

Parshiot Nitzavim - Vayelech, 5770, 2010:

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Standing Before Hashem

Dedicated to the sacred memory of my sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra, the *refuah shlaimah* of Sarah bat Rachel, Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam, and Sheva bat Sarah Rivka.

You are all standing (*nitzavim*) this day before the L-rd, 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 the L-rd, your G-d, and His oath, which the L-rd, your G-d, is making with you this day. (*Sefer Devarim 29:9-11*, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

One question that has always bothered me regarding the beginning of our *parasha* is: “Why is the first *pasuk* (verse) written ‘*Atem nitzavim hayom*’ (‘You are standing this day’), rather than the usual ‘*Atem omdim hayom?*’ (‘You are standing here today.’)?” After all, “*omdim*” (“standing”) is a far more common Hebrew verb and one that is used quite frequently throughout Tanach. As a result, “*nitzavim*” (“standing”) is a rather unlikely choice for this *pasuk*. Given all of this, what possible message is Hashem communicating to us by the use of this unusual verb?

I believe we can answer this question by looking at two instances of the word “*n'tziv*” (“standing,” or its variants) that are found in *Sefer Bereishit*. The first concerns Lot and his wife. They are warned not to look behind themselves at the imminent death and destruction that will befall S'dom and Gomorrah (*Sefer Bereshit 19:17*). Make no mistake about it: Lot and his wife had no individual merits that entitled them to be saved. Rashi (1040-1105) underscores this idea when he explains that they were just as evil as the

native inhabitants of those cities. Quite simply, they were rescued solely because of their connection to Avraham. Instead of listening to the words of the *malach* (angel), however, Lot's wife cast a furtive glance behind her and was turned into a pillar of salt - a "*ntziv melech*" (*Sefer Bereshit* 19:26). Rashi, based upon the Midrash in *Bereshit Rabbah* 50:4, explains that she was turned into a pillar of salt precisely because she had sinned via salt by refusing to give it to her guests. This had been the custom of *Avraham Avinu* (our Father Abraham) who personified *hachnasat orchim* (kindness to guests). What is the nature of a *n'tziv*? It is something permanent and unmoving. It is fixed in place and will seemingly remain there forever. Lot's wife's transformation from a living and breathing person into an ever-standing and silent pillar of salt is a permanent reminder that she failed to heed the words of her 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 Yitzchak's future wife to him. The Torah uses the expression (*Sefer Bereshit* 24:13): "*Henah anochi nitzav al ain hamayim...*" ("Behold I am standing at the well...") Here, too, why doesn't Eliezer simply say: "*Henah anochi omed al ain hamayaim?*" Why does he employ the uncommon verb "*nitzav*"? I believe that Eliezer uses this word to teach us a crucial and fundamental lesson regarding the nature of *emunah* (faith). In my estimation, he is publicly proclaiming his loyalty to his master Avraham, and to the *Ribono shel Olam* (the Master of the Universe). Avraham made Eliezer take a *shavuah* (oath) that he would expend every possible effort to find Yitzhak a bride from his place of origin. In turn, Eliezer did his utmost to fulfill that *shavuah* - he 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 permanently in place, albeit, for an entirely different purpose. In my opinion, this is precisely why “*nitzav*,” instead of the common verb “*omed*,” is used.

Given all of the above, I believe that the unusual expression: "*Atem nitzavim hayom...*" is coming to impart a crucial message. It is coming to teach us that no matter how powerful and persuasive certain non-Jewish 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!*” - You and I must stand fast today, and every day, in our love and devotion to Hashem and His holy Torah. In short, no force on earth should ever remove us from being *nitzavim* (pillars) of *emunah* (faith) with *dayot yesharot* (proper Torah opinions) in the house of Hashem. As *Dovid Hamelech* (King David) said so powerfully in *Sefer Tehillim* 27:4 “*Achat shaalti m'ate Hashem oto avekash shivti b'beit Hashem kol yimei chayai...*” (“One [thing] I ask of the L-rd, that I seek - that I may dwell in the house of the L-rd all the days of my life...”) This, then, is the goal of our people - to always be “*nitzavim hayom*” (standing today), *machar* (tomorrow) and *l'atid lavo* (forever more) before Hashem.

May *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* grant us the spiritual strength and desire to reinvigorate our relationship with Him, and thereby recognize that He is our true *Yedid Nefesh* (Beloved of our Soul). Moreover, during these final and fleeting days of Elul, may He grant us the

wisdom and will to prepare ourselves to stand contritely and humbly before Him, so that we may be judged on Rosh Hashanah *b'rachamim rabim l'chaim tovim* (with great mercy for lives filled with good). *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

Kativah v'chatimah tovah!

Tizku l'shanim rabot!

Past drashot may be found at my website:

http://home.mindspring.com/~rdbe/parashat_hashavuah/index.html .

Do you have questions, comments, ideas, or thoughts about this *drasha*? Would you like to share them? This *drasha*, and my blog are located at:

tefilahandtorah.blogspot.com .

The E-mail list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added please do not hesitate to contact me via E-mail rdbe718@gmail.com.