

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Nitzavim
September 28, 2019 *** 28 Elul, 5779

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We **welcome all** to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

Today's Portions

1: 29:9-11.....p. 1165	5: 30:7-10.....p. 1170
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Nitzavim in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3078/jewish/Nitzavim-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The Parshah of Nitzavim includes some of the most fundamental principles of the Jewish faith: The unity of Israel: "You stand today, all of you, before the L-rd your G-d: your heads, your tribes, your elders, your officers, and every Israelite man; your young ones, your wives, the stranger in your gate; from your wood-hewer to your water-drawer." The future redemption: Moses warns of the exile and desolation of the Land that will result if Israel abandons G-d's laws, but then he prophesies that in the end, "You will return to the L-rd your G-d . . . If your outcasts shall be at the ends of the heavens, from there will the L-rd your G-d gather you . . . and bring you into the Land which your fathers have possessed."

The practicality of Torah: "For the mitzvah which I command you this day, it is not beyond you, nor is it remote from you. It is not in heaven . . . It is not across the sea . . . Rather, it is very close to you, in your mouth, in your heart, that you may do it."

Freedom of choice: "I have set before you life and goodness, and death and evil: in that I command you this day to love G-d, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments . . . Life and death I have set before you, blessing and curse. And you shall choose life."

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Isaiah 61:10 – 63:9

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/562389/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftarah is the seventh and final installment of a series of seven "Haftarot of Consolation." These seven haftarot commence on the Shabbat following Tisha b'Av and continue until Rosh Hashanah.

The prophet begins on a high note, describing the great joy that we will experience with the Final Redemption, comparing it to the joy of a newly married couple.

Isaiah then declares his refusal to passively await the Redemption: "For Zion's sake I will not remain silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be still, until her righteousness emerges like shining light..." He implores the stones of Jerusalem not to be silent, day or night, until G-d restores Jerusalem and establishes it in glory.

The haftarah then recounts G-d's oath to eventually redeem Zion, when the Jews will praise G-d in Jerusalem. The haftarah also contains a description of the punishment G-d will mete out to Edom and the enemies of Israel.

Isaiah concludes with the famous statement:

"In all [Israel's] afflictions, He, too, is afflicted, and the angel of His presence redeemed them..."

Like a loving father who shares the pain of his child, G-d, too, shares the pain of His people, and awaits the redemption along with them.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Not Beyond the Sea – Nitzavim 5779 by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

<http://rabbisacks.org/nitzavim-5779/>

When I was a student at university in the late 1960s – the era of student protests, psychedelic drugs, and the Beatles meditating with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi – a story went the rounds. An American Jewish woman in her sixties travelled to north India to see a celebrated guru. There were huge crowds waiting to see the holy man, but she pushed through, saying that she needed to see him urgently. Eventually, after weaving through the swaying crowds, she entered the tent and stood in the presence of the master himself. What she said that day has entered the realm of legend. She said, “Marvin, listen to your mother. Enough already. Come home.”

Starting in the sixties Jews made their way into many religions and cultures with one notable exception: their own. Yet Judaism has historically had its mystics and meditators, its poets and philosophers, its holy men and women, its visionaries and prophets. It has often seemed as if the longing we have for spiritual enlightenment is in direct proportion to its distance, its foreignness, its unfamiliarity. We prefer the far to the near.

Moses already foresaw this possibility: Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. (Deut. 30:11–14)

Moses sensed prophetically that in the future Jews would say that to find inspiration we have to ascend to heaven or cross the sea. It is anywhere but here. So it was for much of Israel’s history during the First and Second Temple periods. First came the era in which the people were tempted by the gods of the people around them: the Canaanite Baal, the Moabite Chemosh, or Marduk and Astarte in Babylon. Later, in Second Temple times, they were attracted to Hellenism in its Greek or Roman forms. It is a strange phenomenon, best expressed in the memorable line of Groucho Marx: “I don’t want to belong to any club that would have me as a member.” Jews have long had a tendency to fall in love with people who do not love them and pursue almost any spiritual path so long as it is not their own. But it is very debilitating.

When great minds leave Judaism, Judaism loses great minds. When those in search of spirituality go elsewhere, Jewish spirituality suffers. And this tends to happen in precisely the paradoxical way that Moses describes several times in Deuteronomy. It occurs in ages of affluence, not poverty, in eras of freedom, not slavery. When we seem to have little to thank God for, we thank God. When we have much to be grateful for, we forget. The eras in which Jews worshipped idols or became Hellenised were Temple times when Jews lived in their land, enjoying either sovereignty or autonomy. The age in which, in Europe, they abandoned Judaism was the period of Emancipation, from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, when for the first time they enjoyed civil rights. The surrounding culture in most of these cases was hostile to Jews and Judaism. Yet Jews often preferred to adopt the culture that rejected them rather than embrace the one that was theirs by birth and inheritance, where they had the chance of feeling at home. The results were often tragic.

Becoming Baal worshippers did not lead to Israelites being welcomed by the Canaanites. Becoming Hellenised did not endear Jews to either the Greeks or the Romans. Abandoning Judaism in the nineteenth century did not end antisemitism; it inflamed it. Hence the power of Moses’ insistence: to find truth, beauty, and spirituality, you do not have to go elsewhere. “The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.”

The result was that Jews enriched other cultures more than their own. Part of Mahler's Eighth Symphony is a Catholic mass. Irving Berlin, son of a chazzan, wrote "White Christmas." Felix Mendelssohn, grandson of one of the first "enlightened" Jews, Moses Mendelssohn, composed church music and rehabilitated Bach's long-neglected St Matthew Passion. Simone Weil, one of the deepest Christian thinkers of the twentieth century – described by Albert Camus as "the only great spirit of our times" – was born to Jewish parents. So was Edith Stein, celebrated by the Catholic Church as a saint and martyr, but murdered in Auschwitz because to the Nazis she was a Jew. And so on. Was it the failure of Europe to accept the Jewishness of Jews and Judaism? Was it Judaism's failure to confront the challenge? The phenomenon is so complex it defies any simple explanation. But in the process, we lost great art, great intellect, great spirits and minds.

To some extent the situation has changed both in Israel and in the Diaspora. There has been much new Jewish music and a revival of Jewish mysticism. There have been important Jewish writers and thinkers. But we still spiritually underachieve. The deepest roots of spirituality come from within: from within a culture, a tradition, a sensibility. They come from the syntax and semantics of the native language of the soul: "The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it."

The beauty of Jewish spirituality is precisely that in Judaism God is close. You do not need to climb a mountain or enter an ashram to find the Divine Presence. It is there around the table at a Shabbat meal, in the light of the candles and the simple holiness of the Kiddush wine and the challot, in the praise of the EishetChayil and the blessing of children, in the peace of mind that comes when you leave the world to look after itself for a day while you celebrate the good things that come not from working but resting, not from buying but enjoying – the gifts you have had all along but did not have time to appreciate.

In Judaism, God is close. He is there in the poetry of the psalms, the greatest literature of the soul ever written. He is there listening in to our debates as we study a page of the Talmud or offer new interpretations of ancient texts. He is there in the joy of the festivals, the tears of Tisha B'Av, the echoes of the shofar of Rosh Hashanah, and the contrition of Yom Kippur. He is there in the very air of the land of Israel and the stones of Jerusalem, where the oldest of the old and the newest of the new mingle together like close friends. God is near. That is the overwhelming feeling I get from a lifetime of engaging with the faith of our ancestors. Judaism needed no cathedrals, no monasteries, no abstruse theologies, no metaphysical ingenuities – beautiful though all these are – because for us God is the God of everyone and everywhere, who has time for each of us, and who meets us where we are, if we are willing to open our soul to Him.

I am a Rabbi. For many years I was a Chief Rabbi. But in the end I think it was we, the Rabbis, who did not do enough to help people open their doors, their minds, and their feelings to the Presence-beyond-the-universe-who-created-us-in-love that our ancestors knew so well and loved so much. We were afraid – of the intellectual challenges of an aggressively secular culture, of the social challenges of being in yet not entirely of the world, of the emotional challenge of finding Jews or Judaism or the State of Israel criticised and condemned. So we retreated behind a high wall, thinking that made us safe. High walls never make you safe; they only make you fearful. What makes you safe is confronting the challenges without fear and inspiring others to do likewise.

What Moses meant in those extraordinary words, "It is not in heaven...nor is it beyond the sea," was: Kinderlach, your parents trembled when they heard the voice of God at Sinai. They were overwhelmed. They said: If we hear any more we will die. So God found ways in which you could meet Him without being overwhelmed. Yes, He is creator, sovereign, supreme power, first cause, mover of the planets and the stars. But He is also parent, partner, lover, friend. He is Shechinah, from shachen, meaning, the neighbour next door.

So thank Him every morning for the gift of life. Say the Shema twice daily for the gift of love. Join your voice to others in prayer so that His spirit may flow through you, giving you the strength and courage to change the world.

When you cannot see Him, it is because you are looking in the wrong direction. When He seems absent, He is there just behind you, but you have to turn to meet Him. Do not treat Him like a stranger. He loves you. He believes in you. He wants your success. To find Him you do not have to climb to heaven or cross the sea. His is the voice you hear in the silence of the soul. His is the light you see when you open your eyes to wonder. His is the hand you touch in the pit of despair. His is the breath that gives you life.

[We Need Each Other by Daniel Nevins](http://www.jtsa.edu/we-need-each-other)

<http://www.jtsa.edu/we-need-each-other>

One of the greatest privileges and responsibilities of a rabbi is to train candidates for conversion to Judaism. Such people are often spiritual seekers, and their questions challenge teachers whose Jewish identity and practice are well established. Why do you do this? What do you believe? What does this text mean? Will this practice make any difference? Faced with such inquiries, it becomes harder for teachers to treat ritual as habit, and faith as dogma. The questions posed by converts, children, or adults who are first discovering the depths of Judaism are exciting to those of us who teach Torah, forcing us to reexamine our own beliefs and practices.

In a sense, the convert challenges their teacher to detach from group habit and encounter Judaism as an individual standing before God. This is a healthy shift of focus for people who are deeply embedded in community. But the opposite is also true—teachers of Torah must infuse their students with a sense of collective purpose and identity. It is wonderful to be a spiritual seeker, but if one's journey remains solitary, that is not the Jewish way. Judaism is intended to be communal and cannot be fully practiced all alone. The conversion process therefore includes participation in communal worship, festivals, and meals, as well as learning about Jewish history.

For this reason, the Talmud instructs teachers to ask candidates for conversion why they want to join the Jewish people (BT Yevamot 47a). Don't you know of our historic struggles? Only when the convert acknowledges the suffering of Israel and states that they are not "worthy" to share in it, are they accepted "immediately" and then taught "some" commandments. The Talmud's examples of which commandments should be taught to the proselyte are surprising—we teach them about leaving the corners of the field, dropped and forgotten fruits, and tithes for the poor. Not Shabbat, nor kashrut, nor prayer, but tzedakah is the essential commandment for those joining the Jewish people, just as it was for Ruth (see Ruth chapter 2). According to this Talmudic presentation, the key to conversion is neither theology nor ritual, but social solidarity with the Jewish poor. Of course, as Maimonides hastens to add, we do teach them the principles of faith and the essential practices of Judaism, but first comes community (Mishneh Torah, Laws of forbidden relations, 14:1-2).

This dialectic between individual and collective identity is at play in Parashat Nitzavim and in the Days of Awe. Our portion opens (Deut. 29:9-14) with a dramatic assertion of collectivism—you stand together—all generations, all genders, all levels of engagement, in the covenant with God. The Torah makes the remarkable claim here that physical presence is no limit to community. All generations of Israel are linked together to God, whose perspective transcends time and space. In English we miss the force of this opening since the words "you stand" are the same for singular and plural, but in Hebrew the Torah's point is obvious—you stand together, or you don't stand at all.

If we look at chapter 29, we notice a sudden shift from this emphatic collectivism to addressing the individual. The Torah anticipates individuals—men, women, families, and even clans, who will be tempted to break away and disassociate from the larger community of Israel. In verse 19 we read, "God will not desire to forgive him." In contrast, back in Numbers 14:19-20, Moses pleads with God to forgive "this people" and God

says, "I have forgiven as you have spoken." There is safety in numbers, and not only when facing human enemies. God weighs our merits and sins within the context of community, and judges us not as individuals but as a people.

In Safed of the 16th century, Rabbi Moses Alsheikh pointed to this shift from group to individual identity and called it "backwards." The divine attribute of mercy is aroused by group identity, not by individual merit. This makes sense, since to join a community and stick with it requires mercy from us as well. Which of us has not grown frustrated with some of the people and the dynamics at play in our Jewish community? Who needs this? We all do, it turns out. When we are willing to forgive others and join with them, despite their flaws, then God, as it were, is also willing to put up with us, forgiving us our flaws. This truth explains the paradox of the High Holidays. You might think that the great task of the Ten Days of Repentance is to confess our individual flaws and become more faithful and righteous individuals before God. But that is precisely not the point of these Days of Awe. Even the exercise of confessing individual sins and begging forgiveness from each other is designed to strengthen solidarity between members of the community so that we may stand united before God. The point of the Days of Awe is to stand together, singing "We are your people, and You are our king!" The hours spent in synagogue are a process of amalgamation in which individuals become bonded into a covenanted community.

Pre-modern Jews often lived in tight-knit communities, frequently forced to dwell in close proximity. For Jews in America and other western democracies, we are typically more spread apart and may struggle to join together. Building Jewish community is labor-intensive, expensive, and sometimes exasperating. But spiritual community is the essence of Jewish identity. It is the key to our survival and the source of our strength. When we face troubles, as we surely have done in the past year with the surge in violent anti-Semitism, it is not only the converts who can say of these afflictions, "I know them, and I am not worthy of them." Alone, none of us is worthy; together, we command the attention and mercy of God. May we together be signed and sealed in the Book of Life for a good and sweet new year! (*Daniel Nevins is the Pearl Resnick Dean of the Rabbinical School and the Division of Religious Leadership at JTS*)

[Parashat Nitzavim 5779 by Rabbi Heidi Hoover](https://ajrsem.org/teachings/divreitorah/)

<https://ajrsem.org/teachings/divreitorah/>

In this week's Torah portion, Nitzavim, Moses speaks to the Israelites of the covenant between them and God. He emphasizes that every person in their society is a party to the covenant. Interestingly and perhaps incredibly, the non-Israelites who live among the Israelites are included as part of the covenant. We read repeatedly in the Torah that there is to be one law for the Israelite and the foreigner who lives among the Israelites, but usually it is not as clear that those foreigners are actually party to the covenant with God. But they are.

Moses says, "You stand this day, all of you, before the Eternal your God—your tribal heads, your elders, and your officials, all the men of Israel, your children, your women, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to water drawer—to enter into the covenant of the Eternal your God, which the Eternal your God is concluding with you day, with its sanctions; in order to establish you this day as God's people and in order to be your God, as promised you and as sworn to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I make this covenant, with its sanctions, not with you alone, but both with those who are standing here with us this day before the Eternal our God and with those who are not with us here this day" (Deuteronomy 29:9-14).

A covenant usually goes in two directions—there are rights and responsibilities on both sides. In the case of the covenant with God in our Torah portion, our job, as the spiritual descendants of the Israelites, is to live as God instructs us to live. For those following the Reform tradition of Judaism, this means adhering to the ethical laws of the Torah and rabbinic tradition. In return, we're promised that God will continue to be our God, and will

protect us.

The inclusiveness of this covenant — the fact that it is directed at all the people, those present and those not present, and people at every level and in every role in the society, including foreigners — feels very modern and current. The covenant itself, though, feels like an outdated theology. If we behave as we should, all will go well for us? Reward and punishment from an overseeing God? I'm sure all of us can think of examples of times when people did the right thing and were harmed anyway, and people who behaved horribly but seem to be rewarded.

And yet, we still talk about the covenant. We still read about it in the Torah. Perhaps a way that we can understand the covenant for ourselves today is that we do indeed promise to be ethical and moral, following the instruction of our tradition for how to be so. In return we have the reward of community and a relationship with God, in whatever way we understand that word "God."

Furthermore, this week's Torah portion tells us that we are all in this together. Jews and non-Jews, all of us are in this world together. This week, 16-year-old activist Greta Thunberg spoke at the United Nations General Assembly about global climate change, which will, sooner or later, affect all of us. She spoke passionately and bluntly, with the desperation of someone who only has words to offer, who knows that the listeners might or might not act on her words. I imagine that Moses may have sounded similar, exhorting the people in Deuteronomy to follow God, knowing that he cannot control whether they will or not.

We as humans divide ourselves into families, tribes, races, and in the last 200 or so years, nationalities. It was happening in the time of the Torah, and it is happening today. It seems to be human nature to always have people who are "us" and people who are "other." People who are "other" are less valuable than people who are "us."

The Torah and the rabbinic tradition sometimes push against this. There is a midrash that says that we all descended from one person, Adam, so that no one could say their lineage is better than anyone else's (Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5). And here in Nitzavim, everyone, Jew and non-Jew, elder and child, regardless of gender or social status, is included in the covenant.

This is a time in history when we really must put aside our differences and make radical change in the face of global climate change. All of us who are "standing here today" have a responsibility to those who are "not standing with us today" because they haven't been born yet, those who will have no choice but to inherit the world we leave for them.

We may not believe that God rewards us with blessings and punishes us with curses, but there are times when we create our own blessings and curses as the consequences of our actions and inactions. Let us "choose life" for all humanity. That is our responsibility in our covenant with the universe. May we have the strength and resolve to do so. (*Rabbi Heidi Hoover*)

(AJR '11) has taught Conversion at AJR. She is the rabbi of B'ShERT: Beth Shalom v'Emeth Reform Temple in Brooklyn, NY.)

[Why My Non-Jewish Taxi Driver Respects Judaism: Judaism's Unique Approach to Education by Rabbi Elliot Dorff](https://t.e2ma.net/message/83cvzb/gu2i2kb)

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"Surely, this Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach" (Deuteronomy 31:11). Why could the Torah be sure that it is not too baffling for us or beyond reach our reach?

The answer lies in the educational system that the Torah constructed. First and foremost, parents had the obligation to teach the Torah to their children: "Impress them [or "teach them diligently"] to your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:7). This last verse, famous for being embedded in the Shema, uses a biblical device called a "merism," where the ends of a spectrum are mentioned in order to indicate everything in between as well. Thus this verse is telling parents -- and Jews in general -- to talk about the Torah

everywhere (home and abroad) and always (from the first waking hour to the last). In doing so, it is repeating a heritage going back to Abraham: "For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right, in order that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him" (Genesis 18:19).

Second, adults as well as children would know the Torah because they would be reminded of it through an elaborate ritual system. Contrary to things like tables and chairs, the abstract ideals and even the specific stories and laws of the Torah do not exist in the world in which we live. We must be constantly reminded of the existence and the message of the Torah if it has a chance of affecting our lives. As a result, the Torah requires us to mark the seasons so that their passage can trigger in us an appreciation of our connections to nature and to Jewish history (e.g., Exodus 12:24-27; Leviticus 23:42; Deuteronomy 26:1-11); to mark life cycle events with yet other lessons in mind (e.g., Genesis 17:9-14; Leviticus 15); and, even more pervasively, to put on the tallit and tefillineach day (Deuteronomy 6:8), to put a mezuzah on our doorposts (Deuteronomy 6:9), to restrict our eating in accordance with the dietary laws (e.g., Leviticus 11, especially 11:43-45; Deuteronomy 12:23-25), and to surround eating with blessings (Deuteronomy 8:10). All these rituals remind us ultimately of aspects of our Covenantal relationship with God; they teach us what that relationship requires of us; and they reveal to us the values and concepts embedded in that relationship.

Third, to reinforce these educational methods in the life of each of us in the home and the community, once every seven years, as Jews gather in Jerusalem for the Sukkot holiday, they are to listen to a reading of the entire Torah:

Every seventh year, the year set for remission [of debts], at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God in the place that He will choose, you shall read this Teaching aloud in the presence of all Israel. Gather the people -- men, women, children, and the strangers in your communities -- that they may hear and so learn to revere the Lord your God and to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching. Their children, too, who have not had the experience, shall hear and learn to revere the Lord your God as long as they live in the land that you are about to cross the Jordan to possess. (Deuteronomy 31:10-13)

While Jews take it for granted that everyone is entitled -- indeed, commanded -- to learn the tradition, this was not at all the practice in the ancient world. Most religions were esoteric; that is, only the priest or other elite members of the society were made privy to the secret beliefs and practices of the religion. In sharp contrast, the Torah records that God repeatedly told Moses to "speak to the Children of Israel -- not just to the priests or elders, and not just to the men, but to the entire people. A striking example of this difference, recorded by Columbia University scholar E. J. Bickerman (Studies in Jewish and Christian History [Leiden: Brill, 1976], Part 1, p. 199), occurs in the archaeological remains of the Syrian city of Dura in two third-century houses of worship there:

In the Mithra temple at Dura it is a Magian in his sacred dress who keeps the sacred scroll *closed in his hand*. [But] in the synagogue of Dura, a layman, without any sign of office, is represented reading the *open scroll*.

That every Jew is privy to the sacred texts of the Jewish tradition has several important implications. First, this feature of Judaism confers significant status to each and every Jew. Since we can all learn the revelation of God, we can all interact with God directly. Rabbis and others learned in the tradition can teach Jews the skills necessary to understand the content and methods of the tradition, but ultimately no intermediary stands between a Jew and the sacred texts of Judaism. Each Jew may learn the Torah, wrestle with it, and interpret it in the way most plausible to him or her. Anyone who wants to make his or her interpretation the official stance of the Jewish community (or a subset of it) must justify that reading to those s/he wants to convince, but even if every other Jew thinks your interpretation is wrong, you have not only the right to suggest it, but the duty

to reveal the new facet you have found in the sacred text.

"Is not My word like a hammer that breaks a rock in many pieces (Jeremiah 23:29)? As the hammer causes numerous sparks to flash forth, so is a Scriptural verse capable of many interpretations. (B. Sanhedrin 34a).

It is for very good reason, then, that "Where there are two Jews, there are at least three opinions!"

Second, the sacred status of each Jew as student and interpreter of the Torah comes with a reciprocal duty: each of us has not only the right, but the responsibility to learn the tradition. None of us can pass off that duty to others. Some, by virtue of their learning, may have the special charge to help others learn, but in the end each of us has the duty to learn as much about the tradition as we can. And we cannot blame bad teachers for our failure to learn it ourselves!

Third, learning the tradition brings with it yet another responsibility -- namely, to act in accordance with it. Each and every adult Jew can justly be held responsible for transgressing the Torah's commandments because all Jews are expected to know what they are. This applies not only to our individual behavior, but to the actions of our community as well, for we all are supposed to know what is right and wrong:

Whoever is able to protest against the wrongdoings of his family and fails to do so is punished for the family's wrongdoings. Whoever is able to protest against the wrongdoings of her fellow citizens and does not do so is punished for the wrongdoings of the people of the city. Whoever is able to protest against the wrongdoings of the world and does not do so is punished for the wrongdoings of the world. (B. Shabbat 54b)

Knowledge brings with it responsibility for our own actions and for those with whom we are associated.

Finally, when only a small elite possesses the secrets of a tradition, they can retain their special power only if they keep the tradition both secret and constant. If everyone knows the tradition and lives by it, though, the tradition will inevitably adjust to the new realities of each generation. That is not only a good thing, but a crucial one, for only when traditions are learned and challenged and adjusted can they live on from one generation to another.

Recently, my taxi driver in Chicago, a young man who two years ago had come to this country from Krakow, Poland, told me that he had immense respect for Jews. He even had a book on the history of the Jews on the front seat of his taxi. When I asked him why he respected Jews so much, he said that Jews value family and education. To the extent that he is right about our commitment to education, it begins with passages such as the one from this week's Torah reading with which I began -- and others like this one in this week's reading, with which I shall end: "No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it" (Deuteronomy 31:14). (*Rabbi Elliot Dorff, is Rector and Anne and Sol Dorff Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the American Jewish University,)*

Yahrtzeits

Rebecca and Peter Greene remember their son Ethan on Sunday Sept.r 29 (Elul 29)

Rebecca Greene remembers her mother Anita Schwartz on Monday Sept.30 (Tishri 1)

Willa Bruckner remembers her father Seymour Cohen (Schmuel ben Batya) on Wed. Oct. 2 (Tishri 3)

Irwin Primer remembers his father Joel Primer on Friday October 4th (Tishri 5)



SHANA TOVA U'METUKAH



