



GEULAS YISRAEL

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RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
MAGGID SHIUR ALL PARSHA AND ALL DAF, OU.ORG

The Reach of Areivut

Parshat Nitzavim opens with the entire nation gathered before Moshe Rabeinu as he prepares them to enter yet another brit with Hashem. By this stage, we have already encountered numerous covenants, most recently in the *tochachah* of Ki Tavo, whose concluding pasuk explicitly describes it as a brit:

אֱלֹהֵי דִבְרֵי הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת מֹשֶׁה לַכְּרֹת אֶת
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב מִלִּבְד הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת אִתָּם
בְּחֶרֶב.

“These are the words of the covenant that Hashem commanded Moshe to establish with the children of Israel in the land of Moav, in addition to the covenant He had made with them at Chorev.”

Why, then, does Moshe introduce yet another brit in Parshat Nitzavim? What does this covenant add to those that preceded it?

BUILDING A SOCIETY OF AREIVUT

One important added feature of the brit of Nitzavim is *areivut*, mutual responsibility for other Jews. On the doorstep of Eretz Yisrael, Moshe emphasizes that religious responsibility can no longer remain purely individual. We are accountable not only for our own behavior but, in some sense, for one another. Chazal teach that this principle of *areivut* would become fully operative after we crossed the Jordan and accepted the covenant at Har Gerizim and Har Eival.

This shift was closely connected to the transition from desert existence to life in Eretz Yisrael. Under desert conditions, it was difficult to demand sustained communal responsibility. We did not yet live in permanent communities or inhabit a stable social structure. Our lives were transient, and even our most basic physical needs were supplied directly by Hashem. Food descended from Heaven, water was miraculously provided, and the protective clouds surrounded us. There was less need, and perhaps less opportunity, for us to build the structures of collective responsibility that ordinary national life requires. The desert did not yet require Jews to construct and sustain an enduring society together; Eretz Yisrael would.

Entering Eretz Yisrael changed the nature of Jewish life. We were no longer merely traveling together; we were now responsible for building a society together. We were about to become a settled society, divided into shevatim and communities, cultivating land, building cities, and constructing a



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shared religious and social culture. Under these conditions, *areivut* became both possible and necessary.

An individual's religious responsibility now extended far beyond his own two feet. Everyone now bore some responsibility for the collective commons: what our society would look like, what values it would embody, and what kind of religious and moral atmosphere it would create.

A Jew cannot bury his head in the sand and concern himself only with his own private religious space. Living as part of a Jewish society means assuming responsibility for the spiritual and material welfare of other Jews. The brit of Nitzavim prepares us for an enlarged religious identity: we serve Hashem not only as individuals, but as members of a people whose lives are bound to one another.

AREIVUT IN EXILE

And then we left Israel. Twice. We did not merely leave; we became scattered across the world. With the loss of sovereignty, *areivut* did not disappear, but its scope and expression changed. We continued to assume responsibility for fellow Jews, often with extraordinary devotion, but that responsibility was generally concentrated within the communities in which we lived. What largely disappeared was the broader national form of *areivut*: the ability to shape an entire Jewish public sphere, defend Jews through sovereign power, and assume responsibility for the collective Jewish future.

Halachically, *areivut* continued to demand that we assist others in the performance of mitzvot when they could not perform them themselves. We blow shofar for those who do not know how to blow on their own. Jewish communities also developed extensive systems of charity, education, and mutual

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assistance. Yet all of these operated within the constraints of exile. We could care for other Jews, but we could not exercise the full national *areivut* that becomes possible when the Jewish people live together as a sovereign society in their own land.

RESTORING NATIONAL AREIVUT

Now we have returned to a sovereign Jewish state, and once again we are renewing the broader and more sweeping form of *areivut*. As a state, it is our responsibility to protect and defend the interests of every Jew. The State of Israel is not merely a state for its citizens. It carries responsibility for the welfare of Jews everywhere.

That responsibility can span years and even decades. Over the past few months, the IDF identified the burial sites of two soldiers who were killed in the War of Independence nearly 78 years ago. More recently, the remains of Yehuda Katz, a soldier killed fighting Syrian forces in Lebanon more than forty years ago, were recovered and brought to burial in Israel. These efforts reflect a refusal to abandon responsibility simply because time has passed. We share a sacred bond that obligates us to care for every Jew, in life and even in death, even when fulfilling that responsibility takes decades. This is the ethos of *areivut* upon which Jewish life is built and upon which the Jewish state must be built.

AREIVUT ACROSS GENERATIONS

Over the past few years, we have realized an even broader form of *areivut*. Not just *areivut* toward a fellow Jew in the shtetl, helping him perform a mitzvah or assisting him materially. Not just *areivut* toward every Jew wherever he may live, even decades after his death. We also carry an *areivut* toward Jewish history. We have been chosen to participate in the renewal of Jewish sovereignty, and we feel a historical responsibility to defend this country and advance the arc of Jewish history.

Historical responsibility also runs in the other direction. We feel a tremendous obligation to fight this intense and protracted war so that, hopefully, future generations will not have to endure events like October 7th. We are willing to sacrifice our own personal needs and comforts because we feel *areivut* toward generations we have never met and will never meet.

This is part of our Jewish calling: to live a life of *areivut* and responsibility. *Areivut* adds depth and resonance to life. Without responsibilities beyond the self, life shrinks into personal welfare and personal comfort. When we live for others, and even more so when we live for a larger historical calling, our lives acquire deeper and more panoramic meaning. We become part of something much larger than ourselves. To live as part of something larger is to live with *areivut*.

THE TENSION OF AREIVUT

Yet *areivut* in the modern Jewish state can also become complicated. If we feel responsible for the spiritual welfare of other Jews, we cannot simply regard their religious choices as none of our concern. *Areivut* naturally creates an impulse to persuade others of the values we believe in. It also pushes us, on a national level, to shape the public character of

Israel according to those values. Both instincts are fundamentally healthy. They reflect genuine investment in other Jews and concern for the religious and moral character of Jewish society. An attitude of live and let live can easily slide into indifference. Yet that same sense of responsibility can also lead us to become aggressive in persuading others, dismissive of choices different from our own, or too forceful in imposing religious standards on parts of society that may not be interested in or ready for them. Sincere *areivut* can sometimes express itself in ways that undermine the very Jewish values it seeks to advance.

THE LIMITS OF AREIVUT

The Torah encodes the mitzvah of *areivut* in a very intriguing manner:

הַנִּסְתָּרוֹת לַה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְהַנִּגְלוֹת לָנוּ וּלְבָנֵינוּ עַד עוֹלָם
לְעִשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת.

“The hidden matters belong to Hashem our God, while the revealed matters belong to us and to our children forever, to fulfill all the words of this Torah.”

By exempting us from responsibility for the hidden lives of others, which Hashem alone sees and judges, the Torah implicitly charges us with responsibility for the public commons and for behavior that is visible to us.

But there is a deeper message. The phrase *הַנִּסְתָּרוֹת לַה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ* suggests that every person possesses a private realm of *nistarot*, known fully only to Hashem. We can never completely understand that private world, and issuing snap judgments about other people's religious lives fails to respect its complexity. Even when we are convinced of certain religious values, *areivut* does not give us unlimited license to intrude into another person's private spiritual world. Some aspects of religious life remain between the individual and Hashem.

There is, however, a second and different

limitation, also implicit in the phrase הנסתר. רות לה' אלוּקִינוּ. Even in areas where we legitimately seek to influence others or shape the public character of Jewish society, we must ask how certain we can be that our own *hashkafah* is the only correct one. The first limitation concerns the boundaries of another person's private religious life. This second limitation concerns the boundaries of our own certainty. If certain questions belong, at least partially, to the realm of *nistarot*, their very designation as "hidden" should temper our confidence that we fully understand them. Something as nuanced as *hashkafah* may demand conviction, but it should also leave room for humility about whether our approach is the only legitimate one.

IDEOLOGICAL HUMILITY

If Elul is a month of humility, that humility must include ideological humility. Each of us must find the approach to Judaism that best enables our *avodat Hashem* and we should hold our convictions seriously. But we should be extremely cautious before assuming that every question of *hashkafah* belongs to the realm of *niglot*, where our obligation of *areivut* authorizes us to impose our own convictions upon others. The deeper our sense of *areivut*, the more humility it demands. ■



Rabbi Moshe Taragin's latest sefer entitled: **Reclaiming Redemption, Vol. II: Faith, Identity, Peoplehood, and the Storms of War**, is available at: mtaraginbooks.com.

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