

Torah Portion Nitzavim

Shabbat beginning September 23, 2022

David Kirk Dirlam

As we near the high holidays Parshah Nitzavim reminds us of why we gather. It opens explicitly addressing every person standing in the community: leaders, elders, men, children, women, and strangers. The order sounds strange to our modern equalitarian ears, yet clearly exempts no one. It is not enough to join the community or even learn its customs. For Moses makes clear that some within earshot will harbor hubris in their hearts, thinking they can hide willful and sinful ways without harm to themselves or others. It matters not whether they become leaders or believe themselves introducing new effective practices. The willful and sinful and those they infect, no matter how concealed, will receive punishment due their hubris.

But that is not the end of Moses' instruction. Redemption is always open to all, no matter our prior arrogance. The key is repentance and return to the principles that keep the community whole. During the Torah's time, idol worship was the gall and wormwood of community destroyers. Today, we find exclusion, harassment, bullying, snobbery, and smug ghosting playing those roles. Our high holidays help us to reflect, challenge ourselves to root out destructive behaviors, and receive the blessings of loving support.