

Dear Chavraya,

Focused now on the coming Days of Awe, I write briefly today to wish each of you a good Shabbos and a good, sweet, healthy year. May it be a year of personal fulfillment for each one in addressing the matters of importance and challenge, both great and small, in your own life. So too, may it somehow be a year that will see in this country and in the world the rising of greater wholeness and peace, of greater kindness and compassion, of greater justice and hope.

We need each other if there is to be hope of meeting the challenges of the worlds around us, and so too in meeting the challenges of our own community as we journey forward. And we need each other in meeting the challenges of our own lives. That is what community is for, to help lift each one up in order to go forward. That is the message of this week's Torah portion, the portion that always precedes Rosh Hashannah, *Parashat Nitzavim*. On this Shabbos that stands as a gate through which we come to the edge of the new year, we read *atem nitzavim ha'yom kulchem/you are standing firm today, all of you...* (Deut. 29:9). *Nitzavim* is not simply to stand, but to stand firmly and with resolve, like a well-rooted tree, and so too, it is to stand forth, to take a stand.

In the first word of the *parsha* is the entire teaching, *atem/you*, is plural, all of us included in its address. Dancing the second two letters around, the collective *you* becomes *emet/truth*. It is only together, learning from each one their truth, do we come to a greater sense of the great truths of life. Beyond the plural *you*, the word *kulchem/all of you*, makes it clear that we are all included. Some commentators then wonder, with such emphasis on the collective, why does the Torah go on to spell out so many different groups within the community, *your heads, your tribes, your elders and your officers; all the men of Israel; your children, your women, and the stranger that is in the midst of your camps; from your woodcutter to your water drawer....* Just a few verses ahead the Torah makes the amazing statement that the Covenant is made *with the one who is standing here with us today..., and with the one who is not here with us today...* (29:13-14). From that expansive expression of inclusion the rabbis teach that the Torah is referring to all Jews who shall ever be, specifying among the generations to come the souls of all who would ever convert and choose to be part of the Jewish people.

In the word *ha'yom/today*, the rabbis set the context in this very moment, teaching that *ha'yom* refers to Rosh Hashannah. It is where we stand together now, on this Shabbos that is the gateway to a new year. May we enter it as one and make our way forward together, thereby helping to make the new year in the way that we meet its challenges one of sweetness and goodness, of hope and peace.

Shabbat shalom/Shannah tovah,
Rabbi Victor