

Parashat Nitzavim 5779, 2019:

*We Are All Standing 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 Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Shabbat Parashat Nitzavim is the concluding *parasha* of the Jewish calendar year, and an ideal time to engage in depth-level introspection. On this final Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah, many of us reflect upon our past shortcomings, and intensify our efforts to improve our behaviors in order to strengthen our connection with Hashem. This parallels the idea that is subtly given voice in the first *pasuk* (verse) of our *parasha*, spoken to our ancestors prior to entering *Eretz Yisrael*: “You are all (*kulchem*) 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.” (*Sefer Devarim* 29:9, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

The *Midrash Pesikta Zutarta (Lekach Tov)* on our *parasha* analyzes a number of salient themes in our verse. It begins by recognizing that this is not the first time the Torah utilizes a version of the term “*nitzavim*.” Prior instances of *nitzavim*-related terminologies, like that of our *parasha*, reflect powerful transformational moments in our nation’s history, namely, *Kriyat Yam Suf* (Splitting of the Sea of Reeds) and *Kabbalat HaTorah* (The Receiving of

the Torah):

Moshe said to them [the Jewish people]: “Come and hear [literally, “see”] and I will tell you of other times when you stood firm [as you are so doing at this moment]. The first took place at the Sea [of Reeds], as the text states: ‘Stand firm (*hityatzvu*) and see the L-rd's salvation that He will wreak for you today...’ (*Sefer Shemot* 14:13) Subsequently, you stood firm [in your resolve] to receive the Torah. As it is said: ‘Moses brought the people out toward G-d from the camp, and they stood (*vayityatzvu*) at the bottom of the mountain.’” (*Sefer Shemot* 19:17, this, and the following citations are from the 1546 Venice edition of *Pesikta Zutarta*, translations and brackets my own)

Based upon the Midrash’s citations, we can readily see the singular import of “*nitzavim*” and its textual variants, as they herald crucial events that have shaped the very essence of our people. The Midrash continues by clarifying who was present at the covenant enacted on the Plains of Moav that is front and center in our *parasha*, and enables us to better grasp the meaning of our *pasuk*:

And you should know that the spirits and souls (*rucham u' nishmatam*) of both the departed (*meitim*) of the Jewish people, and those of all future generations (*dorot he'atidot l'avo*), are standing here [on the Plains of Moav] with us today. As our verse declares: “You are **all** (*kulchem*) standing (*nitzavim*) this day before the L-rd, your G-d.”

This interpretation foreshadows two verses we encounter a few *pasukim* later in our *parasha*: “But not only with you am I making this covenant and this oath, but with those standing here with us today before the L-rd, our G-d, and [also] with those who are not here with us, this day.” (*Sefer Devarim* 29:13-14) Our Midrash straightforwardly asserts that “those who are not here with us, this day” refers to both the *meitim* and the *dorot he'atidot l'avo*. I find this interpretation to be particularly significant, since, in my estimation, it forever connects us to the great chain of Jewish being that began with Avraham and continues until our own historical moment.

My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as “the Rav” by his students and followers, notes that Avraham was directly tasked by the Almighty with: “...the formation and education of a covenantal community that would be close to G-d and follow a new way of life... [and, in so doing, forge] a special relationship to G-d.” (*Abraham’s Journey: Reflections on the Life of the Founding Patriarch*, page 158, brackets my own) What is the essence of the covenantal community that Avraham created? According to the Rav in his classic philosophical work, “*U’vikashtem Misham*” (“And From There You Shall Seek”), it is comprised of two complementary aspects, *Knesset Yisrael* and *Adat Yisrael*:

*Knesset Yisrael* (the Community of Israel) – its definition: the inextricable connection between the first and last generations of prophet and listener, of Torah scholar and student, of the Revelation of G-d’s Divine Presence in the earliest lights of dawn, and the eschatological vision on that day to come. The Community of Israel is also *Adat Yisrael* (the Congregation of Israel). It incorporates in its innermost being the ancient and true testimony of the myriad visions that have never been obliterated in the depths of the past, the continuity of history, and the unceasing transmission of the Revelation from generation to generation. (Page 66, translation, underlining and parentheses my own)

In sum, Avraham founded a covenantal community linking all Jews — past, present and future — to one another for all time. Therefore, the prophets and their adherents (that is, the entire Jewish nation), Torah scholars and their students, are eternally bound together by both the “unceasing transmission of the Revelation” at Mount Sinai, and Judaism’s Messianic vision of enduring peace for all mankind.

Just as the entire Jewish people for all time were standing before Hashem at *Kriyat Yam Suf*, *Kabbalat HaTorah* and on the Plains of Moav, so, too, will we stand before the King of kings this Rosh Hashanah. With Hashem's unending kindness and mercy, may we, and all the Jewish people, be written in the *Sefer HaChaim* (Book of Life) for a New Year filled with all of His blessings. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>  
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria 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/8hsdpvd\*\*](http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd)

\*\*\* 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.