

Parshiot Nitzavim-Vayelech 5783, 2023:

Standing Before Hashem

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon HaKohane, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yeziel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Gittel Malka bat Moshe, Alexander Leib ben Benyamin Yosef, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

This *Motzai Shabbat* we begin the recitation of *Selichot* in order to prepare ourselves to meet the Master of the Universe on Rosh Hashanah. As such, it is no mere metaphor that the initial *pasukim* of our *parshiot* state:

You are all standing this day (*atem nitzavim hayom*) before Hashem, your G-d, the leaders of your tribes, your elders and your officers, every man of Israel, your young children, your women, and your convert who is within your camp both your woodcutters and your water drawers, that you may enter the covenant of Hashem, your G-d, and His oath, which Hashem, your G-d, is making with you this day. (*Sefer Devarim 29:9-11*, this, and all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

As we can readily see, the statement, “You are all standing this day,” is written as “*atem nitzavim hayom*,” instead of the standard “*atem omdim hayom*.” This unusual word choice becomes clearer when we examine two instances of the word “*n'tziv*” (“standing,” and its variants) that appear in *Sefer Bereishit*. The first concerns Lot and his wife. They are warned not to look behind themselves so as not to behold the destruction that will befall S’dom and Gomorrah (*Sefer Bereishit 19:17*). Instead of listening to the words of the *malach*, Lot’s wife casts a furtive glance behind her and is turned into a pillar of salt—a *n'tziv melech* (19:26). A *n'tziv* is something permanent and unmoving. It is fixed in place and will remain there forever. Lot’s wife’s transformation from a living and breathing person into a silent pillar of salt is a permanent reminder of her failure to heed the words of the Creator.

The second instance of the verb “*n’tziv*” occurs when Avraham’s servant, Eliezer, is waiting by the well and prays to Hashem to reveal the identity of Yitzchak’s future wife to him. The Torah uses the expression, “*Henah anochi nitzav al ain hamayim...Behold I am standing at the well,*” (24:13). Here, too, why doesn’t Eliezer simply say: “*Henah anochi omed al ain hamayim?*” Why does he employ the uncommon verb “*nitzav?*” I believe that he uses this word to teach us a crucial lesson regarding the nature of *emunah*. In my estimation, he is publicly proclaiming his loyalty to his master Avraham, and, ultimately, to the *Ribono shel Olam* (the Master of the Universe). Eliezer had taken a *shavuah* (oath) that he would expend every possible effort to find Yitzhak a bride from Avraham’s country of origin. Therefore, he did his utmost to fulfill that *shavuah* and would not be moved right or left for any reason. He had one course and one course only: *nitzav*—to stand and wait patiently for Hashem's divine revelation to unfold. Thus, like Lot’s wife, he was standing in place, albeit, based upon an entirely different reason. I believe this is why “*nitzav,*” rather than the common verb “*omed,*” is used.

We can now view the phrase, “*atem nitzavim hayom,*” as imparting an essential message: No matter how powerful and persuasive certain cultural norms and ideas may be, if they are opposed to the essence of the Torah and Halacha and represent the antithesis of our being an *am kodesh* (a holy nation) and the *am segulah* (the Chosen People), then: “*atem nitzavim hayom!*” In short, no force on earth should ever move us from being *nitzavim* of *emunah* (pillars of faith) in the house of Hashem. As *Dovid HaMelech* said so long-ago: “*Achat sha’alti m’ate Hashem oto avekash shivti b’beit Hashem kol yimei chayai...One [thing] I ask of Hashem, that I seek—that I may dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life...*” (*Sefer Tehillim 27:4*) This, then, is the goal of our people—to ever be “*nitzavim hayom*” (standing today), *machar* (tomorrow) and *l’atid lavo* (forever more) before Hashem. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom and *Kativah v'chatimah tovah!*

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*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav](#)