

Eternal Covenants and Oaths

by Dr. Meir Tamari

"Not with you only do I make this Covenant and this Oath; but with those that stand here with us this day and also with those who are not here with us this day" (D'varim 29:13-14). How are we to understand that this obligates not only the generation that stood at Har Sinai but also with all the future generations of Israel?

Parents share physical and bodily qualities and characteristics with their descendants. However, these become more and more marginal as the generations pass, so that this constantly diminishing influence and power cannot be powerful enough to obligate all the future and distant descendants. We may imagine that it is the father's nefesh and spiritual power that his descendants inherit from him, that could obligate them to keep the Covenant and so make them liable for the punishments foretold for any non-observance or revolt. Yet, the fathers have no connection or partnership with the nefesh of their children that would obligate blind adherence and a non-questioning behavior on their descendants. All the souls belong to Him, so that the nefesh of the father and of the son are equal before Him. This means that the fathers cannot obligate the sons, let alone the far distant generations. One

who is converted while still a minor, the Beit Din immerse him in the mikveh together with the adults. However, minors have the right to reject the conversion when they reach adulthood (Ketubot 11). Furthermore, it is difficult to understand that because all the souls of Israel were present at Matan Torah, therefore all the future generations should be obligated to keep the mitzvot. After all, the mitzvot are all meant to be observed by the bodies and not by the souls. The latter come pure from Heaven and are returned pure, so it is only the body that needs to be sanctified and purified. So, it would have been necessary for all the future bodies in Israel to have been present at Sinai; the presence of their souls alone would not have been sufficient to obligate the future generations

Perhaps all these difficulties can be solved when we realize that the root of the obligation lies in the Exodus from Egypt, even prior to the Covenant at Sinai,

Now a father can borrow money and his sons become liable for the repayment, when they were not even born at that time, by the same rights and law whereby they inherit all of his assets when he dies. So too, the obligations for the benefits and gifts that our forefathers received on their way, become obligations of their heirs. Hashem acquired us as slaves when He redeemed us from Egypt: "For unto Me



the Children of Israel are slaves; they are My slaves that I took out of the land of Egypt" (Vayikra 25:55). Furthermore, as His servants, our ancestors received sustenance from G-d during all the years of their wanderings before they came to Eretz Yisrael. Thereby, all the generations of Israel become obligated with their bodies as the descendants of His slaves. In the same way He acquired our souls when He transformed us spiritually by giving us His Torah and its Divine wisdom. Then Moshe cast the blood of Naaseh v'Nishma on us (Sh'mot 24:7-8) since the blood is the nefesh. Since our fathers were acquired by Him as slaves and agreed to keep His mitzvot, their descendants too are obligated as the descendants of slaves are in perpetuity. The Covenant in Netzavim was made concerning Eretz Yisrael, the obligation of Israel to keep His commandments and their punishment for non-observance, and Hashem's promise never to desert His People. That Land was a loan as it is written: "And the Land shall not be sold in perpetuity for the Land belongs to Me" (Vayikra 25:23) by Him to our forefathers, for which we became obligated for all the generations to pay homage to the Lord of that Land. We became liable to bring Bikurim and the mitzvot teluyot ba'aretz as a debt to that Owner.

Every person in Israel is obligated to keep His Torah, since at Har Sinai when then they entered His Service,

they and all their generations pledged their bodies, their souls and Eretz Israel. "Thus says the Lord, If these ordinances depart from before Me then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being the nation before Me" (Yirmiyahu 31: 36). 🌸

