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GROWTH

At The SHABBAT TABLE

BS"D
By Mishaal Sionov
5785

PARSHAT NITZAVIM

Stand Up

In the 1950s, psychologist Solomon Asch set out to test how strongly social pressure can override individual judgment. In his now-classic conformity experiment, groups of eight college students were shown two cards — one with a single line and another with three lines of varying lengths. Seven of the participants were secretly actors instructed to give deliberately wrong answers, while the eighth was the true subject.

Round after round, the actors confidently insisted that a clearly shorter line matched the length of the single line. When it came time for the lone, unsuspecting participant to answer, roughly one-third conformed at least once, setting aside the evidence of their own eyes to agree with the group.

Asch also discovered a striking twist: if even one actor broke ranks and gave the correct answer, conformity rates plummeted to about 5 percent. His conclusion was clear and enduring — just one voice of dissent can embolden others to stand by the truth. [1]

As Moshe nears the end of his journey leading the Jews to the Promised Land and imparting his last few messages, he gathers the entire nation — leaders, elders, men, women, children, and even the converts — to stand before Hashem and enter into a renewed covenant. His message is that this bond with God is not limited to the current generation but includes those not physically present, binding all future descendants as well. In prefacing, “You stand this day, all of you, before Hashem, your G-d,” Moshe stresses unity and collective responsibility: every individual, regardless of status, is equally part of the people of Israel and equally accountable to uphold the Torah and its commandments.

One may wonder why Moshe felt compelled to mention that they were “standing” as he delivered this message. The answer, I believe, is profound.

If Jewish Nation would indeed endure, as it has, carrying the torch of truth and moral clarity throughout the centuries, it can't be sitting or sleeping. It can't be hiding or cowering in fear. It needs to be standing tall and proud — determined; unashamed; unapologetic of its belief, identity, or heritage. When we stand up for what's right, our courage inspires others to do the same.

As we enter Rosh Hashanah, the first thing we do is *kiddush* — standing. On a night with so many symbolic *simanim*, perhaps this, too, communicates that setting the stage for an amazing new year ahead requires standing up to the challenges that inevitably arise, so the year begins not with passivity but with purposeful strength and resilience.

[1] Solomon E. Asch, “Opinions and Social Pressure”, Scientific American, 1955.

Living for Others

On Monday morning last week, September 8th, a man was driving in Israel from Ramot toward Bayit Vegan. Passing a bus stop, he called out — as many Israelis often do — “Anyone need a ride? I'm going to Bayit Vegan.” Four people hopped into his car, one of them being R' Levi Yitzchak Pash.

Just before they drove off, another man rushed to the car window and begged, “I need to get to Shaare Zedek Hospital. Please, is there any chance you have room for one more?”

That's when something absolutely incredible happened.

R' Pash exited the car and told the man, “If you need this spot more than I do, I'm happy to wait for the bus. Please, you take it.”

R' Pash stayed behind to wait for the bus, and in that hour, he was tragically gunned down in a terrorist attack, murdered in cold blood together with 5 other precious lives.

His final act in this world was thinking about someone else. Even amidst such darkness and heartbreak across our nation, we find what to draw strength from. This small glimpse into such a quick interaction is the story of the Jewish people. Every single moment asking: *What can I give? What can I do? What does the next person need from me?*

That is our strength. That is his legacy. May we live every moment of our lives as the best and kindest version of ourselves, being ready and able at a moment's call to help and support others. Legacies aren't built by the singular big moment; they are created by the countless small ones.

May his memory, along with all those whose lives were tragically stolen from us, be a blessing.

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*“The key to greatness is not to show others how great **you** are, but to show others how great **they** can become.” (R. Shmuel Reichman)*