

Standing and Going

The *Sidrot* of Nitzavim and Vayelekh always come out close to Rosh Hashana. Sometimes they are combined into one reading and sometimes (as this year) they are before and after Rosh Hashana. Nitzavim was the Sidra last weekend and Nitzavim will be read this Shabbat. I have always discerned a connection between these *parshiot* and the season.

Nitzavim means “Standing” and Vayelekh means “Going” (more specifically, “and He – Moshe – went”). This could be seen as an underlying theme for this time of year, following the idea of Kohelet 3 – a time to stand, a time to go.

On an individual level, we know that there are times to stand, especially when one feels as if they are floundering around. Sometimes we are not sure where life is taking us. At times like these, the best solution can be standing still rather than going in misdirection. On the other hand, one cannot live life by always standing still.

Chazal tell us that frequently, *malachim omdim*, the angels stand, always hovering, never moving forward. (If you get bored with the *machzor* over this season, look and see how many references to this theme you can find in the liturgy!). On the other hand, people (unlike angels) have to grow and learn.

This week’s *sidra* (Shabbat Shuva) Vayelekh starts out by telling us (Dvarim 31:1) “and He – Moshe – went”. It does not tell us exactly where Moshe went. There are many interpretations and explanations – he went to the Bet Midrash, he went to say goodbye to each tribe and family. I believe this is a descriptive term, telling us that close to the end, Moshe was still coming and going. And oddly, in the next verse (31:2) we are told that Moshe said, “I can no longer go out and come in”. This, after we are told that he went. Perhaps it means that even when he could not physically do what he used to, he was still able to go and act.

I would suggest that this time of year, as we greet 5776, is a time for standing and going. As individuals, it is a time for *heshbon hanefesh* - a deep look at ourselves, our spiritual and religious lives, our observance of mitzvot and halacha, our Torah learning, our relationships with our families, our congregation, our community and with each other. We need to stand and ponder, and then we need to go on, to grow and improve. We are not angels but people, imperfect but capable of great potential.

When Moshe talks about standing, he frames it in the plural (29:9-10) “your leaders, your families, the stranger, even the wood-choppers and water-drawers”. So this is also addressed to us on a communal level. A shul is a diverse aggregate of Jews. This is also a time for us to stand and go – to look at from where we have come, where we are, and where we might be going.

Moshe provides for us the example – for each of us individually as well as collectively. Truly at the time of Nitzavim and Vayelekh and as we begin 5776, it is a time for Standing and Going.

Ashira and my entire family join me in wishing the entire Darchei Noam family a year of life, light, peace, health, and love.

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