

# The Extra Covenant

Category: Devarim, Nitzavim

*When Rabbi Grossman and his wife arrived in Migdal Ha'emek, everything was stacked against them. Where did they find the strength to persevere?*

## “Your Husband is Taking You To Hell”

One of the most popular rabbis in Israel is Rabbi Yitzchok Dovid Grossman. He runs an educational empire of over six thousand students, mainly from broken homes;. His campuses are equal in size to Columbia University.

It all began after the Six Day War. Inspired by the open miracles of the times, Rabbi Grossman and his wife decided to move to Migdal Ha'emek, a town in the north that was rife with crime and poverty.

During the taxi ride to Migdal, they received their first welcome. They had stopped at a gas station and Rabbi Grossman had stepped out for a moment, when the taxi driver turned to his wife and asked, “Do you know where your husband is taking you? He is taking you to hell...”

When they arrived in Migdal, they rented a small apartment and began successfully engaging with the local youth. As time went on, he became increasingly popular, but there was one person who didn't appreciate his success - the mayor of the town, Tzvi Eldroti.

Eldroti wasn't only a mayor; he was the sheriff of Migdal. He controlled everything with an iron fist, and nothing happened in the city without his approval. Being a member of the leftist, secular Mapai party, he was very suspect of the religious Jew who — in his understanding — was here to steal votes for the religious parties. He decided to “send him back to Jerusalem.”

One day, about a year after the Grossmans had arrived, their landlord knocked on the door. Mrs. Grossman welcomed him warmly, but he informed her without any delay that they needed to vacate the premises before the next morning.

She was horrified. Her husband had just traveled to Jerusalem. This was before

the cell-phone era; even regular telephones were something only the well-off could afford. There was no way of contacting him, and no knowing exactly when he would be back.

She asked him to wait until her husband returned from Jerusalem, but the landlord was insistent. He explained that he worked in the city council, and they told him that he would lose his job if he continued renting to the new rabbi. Mrs. Grossman understood that he had no choice in the matter and she didn't want him to lose his job on her account so she rented a horse and buggy, left the house with her baby daughter and their meager belongings, and settled down in the women's section of the Ashkenazic synagogue.

That Friday, Rabbi Grossman returned to town. He came to his house and knocked on the door, but nobody opened. He tried to insert the key, but he discovered that the locks had been changed.

One of the neighbors came out. "Rabbi, you no longer live here."

"What do you mean? If I don't live here, where *do* I live?"

"I don't know where you live," the neighbor responded, "but you definitely don't live here." He told Rabbi Grossman that his wife had been evicted from the apartment.

Not knowing where to go, he went to the synagogue. Arriving there, he bumped into his wife, sitting there with all their belongings. When she saw him, she burst out laughing. "What do we have left, besides for laughter," she told him.

When they finished laughing about their situation, they went to look for a new apartment. But nobody in the city would rent to them. The rumor was out that the "king" of the city doesn't want them there, and people were afraid to let them in.

In the end, they found an old decrepit apartment owned by an elderly man who wasn't associated with the City Council. Despite its terrible conditions, they decided to rent it. Everything was broken; the door to the apartment was gone, there was no heat, the kitchen was tiny and wrecked, but they made do with whatever they had.

They went through a very difficult winter. Their baby got sick, and then Rabbi Grossman got sick as well. Mrs. Grossman felt that she couldn't go on any longer.

She sat down to write a letter to her parents in which she described the hardships and her frustration.

Then, after pouring her heart out, she looked at the two large pages crammed with small letters. Standing up straight, she took a deep breath and threw the letter in the garbage. She decided that she would continue.

## **The Second Covenant**

On the Shabbos before Rosh Hashanah, we always read Parshat Nitzavim. It begins with the words, “All of you stand today before God... to pass into a covenant.” Rashi explains that before Moses on the day of his passing, gathered the entire nation together and made a covenant with them in preparation for their entry to the land of Israel.

Why was another covenant necessary? Didn't they already make a covenant at Mount Sinai?

During the entire sojourn in the desert, Moses accompanied the Jewish people. Whenever there was a problem or a crisis, they immediately turned to Moses. If there was no water, they complained to Moses. If there was no food, they complained to Moses. If they were tired — again, Moses. Moses was always there to save them.

Now, Moses knew that he wouldn't be accompanying them anymore. It was time for them to enter the land of Israel, where they would need to work the land. Manna would no longer fall from heaven, and water would not be easily available. In Israel, they would need to work hard to survive.

Therefore, it was time for another covenant. This covenant was to give them strength for the days to come; even when life is difficult, even if you get thrown out of your apartment, even if it's very cold in the winter, even if the land does not produce the crop that you hoped for — you still should not lose hope.

The secret of this covenant is found in the name of the parsha, Nitzavim. The classic Hebrew word for “standing” is “omdim.” but here, Moses chooses a different word for standing, Nitzavim.

The Rebbe explains that Nitzavim connotes a strong stance, the type associated

with a king. When the Talmud wants to describe the power of a king, it says, "If the king commands, even a mountain will be uprooted."

In simple terms, this covenant gives a Jew the power to uproot mountains. There is nothing standing in your way.

But the condition for this covenant is that it be "all of you." We have this power when we are united. True, there are different types of Jews and different levels of people. Every person has his unique job and mission, and there is no need to erase the differences between us. But we all need to remember that we are one. (Shulchan Shabbos Devarim pg. 233.)

The Alter Rebbe says in Likutei Torah, that Atem Nitzavim **Hayom** refers to Rosh Hashanah because every Rosh Hashanah we make a new covenant with G-d that gives us the strength to carry on for the coming year.