



HAFTARAT PARSHAT NITZAVIM-VAYELECH Immortality in Partnership

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Parshat Nitzavim contains one of the most celebrated declarations in the Torah: "It is not in heaven...nor is it beyond the sea.... This word is very close to you" (Deuteronomy 30:12–14). For generations, commentators and halakhists have heard in these verses a bold assertion about the nature of Torah itself — that once given, it belongs not to the heavens but to us. As we shall see, the haftarah from the Book of Isaiah deepens that assertion, clothing it in the imagery of joy, marriage and eternity. Together, the parsha and haftarah invite us to reconsider what it means to be partners, not merely recipients, in the divine covenant.

Nowhere is this more dramatically illustrated than in the famous Talmudic episode of the Oven of Akhnai (Bava Metzia 59b). A halakhic dispute erupts between the community of sages and Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Eliezer demonstrates miraculous signs to support his position. A heavenly voice even intervenes to support him. Yet the majority of the sages refuse to accept it, invoking the very verse from Nitzavim we have quoted above: "It is not in heaven." The ruling goes against the divine demonstration. The Torah has already been given; its interpretation now belongs to the human community of its bearers.

But what has always been most striking about that story is what happens next. Rav Natan later encounters the prophet Eliyahu and asks: What was God's reaction when He saw His miraculous signs overruled? Eliyahu's answer is astonishing. God smiled, and proclaimed: Nitzechuni banai! — usually rendered, "My children have defeated Me!" It is a concession wrapped in what sounds like delight.

This haftarah, however, opens a window onto a different reading of the reaction of God. Yeshayahu declares: "I shall rejoice, rejoice in the Lord; my soul exults in my God; He has wrapped me in garb of triumph, on my shoulders the mantle of victory, as a bridegroom attends in splendor, and a bride puts on her jewels" (Isaiah 61:10). The image is one of radiant joy, and the triumph being celebrated is one in which God Himself wraps us in the mantle of victory. The triumph does not belong to us alone. It belongs to the partnership.

The figure of the bride and groom is not incidental. Marriage is the Torah's paradigm for a relationship in which two voices are essential, in which each party holds the right to speak and to respectfully assert itself, and in which the truth that emerges is the product of genuine connection. A marriage is not a transaction or a hierarchy. It is a covenant in which both partners are transformed by their bond. And crucially, the home that a bride and groom build is meant to outlast them both, to create something that transcends their individual lifetimes. So too the edifice of Torah built through human-divine partnership is meant to be eternal, tempered by



both its heavenly source and its earthly interpreters into something that neither could produce alone.

From the description in the haftarah of God and the Jewish people we discover a deeper meaning hidden in the expression nitzechuni banai. The word nitzechuni need not be read from the root meaning "to defeat." It can equally be read from netzach, meaning eternity or forever. Eliyahu's response to R. Natan was not "My children have not defeated Me," rather he meant "My children have immortalized Me." The moment we take responsibility for Torah — not as passive recipients of a fixed inheritance but as active partners in its interpretation and development — we guarantee the covenant's eternal future. We ensure that the divine word will never become a relic, because it will always be alive in the hands of those who carry it.

Rav Chaim of Volozhin, in his introduction to the Vilna Gaon's commentary on Sifra Ditzniuta, captures something of this spirit when he describes how his teacher, the Vilna Gaon, refused to receive Torah wisdom through any medium — not prophecy or even angelic intercessors. The Gaon insisted on arriving at understanding through his own toil and struggle, so that whatever portion in Torah he achieved would truly be his own. This is not arrogance. It is the deepest form of fidelity to what Nitzavim asks of us: to own the Torah, to labor over it, and thereby to make it live.

As we approach Rosh Hashana, the combined message of parsha and haftarah should remind us that the Torah rests on our shoulders — the very shoulders on which, in Yeshayahu's vision, the mantle of victory is draped. This awareness can guide us as we prepare to enter the new year, examining what we need to improve, what we want to accomplish and how we as the Jewish people can grow. The covenant endures because each generation takes it up, wrestles with it, and, in doing so, immortalizes it anew.