

Parshiot Nitzavim – Vayelech 5777, 2017:

*You Are Standing Today Before Hashem*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, the *refuah shlaimah* of Shoshana Elka bat Eitel Dina, Devorah bat Chana and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

This is the final Shabbat of 5777. We have been listening to the sound of the shofar each weekday morning throughout the month of Elul. This *Motzai Shabbat*, we will begin the recitation of *Selichot* to help us take the next steps toward heartfelt *teshuvah* (repentance), and properly prepare ourselves for Rosh Hashanah. Truly, it is no mere metaphor when the first verse of our *parasha* states:

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 captures my attention regarding this *pasuk* (verse) is, “Why is the statement, ‘You are all standing this day,’ written as ‘*Atem nitzavim hayom*,’ rather than the usual ‘*Atem omdim hayom?*’” After all, “*omdim*” is the far more common Hebrew verb for standing, and the one that is used quite frequently throughout Tanach. As such, what message is Hashem communicating to us by the use of “*nitzavim?*”

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 Bereishit* 19:17). Instead of listening to the words of the *malach* (angel), however, Lot's wife casts a furtive glance behind her and is turned into a pillar of salt - a *n'tziv melech* (*Sefer Bereishit* 19:26). 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, "*Henah anochi **nitzav** al ain hamayim...*" ("Behold I am standing at the well," *Sefer Bereshit* 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 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, ultimately, 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 the above, I believe that our *parasha*'s phrase, "*Atem nitzavim hayom*," imparts a crucial message. It teaches us that 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!*" - We 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* of *emunah* (pillars of faith) in the house of Hashem. As *Dovid Hamelech* (King David) said so powerfully in *Sefer Tehillim* 27:4, "*Achat sha'alti 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. 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 blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on [YUTorah.org](http://YUTorah.org) using the search criteria of Etengoff and the *parasha*'s name.

The email 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 email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on this link: <http://bit.ly/2jrPl2V>.