



In the merit of our soldiers and hostages

 Shabbat Times
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Torah Bytes

 A weekly Dvar Torah on the Parsha by Rabbi Dovid Horwitz
 and the Rabbanim of the Ra'anana Kollel

Parshat Nitzavim 5785

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Parshat Nitzavim is always read on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashana, not only to separate the curses of Ki Tavo from the day of judgment, as the gemara states, but also because the parsha of Nitzavim contains some great messages for Rosh Hashana.

Rashi asks why it is that the words of Nitzavim immediately follow the recitation of the curses. He explains that when the people heard the 98 curses that would befall them if they ever rebelled against the Torah, they began to panic. "Who could live up to such strict standards and such severe consequences for falling short?" Moshe answered that although they had angered Hashem many times in the past, they are still alive and together today. In other words, as long as the Jewish people are together and unified, Hashem will be merciful towards us, but if we separate from the community and we are not unified, then each of us, on his own, is vulnerable and has good reason to be worried come Rosh Hashana. The Jewish people are like a thickly braided rope. A thick rope is practically unbreakable but if one looks closely, it is made up of hundreds of super thin strings! Each string on its own is easily broken, but together they are indestructible. So too, we are only as strong as we are united and as weak as we are divided. This is why as important as it is to pray with a minyan every day of the year, it is especially crucial to do so on Rosh Hashana, to be part of the bigger community of Klal Yisrael!

The Pirkei d'Rebbi Elazar praises us for the special relationship we have with our Creator. Normally, one who is on trial for life or death, would appear in court disheveled and in a state of anxiety and penance. But the Jewish people, on their day of judgment, honor the day by bathing and dressing up in Yom Tov finery. They eat lavish meals and dine with family and friends to usher in the new year! How can we celebrate and act so cavalier on such a serious day? The answer is that we are confident that Hashem will bless the Jewish people and the community with a successful verdict. Although we cannot be sure what the outcome will be for us as individuals, when we appear before Hashem alone, the overall judgment of the people as a whole is already guaranteed to be good. For this we celebrate. So the first message is to cherish and to maintain our national and communal unity, for the higher we strive, the more optimistic we are.

On a personal level, however, we each need to take the day of Rosh Hashana very seriously.

The parsha warns us to avoid the attitude of "Shalom Yihyeh Li", "all will be fine with me". For as long as we have this attitude, change is impossible.

People by nature do not like change. It is human nature that once we find a good rhythm, once we are happy and comfortable on the path we have chosen, we stick with it and operate on "cruise control." Only if there is an obstacle in our path, do we take control of the car and swerve into a different lane.

The attitude of "it will be fine", or "all will be good" allows us to deny the challenges and dangers around us so that we can continue to coast through life.

The Torah is telling us to wake up and change courses. Analyze the path that we are on. If we see tragedy happening around us, and we find people similar to ourselves suffering, then don't deflect it by saying, "all will be good with me!" Rather reflect, change and improve!

After all of the tragedies we have endured, almost daily, whether it be the loss of our righteous brethren in battle or in terrorist attacks, we cannot go into Rosh Hashana this year like we did in previous years. We cannot afford to enter into Rosh Hashana with an "all will be fine" attitude. Our cruise control is getting us into a lot of trouble. There are so many obstacles ahead that we cannot afford to coast through life on auto pilot. We must take control and change! The Shofar jolts us out of complacency. It is the antidote to the "all is fine" syndrome. How so? Because the shofar reminds us of the cries of Sisra's mother, who cried because her son had not returned home after battling the Jewish people.

Every day Sisra would go out and fight, and return home for dinner with Mom. That night he was late. His mother became so worried that she cried in anxiety over the unknown.

All of a sudden it hit her!

Just because all was good with her yesterday and last week and last month and last year, does not mean that her fate could not flip upside down in an instant!

It is this anxiety we should feel when we hear the shofar! Nitzavim reminds us to take Rosh Hashana seriously, to reevaluate our individual path and to reaffirm our commitment to the Jewish people.

If we turn off the auto pilot mode and we work to embrace our fellow Jews, we will be able to approach Rosh Hashana with Yom Tov clothing and with simcha, joy!