

Nitzavim Vayalech 5777

BS"D Parashat Nitzavim Vayalech 5777

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Two Questions

I am writing this on the 11th of September, the 16th anniversary of the Twin Towers tragedy caused by members of the dysfunctional, savage Arab people.

Tractate Suka 52b: "Hashem regrets having brought four entities into the world: Galut (exile), Kasdim (Babylonians or today's Iraqis), Yishmael (the Arabs), and the Yetzer Hara (inner compulsion for immediate gratification.)"

The world on 9/11 had the opportunity to empathize with the Creator in His regret for permitting the dysfunctional, savage Yishmael to come into the world; for on that day war was declared on the world order, and the value we place on God-given life. That infamous day radically changed the world, and has a unique message for the Jewish people.

If one would have asked an American before 9/11 "what are the most erect, exalted, lofty, tallest objects in the USA?", most would reply, "The Twin Towers in New York City". The day the towers went down was in the week when we read in the Torah this week's parsha of Nitza'vim.

Nitza'vim means erect, exalted, lofty, tall; and just in that week, the erect, exalted, lofty, tall towers melted down. The parsha begins with the words of Moshe Rabbeinu to all the congregation of Israel, "Atem nitzavim" – you the Jewish

nation are now standing erect, exalted, lofty and tall before HaShem to rededicate the sacred covenant in order to enter Eretz Yisrael after 40 years of preparation in the wilderness. You will continue to be erect, exalted, lofty, and tall, as long as you are faithful to the covenant.

The two original "Twin Towers" were far from New York in place and in time. The book of Me'la'chim (Kings 1) describes the monumental structure of the Temple erected by Shlomo Hamalech. On both sides of the entrance to the U'lam, the vestibule of the Bet Hamikdash, there stood two erect, exalted, lofty, tall columns, each 18 amot high (nine meters) – one was called "Ya'chin" and the other "Boaz". Unfortunately, too many of our Jewish brothers and sisters have abandoned the ambition to rebuild our "Twin Towers" of kedusha of the Temple in favor of the "Twin Towers" of New York's financial district. Those towers crumbled, as will all others in a society that places material values over those of the Torah.

The five-sided Pentagon building is also part of the lesson. How can one abandon emunah in the Five Books of Moshe and put one's trust in the might of the five-sided Pentagon defense headquarters, which cannot even defend itself?

Towers are built for the protection of those who reside in or around them; for they permit the enemy to be seen from a distance.

In the absence of our Yachin and Boaz towers of the Bet Hamikdash, which permitted our forefathers to see afar, there are two substitutes, which when used properly, enable us to see future dangers and take the necessary precautions. They take the form of two questions that every Jew should ask himself daily, and that have the power to direct each of us in this confused age.

Question #1 that we should all ask: Is there a grading system whereby we can learn what Hashem thinks of us?

Question #2 If one hundred years ago, every Jew in the world was on my present level of observance, would there be any Jews in the world today?

Answer to question 1): The great Baal Hatosafot, Rabbeinu Tam, in his "Sefer Ha'yashar" relates to the first question and points out that Hashem does have a grading system. When one is presented with the opportunity to perform a mitzva which is not readily available to most other Jews, that is a sign of love from Hashem. Two neighbors. One relates that he is inundated with phone calls and knocks on the door for tzedaka, and has no time for himself because of all the yeshiva committees he is on. His neighbor boasts of his serene life: no distracting knocks on the door and no committees. The first neighbor is beloved by HaShem; the second is in deep trouble.

In our time, the ultimate sign of love from Hashem to an individual Jew is the opportunity presented to him to escape the life of spiritual mediocrity in galut and to come home to Eretz Yisrael, where every breath and every step is a mitzva.

Answer to question 2): An honest reform or conservative Jew must admit that if 100 years ago all Jews were like him, there would be no Judaism or Jews alive today.

But indeed, we observant Jews are not free from asking ourselves this same question.

Let us look inside our souls. What kind of an example do we set for our children and grandchildren in the way we daven, conduct business, spend our free time? What is our level of me'sirat nefesh for things Jewish? What kinds of books, magazines, and internet sites enter our home?

It would not be an exaggeration to say that if we take at random an observant Jew in chutz la'aretz and a non-observant Jew in Eretz Yisrael, four generations down the line, the grandchild or great grandchild in chutz la'aretz will most likely be a violator of Shabbat and probably marry a gentile,

whereas the secular Jew's descendant in Eretz Yisrael will return to Torah.

The above two questions parallel the "twin towers" of the Bet Hamikdash. The one called "Boaz" brings to mind the story of Boaz and Ruth. In return for clinging to the elderly Naomi, Ruth was granted the opportunity of a very rare mitzva – the sign of HaShem's love. She came from afar, from Moav, to become the mother of royalty – she was the great grandmother of King David. And Boaz, at such an advanced stage in his life was granted the rare opportunity to become David's great grandfather.

The other "tower" called "Yachin" means to prepare, and alludes to our second question. When one begins to ponder where his descendants will live, he will have to better prepare himself and his family and their future attachment to klal Yisrael.

The parsha says (Devarim chap. 30):

"This mitzva (tshuva) which I command you this day is not too difficult for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in the heavens (not in an imposing structure of 110 floors), neither is it beyond the sea (in New York), but the word is very close to you in your mouth and in your heart (if you so will it)".

Shabbat Shalom,

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