



A time for love

RABBI DOVID GOLDMAN
Parsha Nitzavim, Deuteronomy 29:9-31

Ah, fall - the season for love. What, you thought that was springtime? The truth is that the Torah identifies both as times for love - between the Jewish people and God.

The spring is the season of the Exodus, when God swept into Egypt and carried off His beloved people into the sunset forever. The Prophets quote God many years later saying to the Jewish people, "I remember the goodness of your youth, your bridal love as you followed Me into the desert, a barren land" (Jeremiah 2:2).

But the month of Elul, the 12th month on the Jewish calendar, which leads up to Rosh Hashana and always brings in the fall (not that we have much fall here in the Valley of the Sun), actually stands for the love between us and our Creator. In Hebrew, the letters E-L-U-L are known to stand for Ani L'Dodi v'Dodi Li - I am to my beloved as my beloved is to me. This well-known verse comes from the Song of Songs, intended by King Solomon as a metaphor for the relationship between us and God.

It is no coincidence that we find this to be the theme of this week's short Torah reading as well. Nitzavim begins with a third sealing of the covenant that specifically includes all future generations. It continues with a description of the seriousness of the covenant and its consequences, then reassures us that it is not too difficult for us to uphold, and promises that after an exhausting history of blessing and curse, we will find our way back to the covenant once again.

It is at the end of the parsha that we discover how all this can happen: "See that I have placed before you (the choice to uphold the covenant). ... I give you today the mitzvah to love God. ... Choose life that you and your descendants may live - love God, listen to His Voice and connect with Him - this is your life and the length of your days."

There are many mitzvot that really challenge us to reach deeply into ourselves but to me, this one is in a class by itself. How is someone living on this Earth, especially the average Jew living in America today, supposed to figure out how to love God? Doesn't love emerge from personal bonding in an actual encounter? From some amount of identifying with each other and enjoying each other? How could this apply to an invisible, inscrutable and ultimately unknowable Being with a reputation as much for His commands as for His blessings? Can you love "someone" you can't even define or figure out?

This is a topic that deserves meaningful attention - perhaps you will have the opportunity this holiday season to delve into it some more. But let me offer you one thought. Loving God - and believing in God - must start with loving yourself and believing in yourself. The more good you find in yourself, the more you will see in others, and the more you will ceaselessly wonder where it all comes from.

Loving God, as awkward as it sounds, means seeking the one Source of a world full of consciousness and awareness, life and beauty, meaning and direction - a world of endless ideas, exquisite in their interaction with each other. The thought that everything in this awesome world we live in comes from one Source should make us passionate in our drive to understand that Source and connect with Him.

Elul is a time for love - the perfect time to connect to our Creator as we inch closer to the dawn of a new year when we will stand before Him, praying to be inscribed in the Book of Life.

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