

**AtemN'tzavimhayom,**

You are all standing here today – yes you: you men, you women, you strangers, even you who aren't even actually here. You are here to enter into covenant with God.

But hold on – wait a minute.

“Perhaps there is among you one whose heart is even now, TODAY, turning away from God.” Perhaps this one, let's call him Shlomo, will hear this covenant and say “**shalom y'hiyeh li, kibishrirutlibielech**” – Eh; I'll be fine, no need for this covenant. I'm going to go with the **shrirut** of my **lev** on this one.”

Be careful, each of you, and mark my words: that one person? Mr. Shlomo who goes with the **shrirut** of his **lev**? He is going to ruin it for everyone. The land will be destroyed; salty soil, no grass, disease, the whole bit.

Yikes! What IS this **shrirut** of the **lev**?

12th century uber-famous commentator Rashi decides that **shrirut** comes from the verb **shur, shin vavresh**, which means “to behold or to see”. Thus **bishrirutlibi** means “**ma shelibiroehlaasot**.” In other words: “Eh; I'll be fine, no need for this covenant. I'm going to do whatever my heart sees fit to do.”

The RamBAN, Rashi's grandson, and a Torah scholar in his own right, sees a different meaning. He traces **shrirut** to the shoresh **shin reshresh**, a word connoting strength and authority. RamBAN first points out the noun form of the word. Even today in modern Hebrew, **shrir** is the word meaning muscle. So we can understand **shrirut** as a word that alludes to a physical strength. To this RamBAN points out another use of the word, in the common Talmudic phrase “**shrirv'kayam**”, which is used to show that a decision is valid and binding. All of this is to say that RamBAN would translate our friend Shlomo's statement as follows: “I will be fine, I don't need this covenant. I am going to go according to the authority of my heart.”

These two translations may seem similar, but there is a significant difference in the connotations.

Rashi's translation allows Shlomo a nonchalant air; a sort of “I do what I want” attitude, but RamBAN's definition of **shrir** makes Shlomo's statement much more intentional. According to RamBAN, Shlomo has just stated that his heart is more authoritative than God, that he doesn't really need God.

Now, this Shlomo is fictional in the text of Deuteronomy – Shlomo has been invented as an example of what happens if a single person does not uphold the covenant. If a single person turns his heart away from God, the text warns us, the entire community will be punished.

On the one hand, this warning seems to argue against our ability to speak out against the system, our right as human beings to make our own choices. But the point here isn't that Shlomo isn't allowed to speak out, it is that Shlomo has lost faith, has become convinced that God is not as important as he is, that the community isn't as important as he is. Shlomo doesn't need to go to synagogue, doesn't need to learn about or follow God's commandments. He believes he knows better than God.

It isn't that Shlomo no longer believes in God – after all, if he's rebelling against a system, that means he believes a system exists in the first place. And it isn't even that he is rebelling against a system, though the Torah does tend to take issue with that as well.

The problem here is that Shlomo has allowed the **shrirut** of his **lev**, the authority of his heart, to override his ability to listen.

How often does the authority of our own heart make it hard for us to hear, hard for us to listen? This is the time for saying sorry, for forgiving and being forgiven. This next week and half gives us the gift of a designated time for apology.

But apologies are difficult both to give and accept, and too often, the **shrirut** of our **libim** gets in the way. Too often, we cannot accept the apology given – we are still holding onto the wrong that has been committed against us. We decide that the apology is ingenuous. Rather than listening to the word “sorry”, we go with the authority of our heart.

So too it is with the act of apologizing. How many times have we gone to apologize to someone and been put off from the task, either by a flare-up of anger or even the person's response to the apology. Often, we are too proud to say sorry. The **shrirut** of our **libim** drowns out our ability to really repent.

Perhaps we can learn from Shlomo's statement.

On THIS day, perhaps, a mere two days before Rosh Hashana, as we stand here; men, women, strangers and yes, even those of our community who are not here, rather than squelching the **shrirut** of our **libim**, we can work to redirect it. We can use the strength of our heart to be humble, to be BETTER listeners, better apologizers, and better apology accepters.

**Ken yhiratzon**, may it be God's will.