who bedecks himself with his jewelry” (Isaiah 61:10).

It seems that this verse alludes to the holidays that take place in the month of Tishri. Rosh Hashanah is the day of judgment, but the Children of Israel sense that this judgment is solely for their good, that they may attain holiness and blessing. This is alluded to in the words, “I will rejoice intensely with the L-RD.” For Hashem’s Name designates mercy, and everything is but immense mercy. “My soul will exult with my G-d” – this is the Name that designates justice, for the Children of Israel rejoice in severe decrees, as it is written: “For the enjoyment of the L-RD is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). If the Children of Israel know that severe decrees exist solely for the needs of kindness, it is gevurah (strength) that is found in chesed. “For He has dressed me in the garment of salvation” – this alludes to Yom Kippur, as the Midrash states: “The L-RD is my light and my salvation” (Psalms 27:1). He is ‘my light’ on Rosh Hashanah and ‘my salvation’ on Yom Kippur (Vayikra Rabba 21:4). The Jewish people are saved on Yom Kippur, this alludes to Yom Kippur, as the Midrash states: “He who obeys Me will rest in security.” That’s why my body has not rotted.” Rabbi Nachman said to him, “I will build a cabin for you.” He replied, “Don’t do anything for me, and don’t move me from here because I was buried with permission. Instead, put the earth that was taken from me back in its place.” Rabbi Nachman was afraid and worried throughout the day, for he thought to himself: “Woe to me, for perhaps I disturbed the dead!” He then had a dream in which he was sitting in a sukkah of myrtle. He began to praise the Holy One, blessed be He, and he read the verse, “Happy is the man who listens to Me by knocking at My door every day.” Blessed be the Name of the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, Who deprives no creature of his reward. Even if one who did not insist on being right receives the reward of remaining silent, how much more will the Holy One, blessed be He, give an infinitely greater reward to one who studies Torah every day, educates his children to study Torah, and walks in the ways of Hashem and with humility! – Reshith Chochma, Sha’ar HaAnava, Part III

Chesed Protects the Body

To gladden the groom and bride is also an important duty. … We have learned this from the episode concerning the wicked Jezebel, the wife of Ahab. She was the one who incited him to worship idols and to shed the blood of Naboth of Jezreel. According to Scripture, her punishment was that dogs devoured her flesh. When her remains were collected for burial, only her skull and heels could be found. Chazal have explained that these limbs were left intact because her feet would dance and her head would nod to the ground. Hence these were left over by the dogs. These facts demonstrate the greatness of the mitzvah. … The mitzvah of gladdening groom and bride reaches its highest form when not many guests are present, or when poor couples or the children of parents who have become bereft of their wealth, marry. Few come to give them joy. … Chazal have said: Whoever gladdens the bridegroom is privileged to acquire Torah, and it is considered as if he had sacrificed a thanksgiving offering in the Temple or as if he had rebuilt one of the ruins of Jerusalem.

– Ahavat Chesed

Allusions to Tishri

It is written, “I will rejoice intensely with the L-RD. My soul will exult with my G-d, for He has dressed me in the garment of salvation.” In a robe of righteousness has He cloaked me, like a bridegroom who exults with splendor, like a bride who bedecks herself with her jewelry” (Isaiah 61:10).

An emissary from Eretz Israel arrived in Marrakech, Morocco to collect funds. Since he had great difficulty understanding Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra’s commentary, he asked the Torah scholars of Marrakech to help him understand it. One day this emissary arrived in Mogador, where he heard of Rabbi Haim Pinto. He therefore decided to go and find the tzaddik in order to ask him about Rabbi ibn Ezra’s commentary. Rabbi Haim listened to his questions and explained everything to him in a clear and profound way, much to his great satisfaction. When the emissary returned to Marrakech, he told its Torah scholars what had happened to him, which enabled them to understand the extent of Rabbi Haim Pinto’s greatness in Torah. When the emissary returned to Eretz Israel, he also told his friends about the tzaddik of Mogador. From then on, the Torah scholars of Eretz Israel sent Rabbi Haim Pinto questions and problems regarding Torah and Kabbalah, which he would explain with extraordinary clarity. When Rabbi Haim Pinto was very advanced in age, the great Torah figures of Israel wanted to see if he still retained all his strength in Torah. Hence they sent him scholars who discussed all aspects of Torah with him, yet it was Rabbi Haim who was asking the apparently impossible questions, and he was the one who answered them! Thus they testified that in his great age, his mind was just as clear in Torah as in his youth. May his merit protect us all.