



GROWTH

At The

SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT NITZAVIM – VAYELECH

Standing: From Aleph to Tav

In this week's Parsha, Moshe gathers the nation together at the end of his life, immediately before the nation enters the Holy Land. Just after the warnings and rebuke that we read last week that describe the horrific exile, suffering, and destruction that will befall the Jewish people if they abandon the covenant, Moshe now addresses them: "You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d..."

He is not just preparing them for the transition from his leadership to the next stage of Jewish history under Yehoshua; he is reassuring them that despite the extraordinarily frightening description of everything that could go wrong, "you are still standing here today." And throughout the rest of time, when there would inevitably be trials and tribulations for the Jewish people, he implores us: *stand together*.

The *Chida* and the *Bet Aharon* both enigmatically point out that the word "אַתָּם/*atem*" in the opening words "אַתָּם נִצְבִים" (you are standing) has the same anatomy as the word "אֱמֶת/*emet*."

Perhaps, this reflects one of the deeper messages Moshe was attempting to convey. Not just that the Jews would need to stand firm, but *how* they needed to do so: through spreading truth.

R' YY Jacobson once pointed out something fascinating about the Hebrew word for "truth." Whereas the word for falsehood (שקר) is composed of three letters that stand adjacent to one another in the Hebrew alphabet, "אמת" is a word made up of three letters that span the entire alphabet: the first letter, the final letter, and the letter in the very middle.

The significance is profound. We think of "שקר" to mean a lie, but in a deeper lens, it also means to have a narrowed perspective, set on only viewing a small portion of a much

bigger picture. When reality is only observed from a single angle, one is bound to carry a false narrative.

Truth, on the other hand – as signified by the letters that compose the word – is achieved when one looks at the beginning, middle, and end. Its view is broad and expansive, accounting for the full story as opposed to zooming into one section and only looking at the parts that are convenient. Furthermore, like its standing throughout the alphabet, truth is timeless. It's there from start to finish, and it remains in between.

Perhaps this is also the secret to how the Jewish people have managed to remain standing throughout the course of history. We have endured not only persecution and bloodshed, but generations of distortion: libels, accusations, and smear campaigns that have attempted to paint us as something we are not. The challenge has never been merely to survive the attacks, but to remain standing without allowing the falsehoods of others to define who we are. And in the age of social media, that challenge has never been more powerful. Our response cannot simply be to shout louder, but to stand firmer – proudly and unapologetically rooted in truth, illuminating the darkness with the light of what is real.

But the message of *emet* is not limited to the Jewish people as a whole. It speaks to each of us individually. We, too, are constantly tempted to mistake a small part of our story for the entirety of it. If someone rejected us, we think "I'm unwanted." A failure becomes "I am a failure." A painful experience translates to "my life is painful." A difficult period spirals into "things will always be this way." But an honest perspective forces us zoom out. We may be standing in the middle of the story, unable to understand why we are experiencing what we are experiencing, but the middle is not the end. One chapter doesn't define the entire book. We are called upon not only to defend truth before the world, but first and foremost to seek it within ourselves.

"On Rosh Hashana, we come before Hashem not as perfect beings, but as sincere ones. It is our authenticity, our yearning for growth, and our desire to return that make us worthy of His mercy." (R' Avraham Twerski)

Among my personal favorite weekly Parsha publications is that of my brother, Yehoshua, who consistently works hard to put out an amazing read. Access and enjoy his content here:

