

Nitzavim

Centuries ago, in a small mountain village in Eastern Europe, lived a wealthy man. It is told that this man, who was not been called young for a very long time, became concerned about the legacy he would leave behind in his community. He spent a great deal of time, in fact, thinking about this until one day, he came up with a solution. He would build an enormous, beautiful synagogue for the village that would last long after the man himself was long gone. The construction of this synagogue took many years. And the villagers waited anxiously to see their new place of worship to be complete. Finally, the construction was complete and all the villagers were invited in to view the new synagogue. They were so excited! There was room for everyone, a beautiful 'Aron kodesh- ark' for the Torah. Lovely paintings in the entranceway, a library filled with Jewish books, and beautiful high arched ceilings. The old man surly had had built them the most splendid synagogue in the world. But as they sat down and admired the beauty around them, they noticed a rather serious flaw. One of the villagers asked, "Where are the lamps? What will provide the lighting in the sanctuary?!" "Ahhh...." the man said as he pointed out his special design. Along all of the walls, there were brackets. He handed each person a lantern as he explained, "Bring your lantern with you when you come to the synagogue. Light it, and hang it on a bracket along the wall. There is one for each of you, just as there is a spark of God within each one of you. When you are here, your presence makes this place all that much brighter-- more Kadosh-- more holy. And when you are not here, know that our community feels your absence, as it diminishes the light in this place, and everywhere you are not...."

Atem Nitzavim Hayom, You stand here today....

These are the first 3 words of this week's Torah portion, 'Nitzavim', spoken on behalf of God by Moses. 'Nitzavim' is an interesting choice of word. It is plural, because God is addressing the every single Israelite. Reiterating that the blessings and curses that befall one of us, befall all of us, together, from generation to generation.

An interesting word for 'stand' is used as well. In Hebrew, generally עומדים 'Omdim' is used as the word for "stand" (p). But here, נצבים 'nitzavim' is used. Nitzavim can also be translated as 'stand', but it is a different kind of standing. A kind of 'Standing at the ready'.

God is making a covenant with every single Israelite. Old, young, women, men, from the laborers, to the high priests. Everyone is included- even those who could not be present, and even us; the future generations.

WE are nitzavim. But what does that mean?

We make choices every day. Some are spot on, and some miss the mark. Some have minimal effect on the collective, and some have overreaching effects that impact everyone. It is a given that we will not agree on whether these choices were for the good of the collective or not (10 Jews in a room, 20 opinions and all that)... And despite the fact that each one of the people in this room is perfect and could never make a mistake, human beings tend to mess up. That is, after all, a great way to learn. But to be nitzavim means that we must be ready to face whatever will come as a result of our choices TOGETHER. To acknowledge our differences and put them aside for the greater good. To acknowledge the fact that although the 'other' made the 'bad' choice this time, we most likely made it last time. Or if not, we'll be making it the next time around. The Torah is a guidebook passed down to us for thousands of years, and because of that, we are bound to have many different interpretations of it. And despite our differences, despite our varying interpretations on how we are supposed to live in this world, one thing is clear. We are all God's people. We chose the right to choose back in the Garden of Eden. There is enough chaos, anger, hatred, and finger pointing in the world without us fighting amongst ourselves. Each and every one of us is a gift—a light. And our community is so much brighter when we are all together as one. We have been granted the freedom to choose between good and evil, and life and death. May the choices we make in the coming year lean more towards the good, and may we recognize the blessings in our lives when we have them. So today, on the precipice of a new year, I open my own heart and beg forgiveness for my own intolerance of ideas different than my own, and am ready to be one of the Nitzavim. I hope you all will join me.