

Our Covenant Rabbi Ashley Englander

Every Night, my son has the same bed-time routine. A bath, makes his mommy read fifteen different stories while she tries every goofy voice possible, and finally with my husband, we recite the Shema as a family. After 2.5 years, our son can now babble his way through the second line pretty well and end on a strong “ed”. I believe that my husband and I have fulfilled a part of the commandment stated in this prayer, that we shall teach these words unto our children. We are still working on the second part of the commandment, instilling these words into our child so he can see himself as a part of the Jewish people’s covenant.

In the Torah, it is written, “It was not with our ancestors that God made this covenant, but with us, the living, and every one of us who is here today.” The Jewish people are reminded that we have a covenant with God. The 10 Commandments are recited for a second time, the first being found in Exodus. We are commanded to serve and maintain our covenant with one God. This covenant does not only apply between God and Abraham, God and Moses, and God and the ancient Israelites, but it applies to the Jewish people of today. A *Klal Israel*, people of Israel, means that we are bound to the same covenant agreed upon between our ancestors and God.

According to a midrash found in our tradition, we can see how the covenant spans across generations. It states that when all the Israelites were at Mount Sinai receiving the Torah, Moses stated that the covenant is “with those who are here with us standing today and with those who are not here with us today.” (Deut. 29:14) These are the souls of people who are destined to

be created. Even though they were not there at that moment, each and everyone received the covenant. (Shemot Rabbah 28:6)

Modernity has invited the Jewish people to reexamine the terms of the covenant their ancestors made with God long ago. We relate to each commandment differently as Reform Jews in the Diaspora, especially in an age of advanced technology and different needs. For example, our observance of Shabbat has changed since we developed motor vehicles and the need to drive everywhere. Therefore, we prioritize driving to Shabbat services rather than contemplating if starting a car ignition lights a fire. The laws of Kashrut have even become murky in an age of veggie burgers and lab-grown meat! Ibn Ezra, a Medieval commentator, contemplated the idea that this covenant spans across time. He asks if the covenant is only agreed upon between God and the Israelites, and not those enslaved in Egypt, since they were not there. Moses says that the covenant is for those who are “here” and “alive”. Therefore, our understanding of the covenant is questioned and interpreted even amongst our philosophical thinkers a thousand years ago.

It is essential that we pass down our covenant to our children, so that our people will remain strong and connected forever. The covenant not only reminds us of our obligation to God, but it also reminds us of our obligation to our ancestors and children. We are bound together through time and space by this covenant and tradition that has been passed down on *l'dor l'dor*, from generation to generation. We cannot lose the core of what makes us a chosen and unique people - a *klal Israel* who is tied together by its covenant.