

This Week In Torah *Netzavim-VaYelech*
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The opening words of the *sedra* need some clarification. *Atem nitzavim...* All of you stand here this day. Stand? Where? Why? How? Who do I stand next to ... or before? Is it merely showing up or is there something more to it? What do I wear? Do we need to bring something?

Atem nitzavim... All of you stand here this day. Stand before God in order to accept the responsibility of the covenant, said RaSHI. Stand around the Ark of the Covenant, said Ibn Ezra, in order to accept the burden of Torah as the essence of your lives. Even if you can't stand around or even be present, you are still responsible for what is taught in Torah, so said Sforno. *Atem nitzavim...* All of you stand here this day. You all are responsible for this sacred responsibility going forward. You all are a light unto the nations and a kingdom of priests. You all are bound to live by this sacred relationship. Is it hard? Deuteronomy 30:14 teaches us that "No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it."

Atem nitzavim---- you all stand here today. That verb implies so much more than standing around. It signifies being present, being upright and being willing to serve. It indicates a sense of pride and even some ecclesiastical calling, like being a beadle. *Atem nitzavim*—with purpose, pride and sanctity.

But there is another dimension in play here. Remember we are a week away from Rosh Hashanah. Remember that we will be reading these words again on Yom Kippur morning. Rabbi Dov Baer taught that these words imply a hidden meaning—some self-awareness with which we are present with knowledge of our flaws as well as our strengths, our sense of responsibility and our expectations, our yearnings and our doubts. *Atem nitzavim* – each one of us is responsible to be completely present.

In the Genesis narrative, we read of Tamar. She is a woman married to one of Judah's sons. She defined her calling and her presence to be a vessel to bring an heir to the covenantal relationship. She saw herself not as a matriarch but as a future ancestor of the progeny. When her husband died before she conceived, she married his brother as it was the custom. When he chooses to not impregnate her before he died, she was left bereft and incomplete. When Judah forbade any of his other sons from marrying her, she took her fate into her hand. Genesis 38: 14 and 15—" So she took off her widow's garb, covered her face with a veil, and, wrapping herself up, sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him as wife. When Judah saw her, he took her for a harlot; for she had covered her face." The 19th century sage Rabbi Dov Baer pointed out that she was "standing" by the road when Judah saw her. She was present, aware and knew her destiny to be a mother for the next generation in order for the covenant to live on. He juxtaposed the Hebrew word *zonah* [harlot] with *zo na'eh* [this one has inherit purpose] to show the sanctity of her "standing" and waiting for Judah. He explained that her name was not Tamar but rather--*tam* [pure knowledge of her purpose] and *mar* [bitter at her fate]. *Atem nitzavim*—know who you are and understand why you stand where you do as you grapple with the idea of your destiny.

Atem nitzavim— stand and wait to embrace an eternal promise that you will utter for yourself and all who come after you. Be as the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 62:6—“Truly, wait quietly for God, O my soul, for my hope comes from God.” Take hold of who you are. Acknowledge your strengths, admit your flaws. Be strong but yet vulnerable to be present with humility before God. Assert your faith and have willingness to struggle with what it means to you on a day-by-day experience. Stand proud. Stand firm. Be present.