

“Stand Still and See!”

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“TODAY YOU ARE STANDING, all of you, before the LORD your God...”

These are the rousing opening words of the Torah portion *Nitzavim* (Deut 29:10ff), read every year on the Sabbath before *Rosh HaShanah*. At the end of the portion, Moses prophetically exhorts his beloved Israel to repent: *“Turn back to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul”* (30:10).

These verses, with their themes of reckoning and repentance, capture the essence of *Rosh HaShanah* and the ten Days of Awe that follow, culminating in *Yom Kippur*. This is the season for turning our hearts back to God in repentance, beginning with the recognition that we must stand before our Creator and give an account of our lives. In effect we must *“stand still and see”* (Exo 14:13) how we measure up to our Maker.

We live in such frenetic times that we are ill inclined to “stand still” and even less to “see” with any clarity what is going on in our own lives. But the approaching High Holy Days give us the opportunity to quiet the noise of our busy lives and to pay attention to the course we are taking—in order to see anew our God and to effect profound and lasting changes in our lives. We take cognizance that God is our King and our Judge. He is deeply

interested in us, but we must remember that our actions matter and they will be recorded! Therefore we take time to reflect consciously and carefully on what we are doing and why, of where we are heading, and about who we are as human beings made in His image.

THE CENTRAL THEMES OF *Rosh HaShanah* correlate with the three interwoven spheres of relationship that comprise our lives—with God, others, and self. The piercing sounds of the *shofar* that punctuate this august season serve as a wake-up call, reminding us to re-examine these vital relationships and make any necessary corrections or adjustments.

1] *Teshuvah*, repentance, in which we examine ourselves. Our innermost being is expressed in our outward deeds. Now is the time to see if these are in accord with the heart of God; to consider how we are progressing towards the goals set before us, such as serving the Lord and maturing as persons, of deepening our relationship with our spouse and becoming better models for our children. Where we fall short, the gift of repentance enables us to realign with our true selves as children of the Father and heirs to the fullness of life in Messiah.

2] *Tefilah*, prayer, in which we turn to God. The wondrous privilege of conversing with our Father in heaven—whether to express praise or thank-fulness, to repent or to petition—opens our hearts to the Almighty and acknowledges His sovereignty over us. We confess our radical dependence upon Him and our

desire for Him. Just as meaningful communication is vital for growth in any close relationship, purposeful prayer facilitates ever greater intimacy with the One who made and loves us.

3] *Tzedakah*, charity, in which we concretely express love and concern for the well being of others. Loyalty is the anchor that keeps any relationship strong and secure. Now is an opportune time to examine where our loyalties really lie. In a consumer-driven society, are we better servants of *Mammon* (wealth) than of the Master? Are we giving into the lives of those God has given into our hands for care and those He has brought across our paths for kindness? If so, then we are giving life and hope to others, we are building loving and abiding relationships, and we are allowing God’s light to shine into the darkness of the poor, the needy and the brokenhearted.

The annual succession of biblical feasts represents a cycle of sanctification. This New Year let us seize the moment and “stand still and see” that the Lord is good but that some of our attitudes and actions are not. Let us hear the call of the shofar and repent. And with the Father’s help, let us resolve to bring all our relationships in accord with His name and under the banner of His love.

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