DVAR TORAH NITZAVIM 5784

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It is by design that we read this Torah portion – Nitzavim, on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah and again just about 2 weeks from now on Yom Kippur, the day when so many flock to the synagogue. If the giving of the Torah is the central event of the Jewish people, then the primary teaching of that experience is summarized in this Torah portion and the choice presented by this passage needs time for contemplation and percolation.

We be begin our reading this morning and again on Yom Kippur with this:

"You stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; the captains of your tribes, your elders, and

your officers, with all the men of Israel. Your little ones, your wives, and the stranger who is in your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the one who draws your water. . . And not with you alone will I make this covenant and this oath. But with the one who stands here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with the one who is not here with us this day" (Deuteronomy 29:9-14).

What is the message of this reading?

If you believe as I do that the giving of Torah was not limited to that individual mountain experience--that we can still hear the echoes of that revelation across time, that we need only listen if we want to hear God's voice speaking--then the principal significance of Moses' address to the people is unmistakable.

It is that this covenantal community, this people of the book includes those who stood at that historical moment at Sinai, AND all of us who were not there then but who stand here right now at our own Sinai moment. Sinai is now! Torah is being given to us now!

This tradition is not a BIRTHright – it is a LIVEright. It is offered to us in every generation, in every year, in every moment to choose to do Jewish and Jewishly or not. That is why we read it again and again because the choice must be made over and over. The past is only prologue for the story of our lives that we never stop writing.

We all stand a Sinai, we all have a choice to live a life in harmony with Jewish values. And we stand there again and again every year. Its not a choice you make just once in your life, being Jewish is not about being, but doing, doing Jewish. Yom Kippur is about making that choice, to do Jewish in our lives, in our values, in our relationships. *Attem Nitzavim*, we stand here today, we stand again at Sinai, another year, another choice. To be or not to be is not the question; the question is what will you **do**? What does this holiday, this story, this community call you to **do** in your life?

The second to last verse in the parasha makes it clear what God wants us to choose:

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life”

Life in this context is Torah, Jewish values, Jewish customs, laws and commandments.

But what does it mean to choose life in the context of your life today? What choices are you making or can you make that insure not only a long life, but a meaningful life.

You’re standing at Sinai, where so many have stood before, but their choices are only preamble for your choice this day. They can’t choose for you, at best they can suggest by their good or bad example. You

must choose, we must choose, I must choose. Life or death, blessing or curse?

We stand at Sinai – its our moment of decision. So we choose – Door #1 Life and Blessing – excellent choice.

Life and Blessing – I hear it's a beautiful destination, How you gonna get there? How you going to open that door?

Man says – I wanna be rich! His friend says, you're gonna need a job.

I don't need a job

You’re gonna need investments

I don’t need investments

You’re gonna need rich relatives

I don’t need rich relatives

No job, no investments, no inheritance – how are you going to be rich?

Man says - I’m gonna win the lottery

You’re gonna need a ticket

How do you get a ticket?

You buy one.

I can’t buy a ticket I don’t have a job, investments or a rich relative

Its great to have choices – its better to have a plan.

This morning, the next two weeks, the next two months, till this time next year its about making a choice and having a plan.

Here's a plan – (HOLD UP TORAH) – its pretty good I've read it. Its not perfect, there are some areas of ambiguity and somethings that are a little dated, but its time tested it will get us on the right track. Take this, and add to it your own sechel, your own wisdom, insight and good sense. And we can cross over, we can cross over into the promised last. Like the Israelites who went from the wilderness to a land of promise. With a choice, a plan and reasonable sense of direction we can go from our own wilderness of ideas to a place of blessing, to a life flowing with meaning.

In this new year and these next days and weeks its not ONLY what you choose, but how you plan to get there. Choose rightly, plan wisely. And don't be too stubborn to ask for directions. Shanah Tovah