

פרשת נצבים  
Parshat Nitzavim

אשרינו | Ashreinu

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION



**RABBI AVI HOCHMAN**  
NO MORE EXCUSES!

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CHANA SCHANDELSON ('22)

SHOSHANA STADLAN ('22)

ARIELLA GROSS ('21)

AKIVA ROSENTHAL ('20)

Timing is everything. Sometimes it's when you make that left turn light, sometimes it's when we figure out the answer to a question on a test right before time is up, and other

times it's when you need help opening the door as you are carrying a lot of books and all of a sudden a friend appears and gives you assistance.

It is not a coincidence that our parsha falls out right before Rosh Hashana. The Torah tells us:

כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוך היום לא  
נפלאה היא ממך ולא רחוקה היא

“because this mitzvah which I command you today, it is not hidden from you and it is not distant” (Devarim 30:11).

What is this mitzvah that the Torah speaks of? The Ramban explains that this pasuk is discussing the mitzvah of teshuva, which is something that we can with certainty attain. The Torah continues and says that the mitzvah of teshuva is not only attainable, but it's בפיר ובלבך לעשות -- “In your mouth and in your heart to do” (Devarim 30:14). Aren't those two ideas essentially the same? Once the Torah conveys to us that teshuva isn't distant but is, in fact, very near, isn't it redundant to say that it is also “in your mouth and in your heart”?

Rav Meyer Twersky explains that it is the nature of one who sins to shift the blame upon others. “I cannot daven well because of the massive assignment I am working on,” or, “they need my help so I do not have time to bentsh,” or, “my friends are not the type to perform those acts of chesed.” We tend to shift the blame towards others instead of owning up to it ourselves. Just like Adam HaRishon said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate” (Bereishit 3:13-14).

Unfortunately, when we make mistakes, we claim that “our upbringing is responsible” or “society is to blame,” when in reality the only ones to blame are ourselves. Therefore, the Torah encourages us that teshuva is “in your mouth...to do.” The teshuva process begins “in your mouth,” by confessing and thereby accepting responsibility for your sins. Anyone can have a bad day, but no one can MAKE you have a bad day but yourself. The choices we make and our ability to learn and grow from them are a real testament to our acceptance of personal responsibility for our actions—an essential element of the teshuva process. **כתיבה וחתימה טובה**

## STAND CONNECTED

CHANA SCHANDELSON ('22)

This week's parsha, Nitzavim, opens with the words:

**אתם נצבים היום כלכם, לפני ה' אלקיכם**

“You are all standing this day before the Lord, your God” (Devarim 29:9).

It is the last day of Moshe's life and the Jewish people are standing to renew the covenant with Hashem. Previously, in Parshat Ki Tavo, we read about the curses. What is the connection between the curses and this “standing”?

Different mefarshim comment on this juxtaposition. Rashi offers an answer by saying that when Bnei Yisrael heard the curses in Ki Tavo they became fearful and thought to themselves, “how can we possibly survive?” Moshe then comforted them by saying the beginning words of Parshat Nitzavim: **אתם נצבים היום** -- “you are standing today.” The message was, of course, that it is human nature to make mistakes. Moshe needed to remind Klal Yisrael that just as they are still standing here today, after the curses, they will survive their future mistakes as well and continue “standing.”

The Vilna Gaon takes a different approach regarding the juxtaposition of the curses in Ki Tavo with the “standing” in Parshat Nitzavim. He explains that Hashem expects so much of us as Jews that sometimes Hashem causes a person to suffer so that a person can withstand it and merit to survive.

It is ultimately this suffering that gives a person the merit to remain “standing.”

As Rosh Hashanah approaches, we look back at our year and remember the things that were good and bad. Without these memories we won't be able to learn and grow and remain standing through all that Hashem throws at us. The juxtaposition of Parshiyot Nitzavim and Ki Tavo is in the perfect place to allow us to be introspective before Rosh Hashanah.

## APPRECIATE THE BLESSINGS

SHOSHANA STADLAN ('22)

In Parshat Nitzavim, Moshe begins to reach the end of his goodbye speech to the Jewish people before they enter into the land of Israel. He talks about the future redemption, the coming of Mashiach, and tells the nation:

**והיה כי-יבאו עליך כל-הדברים האלה, הברכה והקללה, אשר נתתי, לפניך; והשבת, אל-לבבך, בכל-הגוים, אשר הדיחך יהוה אלהיך שמה. ושבת עד-יהוה אלהיך, ושמת בקולו, ככל אשר-אנכי מצוך, היום: אתה ובניך, בכל-לבבך ובכל-נפשך**

“And it will be, when all these things come upon you the blessing and the curse which I have set before you that you will consider in your heart, among all the nations where the Lord your God has banished you, and you will return to the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and you will listen to His voice according to all that I am commanding you this day you and your children with all your heart and all your soul” (Devarim 30:1-2).

It makes sense that one would return to Hashem because of a curse put on them. If someone is punished for their actions, they acknowledge what they did wrong and ask for forgiveness so as to not be punished again. Surely when Hashem punishes someone, they see the consequences of their actions and repent to Hashem, but the pasuk says that the blessings *and* curses will compel you to return to God. Why would a blessing cause a person to return to Hashem?

The Ohr Hachaim writes that although a curse would spark immediate repentance, the blessings are also needed to return to Hashem. When Bnei Yisrael are not sinning, they don't fully appreciate the blessings at hand. They might believe their good fortune is what they deserve and take it all for granted, but when they are punished and the blessings are taken away, then and only then can they appreciate the true measure and greatness of the blessings that were previously bestowed upon them. Only when something is taken away can one truly appreciate its value. Therefore, the blessings and curses go hand in hand on the journey of returning to Hashem.

Especially in this month of Elul when Teshuva is at the forefront of everyone's minds, may we take into account this lesson. As we are asking for forgiveness and thinking about all the sins we committed, it is also the perfect time and mindset to recognize and really appreciate all the blessings that Hashem has given us.

## CHOOSE LIFE

ARIELLA GROSS ('21)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Nitzavim, Moshe warns Bnei Yisrael that if they break their covenant with Hashem, they will be exiled and Israel will be destroyed. However, if they choose to obey Hashem and His commandments, they will be blessed with the land of Israel, offspring, fertile lands, and vast wealth. Moshe then reminds Bnei Yisrael that they have been blessed with free choice and that their fate will be determined by their decision to adhere to or deviate from their pact with Hashem. He says:

הַעַד הַעֲדוֹתֵי בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם, אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם  
וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַחַיִּים וְהַמּוֹת נֹתְתִי לְפָנֶיךָ,  
הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה וּבַחֲרַת בְּחַיִּים לְמַעַן  
תַּחֲיֶה אֶתְּהָ וְזָרַעְךָ מִיּוֹם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ  
הַחַיִּים וְהַמּוֹת נֹתְתִי לְפָנֶיךָ, הַבְּרָכָה  
וְהַקְּלָלָה וּבַחֲרַת בְּחַיִּים לְמַעַן תַּחֲיֶה  
אֶתְּהָ וְזָרַעְךָ

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have set before you life and death, blessing

and curse. Choose life—so that you and your offspring would live” (Devarim 30:19).

Moshe warns Bnei Yisrael that they will be faced with difficult decisions that will determine the nation's destiny, but opting for blessings and life over curses and death seems like an obvious choice. So, why did Moshe present “choosing life” as one of the toughest decisions Bnei Yisrael will ever face?

Rashi explains that when Moshe asks Bnei Yisrael to choose life over death, he is not referring to literal life or death. Rather, he is persuading them to choose the right path in life -- to live a life defined by righteousness instead of one defined by sins.

The Ibn Ezra expands on this idea and explains that the Jews across history will all face the same obstacle: the choice between indulging in the materialistic world or focusing on the intangible aspects of life, including spirituality, learning Torah, and keeping mitzvot. Moshe, in his emphatic speech to the nation, strives to push them towards life so that they will grow to love Hashem, which the Ibn Ezra explains is one of life's key purposes.

The Sforno takes a slightly different approach to the words *וּבַחֲרַת בְּחַיִּים* and adds that “choosing life” in this pasuk refers to life in Olam Haba. Like Rashi and Ibn Ezra, Sforno claims that Bnei Yisrael can choose life by living spiritually and righteously, but he adds that the purpose of this lifestyle is to extend our lives into the next world. Sforno interprets “choosing death” as electing to live life based on corporeal desires, which could limit one's reward in Olam Haba. He also explains that every action we perform in the world should be done with the same intention: to choose life and extend it into Olam Haba.

With Rosh Hashanah and subsequently the new year approaching, we will all face a multitude of decisions. Remember this pasuk, Moshe's warning to Bnei Yisrael, and, most importantly, remember to choose life.



# PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

AKIVA ROSENTHAL ('20)

In Parshat Nitzavim, Moshe finishes his speech to the people by ensuring the future of the Jewish nation. He says

ולא אתכם לבדכם אנכי כרת  
את-הברית הזאת...ואת אשר  
איננו פה עמנו היום

“And not with you alone will I make this covenant...and also with Him who is not here with us this day” (Devarim 29:13-14).

Moshe chose the phrase, “who is not here” because it could only refer to future Jews, and leaves no room for misinterpretation, therefore making Jewish children obligated in the same commandments as their ancestors. So why are Jews forced into their religion instead of coming to the conclusion themselves? If the goal of being Jewish is to bring Hashem into the world, how can religion be dealt from birth regardless of one’s beliefs in God?

To answer this question, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks first focuses on the positive implications of Moshe’s statement. He brings up three times in our history that the Jews abandoned their Judaism, proving that some need this commandment to stay on the path of Torah and mitzvot. In the time of Yechezkel, the destruction of the Second Temple, and Spain in the late 15th century, major Jewish communities abandoned their religion. Rabbi Sacks uses these examples to show the struggle to stay committed to Judaism once the Jews faced a serious threat for being Jewish.

Rabbi Sacks explains that, in the Rosh Hashanah davening, we are compared to the prince and Hashem as the King. We are born into a position of responsibility and have no choice but to perform well because our nation’s reputation is dependent on our actions. However, we also have great influence and power in determining the direction of the people around us. The main choice in our lives isn’t whether or not to be Jewish, it is how to represent the Jewish people. Parshat Nitzavim is always read near Rosh Hashanah to make us think about how we want to change our reputation and the reputation of our Jewish nation.



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