

Torah MiTzion

All of Israel are Guarantors

for One Another by Hayim
Zohar

In parshat B'chukotai, among the list of curses that God warns if Bnei Yisrael follow a path that is contrary to Torah, we read, "they shall fall upon one another as though before a sword, when none pursues." The midrash halakha, Safra, interprets the "falling upon one another" as follows: "This does not mean that one person will fall "on top of" another, but rather that one will fall "because of" [the sin of] another, since all of Israel are responsible for one another." (Rashi quotes this midrash with a slight change.)

The sense of mutual responsibility has prevailed amongst the Jewish people since ancient times; the Sages expressed this in the maxim, "All of Israel are responsible for one another." This axiom became a firm and strong halachic foundation, a fundamental principle in halacha, with ramifications in several areas of Torah; it is present throughout all the generations of rabbinical literature. This principle was raised to the status of a supreme value in our national life: even commandments with an entirely different basis and reason are observed with great meticulousness and diligence specif-

ically out of a sense of responsibility and brotherly love. This value guides and motivates even those Jews who are not observant; they, too, feel a sense of responsibility towards all of Israel. Authors, leaders and spokesmen use this axiom as a call to action in the context of rescue operations, support, and charitable endeavors; it is universally recognized and accepted.

Why do our Rabbis choose to teach this great and important principle specifically in the context of the words, "they shall fall upon one another", in our parsha? Various explanations have been offered to answer this question.

Some suggest that the link is linguistic: a literal translation of the Hebrew expression would be, "a man shall fall upon his brother (b'achiv)" - rather than "one man shall fall upon another [man] (b'ish)", emphasizing the brotherly love (achva) that represents the basis for our mutual responsibility.

Other commentators, more grammatically inclined, suggest that the expression "b'achiv" suggests that one falls "because of" (the letter BET implies causality) the sin of another.

The root K-SH-L (stumble) implies something of moral fault - "You have stumbled in your sin" (Hoshea 14:2). The root K-SH-L occurs 62 times in Tanach, of which 14 times it appears in conjunction with sin. Chazal note this association and explain that a person falls, or stumbles, "in the sin of" his brother - for all of Israel are guarantors for one another! Moreover, Chazal sought to reinforce this sense of mutual

responsibility during the period of exile, with the nation deprived of its Temple and its political independence. Therefore they chose the verse from the Torah's section of rebuke and curses which describes a situation of exile. Indeed, this mutual responsibility was a great support to the Jewish nation throughout its exile.

The Gemara asks, in Masechet Sanhedrin, how it is possible for one person to be punished for the sin of another: what about the principle that "a person shall be put to death for his own sin" (D'varim 24:16)? The answer provided there is that this applies "when the person was able to protest, but he did not do so." In other words, our mutual responsibility is expressed in the obligation to prevent sin: "We are commanded not to sin, and not to stand by while another Jew sins" (Rambam, positive commandment no. 205). The individual is responsible for his own fate, the fate of the Jewish community, and the fate of the world as a whole.

Responsibility is not limited only to preventing others from sinning; it requires also that we promote the fulfillment of commandments by others. A person may perform a commandment - such as the recitation of "kiddush" over wine - as the agent of another Jew who is unable to do so, even if he himself has already performed that commandment; this is not regarded as a vain benediction. Thus our responsibility is two-dimensional: prevention by means of rebuke (to be offered only by a person who

knows how to rebuke), and assistance in performing mitzvot for those who are unable to do so on their own.

We find ourselves today in a difficult, bloody time. (This piece was written in 2015 - you decide if things have changed much, or not.) Events in Israel have ramifications for our brethren in the Diaspora, and vice versa. These times require that we focus on our mutual responsibility - that fundamental principle which has served to strengthen us in the past, and which will continue to stand us in good stead in the future. ♪