

It is always fascinating to ponder the intersection between the weekly Torah portion and the current Holiday season. On this Shabbat as we read the Parsha of Nitzavim, we also prepare to close out 5775, and usher in 5776 on Sunday evening. Considering that this Parsha is always read immediately prior to Rosh Hashanah, it would be natural to assume that in some way this Torah portion has a deeper connection to the High Holiday that is quickly approaching.

The Gerrer Rebbe, R. Yitzchak Meir Alter, says that in fact Parshat Nitzavim and Rosh Hashanah share a very common theme. The opening verse of our Parsha describes the event that actually determined its name "Nitzavim." The verse reads, "You are standing (Nitzavim) this day all of you before the LORD your G-D: your heads, your tribes, your elders, and your officers, even all the people of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and your stranger that is in the midst of your camp, from the hewer of wood unto the drawer of thy water." Why did they all come together? What monumental event was occurring that precipitated this auspicious gathering of the entire Jewish nation? The Rebbe explains that the seminal event that was about to occur was a transition of power. As Moses' days on this earth were numbered and he was soon to transfer power to his lifetime aide and student, Yehoshua, it was necessary for him to gather the people together for a moment of reflection and introspection. Much the same way we celebrate a graduation from middle school to high school and from high school to college, between the conclusion of one period and prior to the commencement of a subsequent phase we must pause to reflect on our accomplishments and prepare for the future. Similarly, Moshe wished the Jewish people to think about how far they have come as people, as the inception of their nationality had just been completed. Now a new epoch was set to begin, Moshe's turn to rule had concluded and they were about to embark on a new phase in their national history, the conquest and inhabitation of a religious homeland. Moshe rightfully felt that this landmark moment in Jewish history must be celebrated with a national day of gathering and reflection.

In our own lives, we sometimes forget to pause and take stock of our accomplishments. We may fail to consider the new challenges that lay just over the horizon. To give us this most necessary pause, G-D proclaimed a day of Rosh Hashanah, a day of transition from the past to the future. On this day we too envision a transition, not of external leadership, but of internal struggle. We celebrate the fact that we are no longer under the influence and control of last year's self, but hopefully we begin a new regime under our present and better self. Without this yearly opportunity it would be supremely difficult to even envision changes and personal growth. Our lives would just blend into one long monotony, much like a run on sentence without punctuation; we would have no stop or end in sight to gather our thoughts; to reflect on past failures or successes. We would never consider that our future need not be like our past, that our present can mark the end of one year and commence a new one. We may not even realize that next year's self can be infinitely greater, wiser, and more refined than this year's self.

This annual day of standing - Nitzavim, Rosh HaShanah, is actually the greatest gift from G-D, as it is the gift of pause, reflection, and hopefully incredible growth.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ketivah VeChatimah Tovah

Rabbi Meir Tannenbaum