

What Is the Direction of Your Life?

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Abstract: On Yom Kippur, every person must take a stand. Are you in on this Covenant or not? Will you keep the faith or not? On Yom Kippur we are called upon to stand, to rise to our full height, not just physically, but also morally and spiritually. On Yom Kippur, take a stand for conscience: What do you stand for? What do you stand against?

The Torah reading for this Shabbat is called *Nitzavim*. This is the Torah portion we read just before Rosh Hashanah every single year. You can be sure our Rabbis chose it for a reason. You can bet it is no coincidence. What are the messages that our Rabbis always wanted us to hear in advance of a new year? Let's begin with Deuteronomy 30, verses 1-10. It's much more clear in the Hebrew than in the English translation, but the Torah repeats one particular theme, one verb, seven times in these eleven verses. What is the verb? This Torah portion makes multiple references to the Hebrew verb *shuv*, which has to do with turning or returning, changing direction.

The Rabbis chose this particular passage in advance of Rosh Hashanah because they wanted to get us thinking about past, present, and future directions of our lives.:

In the past year, in what directions did I stray?

From what directions do I want to pull back?

In the new year, to what ideals do I want to return?

How will I change direction for this new year?

In the new year, in what directions do I want to go?

I hope you can all see why this passage is the perfect Torah reading in advance of the High Holy Days!

But there is yet another reason why the Rabbis chose this Torah portion for us. Let's look at Deuteronomy chapter 29, verses 9-14. In our Reform tradition, we read the very same Torah verses from this same portion on Yom Kippur morning. Why? What is the point of reading it?

This passage reminds us that thousands of years ago our ancestors committed themselves to a covenant between God and the Jewish people. By reading these verses it is as if we are re-enacting the covenant, we are re-ratifying the covenant, we are committing ourselves to it. Notice, please, the emphasis on the people standing. On Yom Kippur, every person must take a stand. Are you in on this covenant or not? Will you keep the faith or not?

On Yom Kippur we are called upon to stand, to stand up, to rise our full height, not just physically, but also morally and spiritually. On Yom Kippur, we take a stand for conscience: what do you stand for? What do you stand against?

But our Rabbis are not done. Let's look at Deuteronomy chapter 30, verse 19. "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life if you and your offspring would live." The Torah exhorts us to choose life. What does it mean to you to choose life at this stage of your life? In what directions does "choosing life" go?

Here's my list for 5769:

Choose life. Make time for those you love.

Choose life. Make your loved ones happy.

Choose life. By the peace we bring to others.

Choose life. Life is fleeting. Do special things now. Don't wait.

Choose life. Take responsibility for your health.

Choose life. Live with urgency.

Choose life. Stop feeling sorry for yourself. Don't get bitter. Move on.

Choose life. Take long overdue action to realize your dreams.

Choose life. Adopt a hopeful and optimistic mindset.

Choose life. Never lose your sense of humor

Bacharta bachayyim. For this new year of 5769, may all of us choose life!

And now, to proclaim that the new year begins in just 3 days, and that it is time for all of us to reflect about the future directions of our lives, our commitment to the covenant, and the causes for which we are prepared to take a stand, we shall hear the traditional blasts of the shofar. Please rise.