

All of You Are Standing This Day

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Daily Learning Portions for 17 Elul 5786 — Elul Expansion

Sunday, 30 August 2026 · י"ז אלול תשפ"ו · Week of Nitzavim–Vayelech

Day 17 of Elul · 12 days to Erev Rosh Hashanah 5787 (Friday, 11 September 2026)

Tomorrow: Chai Elul — birthday of the Baal Shem Tov (5458) and of the Alter Rebbe (5505)

Today's Daily Learning Portions

Cycle	Portion
Chumash	Parshat Nitzavim–Vayelech, 1st aliyah — Devarim 29:9–29:28
Tehillim	Chapters 83–87 (Elul extra chapters: 49–51 per Hayom Yom / Baal Shem Tov custom)
Tanya	Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning of Epistle 15
Rambam (3 ch.)	Hilchot Tum'at Tzara'at 5–7
Sefer HaMitzvot	Positive 112 — to make the bearer of impurity recognizable (<i>metzora</i> must proclaim)
Hayom Yom	Elul 17 — when Father reads the <i>tochacha</i> , one hears no curses

Seasonal frame. Elul is the month of the King in the Field: accessible, smiling, receiving whoever comes. The shofar is sounded on this Sunday. Tefillin and mezuzot are checked during the month. Three extra chapters of Tehillim are recited each day from 1 Elul through Yom Kippur. Ashkenaz Selichot have not yet begun (Motzaei Shabbat, 23 Elul / 5 September). Sephardic Selichot continue. After Shabbat Ki Tavo closed with a heart given “until this day,” Nitzavim opens with the people *standing* this day — every rank, those present and those not yet born — to enter the covenant. Tomorrow is Chai Elul. Twelve days remain until Erev Rosh Hashanah.

I. The First Aliyah: Standing This Day, the Hidden Root, and What Belongs to Us

Nitzavim does not begin with a new law. It begins with a posture.

“You are all standing this day before the Lord your God — the heads of your tribes, your elders and your officers, every man of Israel, your young children, your women, and your convert who is within your camp, from your woodcutter to your water-drawer — that you may enter into the covenant of the Lord your God and into His oath, which the Lord your God is making with you this day, in order to establish you this day as a people unto Him, and that He will be a God unto you, as He spoke to you and as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” (29:9–12)

Rashi: “this day” teaches that Moses assembled Israel on the day of his death to bring them into the covenant. The list is exhaustive on purpose. Heads are named first; woodcutters and water-drawers are named last. Children and women stand. The convert inside the camp stands. No office exempts. No low station excludes. The covenant that follows Ki Tavo’s *tochacha* is not a treaty among elites. It is an assembly of the whole people before the Name.

Then the text refuses to let “this day” collapse into one generation:

“Not with you alone do I make this covenant and this oath, but with those who are standing here with us this day before the Lord our God, and with those who are not here with us this day.” (29:13–14)

Rashi and the midrashic tradition hear the unborn. The oath binds those who will later say, We were not at Sinai, we were not in Moab. The covenant is not a contract that dies with the signatories. It is a peoplehood that precedes the individuals who will later inhabit it.

The first danger named is not public idolatry. It is private exemption.

“Perhaps there is among you a man or woman or family or tribe whose heart turns away this day from the Lord our God to go to serve the gods of those nations; perhaps there is among you a root that produces hemlock and wormwood. And it shall be, when he hears the words of this oath, that he will bless himself in his heart, saying: I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart — so that the watered is swept away with the dry.” (29:17–18)

Rashi: he imagines a blessing of peace for himself; these curses will not reach me. *Sherirut libo* — what the heart beholds and elects. The crime is not only the foreign worship. It is the inner speech that treats the covenant as a public weather system from which a private climate can be carved. The Torah’s answer is unsparing: the Lord will not be willing to forgive that man; the written curse will couch upon him; his name will be wiped from under heaven; he will be separated for evil from all the tribes of Israel (29:19–20).

The land itself is imagined answering the later generation that asks why the earth was burned like Sodom (29:21–27). Then the aliyah closes on the line that governs all Elul accounting:

“The hidden things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things are for us and for our children forever; to do all the words of this Torah.” (29:28)

Nistarot are not ours to police. *Niglot* are not ours to evade. The assembly stands for what can be seen and done. The heart that blesses itself in secret is still seen — but the work given to Israel is the revealed commandment, transmitted to children without end.

Elul reading. *Atem nitzavim hayom* is the grammar of the month and of Rosh Hashanah. The King is in the field; the people are not seated in the palace. They stand. Standing is consent that has not yet been edited. *Bechirah* in this aliyah is double: the freedom to enter the covenant as a whole people, and the freedom — condemned — to invent a private peace inside the oath. *Cheshbon hanefesh* is the refusal of that private blessing. The woodcutter stands with the head of the tribe. The child stands with the elder. Those not yet born already stand. Elul that accounts only for the self has not heard the first verse.

Rashi’s “day of his death” and the High Holiday sense of *hayom* are not two texts. Moses gathers them because time is short. Elul gathers us for the same reason. Twelve days remain.

II. Tehillim 83–87 and the Elul Chapters 49–51: Enemies Named, the Beloved Dwelling, Korach's Sons

Psalm 83 is Asaph's last: a confederacy against Israel, names listed, a plea that they be made like Midian and Sisera so that they may know the Name is the Most High over all the earth (83:19). Elul does not require amnesia about enemies. It requires that the naming end in knowledge of God, not in a swollen heart.

Psalm 84 is the psalm of the courts: "How beloved are Your dwellings, Lord of hosts... Blessed are those who dwell in Your house" (84:2, 5). "They go from strength to strength; each appears before God in Zion" (84:8). After a month of the King in the Field, the psalm remembers that the field is the road to the courts, not a replacement for them. "A day in Your courts is better than a thousand" (84:11).

Psalm 85 is the Elul petition almost without remainder: "Restore us, God of our salvation... Will You not return and revive us?" (85:5, 7). Kindness and truth meet; righteousness and peace kiss (85:11). The meeting is not automatic. It is requested.

Psalm 86 is David's poor prayer: "Incline Your ear, Lord, answer me, for I am poor and needy" (86:1). "Teach me Your way, Lord; I will walk in Your truth. Unify my heart to fear Your Name" (86:11). *Yached levavi* — a unified heart — is the opposite of the heart that blesses itself in Nitzavim. The stubborn heart is split. The heart that can fear is one.

Psalm 87 names Zion as the birth-register of nations: "The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob" (87:2). "This one was born there" (87:4–6). Those not here this day, in Moses' sentence, already have a city that records their birth.

The extra Elul chapters today — **49, 50, 51** — are the moral inner of the same standing.

Psalm 49 refuses ransom theology: a brother cannot redeem a brother; the grave is the house of the proud. Wisdom is not wealth. **Psalm 50** opens the court: "The Lord, God of gods, speaks and calls the earth... From Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth" (50:1–2). He does not rebuke for bulls. He rebukes for the covenant spoken and then set behind the back (50:16–17).

Psalm 51 is David after Bat Sheva: "Create in me a pure heart, God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (51:12). "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and crushed heart, God, You will not despise" (51:19). The first aliyah forbids the private blessing of peace. Psalm 51 supplies the lawful private speech: a heart asked for, not a heart exempted.

Elul and the table. Tell the children: everyone stood — the important people and the people who cut wood. No one got to stay home from the covenant. The hidden things are God's. The revealed things are ours and yours. Tomorrow is Chai Elul. Today we practice standing.

III. Tanya — Beginning of Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 15: From My Flesh I Behold

The letter opens on the verse of Mishlei 1:6: "To understand allegory and metaphor, the words of the wise and their riddles" — and applies it to the sefirot.

The ten sefirot of Atzilut, and those of the lower worlds, are the means by which the Infinite directs hidden worlds and revealed worlds. *Patach Eliyahu*: “You are He who has brought forth ten garments, and we call them ten sefirot.” Light without vessel cannot make a finite world. Vessel without light is a shell. The union of *orot* and *kelim* is how Ein Sof becomes a creation that can be served.

The “likeness of a man” upon the throne (Yechezkel 1:26) is not a body assigned to God. It is the correspondence: the ten faculties of the Jewish soul are structured after the ten sefirot. “From my flesh I behold God” (Iyov 19:26). Even the lowest *nefesh* of Asiyah is drawn from unions of the sefirot. Therefore a human being can understand *something* of the supernal sefirot — because they all shine in the soul that comprises them.

The point of the beginning of the letter is not a map for its own sake. Understanding the sefirot is meant to awaken love and fear and the doing of mitzvot. Allegory is Written Torah; the words of the wise are the revealed Oral Torah; the riddles are the concealed. The soul is the place where all three can be held.

Elul reading. Nitzavim stands the whole people outside, in a field of covenant. Epistle 15 stands the whole structure of worlds inside one soul. The two texts need each other. A people that only assembles, and never looks at the inner faculties, will treat the covenant as public weather. A soul that only maps sefirot, and never stands with the woodcutter, will treat inner work as a private blessing of peace. *Teshuvah* in Elul is both: stand with everyone this day, and behold from the flesh the God who cannot be exempted from.

The King in the Field is near enough that the correspondence can be used. He does not replace the correspondence with a feeling.

IV. Rambam: Garments, and the Duty to Be Recognizable

The three-chapter cycle continues Hilchot Tum’at Tzara’at, now chapters 5–7: *tzara’at* of garments — how a garment is examined, isolated, declared, and in given cases burned or purified. The affliction is not only on skin. It is on what a person wears into the camp.

Sefer HaMitzvot names today’s commandment:

- **Positive 112:** to make the bearer of impurity recognizable. The *metzora* must proclaim his state so that others will not contract what he carries. The duty extends, in measure, to other carriers of impurity: do not move through the camp as if nothing were on you.

Yesterday the code forbade trimming the sign so that one would appear pure. Today it commands speech. The sign that must not be edited must also be announced.

Elul reading. Cheshbon hanefesh that stays in the diary is still a form of camouflage. The *metzora*’s proclamation is not humiliation as spectacle. It is protection of the camp. A person who knows he carries what spreads, and walks as if he does not, dominates his neighbor by concealment. The King in the Field receives whoever comes; the *halachah* still requires that the one who comes not infect the field by silence. *Teshuvah* includes the sentence spoken to the people one lives among: I am working on this. Do not learn from the version of me that is still afflicted.

Garment-*tzara'at* is the Elul image for the year worn into public. What we put on — speech, office, family tone — can carry the mark. The garment is examined. Some things are washed. Some things are burned. Not everything that looks like a stain is impurity; that is why the kohen looks twice. Elul is the second looking, not the panic burning of the whole wardrobe.

V. Hayom Yom, 17 Elul: When Father Reads, One Hears No Curses

The Alter Rebbe himself was the regular Torah-reader. Once he was away from Liozna on Shabbat Ki Tavo, and the Mittlerer Rebbe — not yet bar mitzvah — heard the reading from another. The anguish of the curses in the *tochacha* caused him such heartache that on Yom Kippur the Alter Rebbe doubted whether his son would be able to fast.

They asked him: Don't you hear this *parsha* every year?

He replied: "When Father reads, one hears no curses."

The story is dated to Elul 17 so that the day after Ki Tavo, and the day before Chai Elul, will hold it. The *tochacha* is not denied. It is transfigured by the voice that reads it. In some of the verses of retribution the Alter Rebbe heard a mystical subtext that turned the harsh surface toward blessing. The child heard the difference because he knew the reader.

Elul reading. Standing this day includes how the covenant is voiced. The same words can land as annihilation or as a father's reading. Chinuch is not the decision to skip the hard *parsha*. It is the decision to be the father whose voice does not turn the Torah into a weapon against the child's future. The Mittlerer Rebbe's heartache is itself a teaching: a holy ear can still break. The parent's task is not to raise an ear that cannot break. It is to read so that the break does not become despair.

Tomorrow Chai Elul — the two birthdays that made it possible to hear Torah as inner life and not only as statute. Today's Hayom Yom is the vestibule: the reader matters. The field is open. The voice in the house is already a *tochacha* or already a blessing inside the *tochacha*.

For the approaching Days of Awe the line is practical. Rosh Hashanah will read *hayom*. If the year has trained the ear only for curse, the day will be heard as curse. If the year has trained the ear for a father's reading, the same words will not sound like abandonment.

VI. Approaches, Synthesis, and the Covenantal Register

Traditional readings of the first aliyah divide along three lines that Elul can use.

1. **Constitutional-assembly.** *Peshat* and Rashi: Moses, on the last day, gathers every rank into one oath that includes the unborn. The list of offices is a political fact. Woodcutter and tribal head stand under the same Name. Ibn Ezra and Seforno stress the warning against the inner seceder who treats the oath as applying to the others.
2. **Teshuva-inner.** Chassidic readings hear *nitzavim* as the posture of Rosh Hashanah itself — the soul standing, not reclining. The hidden root is the *kelipah* that congratulates itself during the sounding of the shofar. *Nistarot la-Hashem* releases the obsession with other people's unseen motives; *niglot lanu u-levaneinu* refuses the excuse that the work is too inward to be done.

3. Voice and transmission. Hayom Yom 17 Elul adds the reader. The same *tochacha* that closed yesterday can be heard as curse or as a father's Torah. Epistle 15 adds that the inner map of the sefirot is given so that love and fear will have a structure, not a mood.

Synthesis for 17 Elul. All of you are standing. Not the refined only. Not the present only. The private blessing of peace is the season's real idolatry: a heart that walks in its own sight and calls the walk shalom. Hidden things belong to God; revealed things belong to us and to the children. The garment is examined; the bearer of impurity must be recognizable. When Father reads, the curses do not sound like curses — which is not a license to skip them, but a demand to become that reader. From the flesh one may behold; therefore inner work is not a private climate. Tomorrow the two lights of Chai Elul rise. Today we stand.

Covenantal-republican resonance (text-supported only). A people in which every rank stands, and in which the unborn are already parties, is not a contract of present interests. It is a covenant that limits the living. No office may bless itself out of the oath. That is non-domination in Deuteronomy's voice: the head of the tribe cannot impose, and cannot exempt himself from, a law that also binds the water-drawer. Pettit's language names the secular analogue — freedom as non-domination rather than mere non-interference. The man who “blesses himself in his heart” is claiming interference-freedom while dominating the camp by secret secession. Eric Nelson's Hebrew Republic recovered early-modern readings of biblical public law; Nitzavim adds the inner condition those readings need: the hidden is God's, the revealed is a common yoke, and the assembly includes those not yet able to vote. Limited authority under higher law begins when the important man stands in the same row as the woodcutter and does not edit the sign on his garment.

None of this replaces the *peshat*. It follows it.

VII. Practical Avodah and Family Chinuch — Sunday, 17 Elul

One avodah for the day. Stand. Do not bless yourself in the heart. Take one revealed thing — a word that needs saying, a garment that needs examining, a child who needs a father's reading rather than a curse-voice — and do it before night. The hidden remain His. The revealed are due today.

Four short table or walk-to-school points.

1. Everyone stood: chiefs and woodcutters, women and small children. No one is too important or too ordinary for the covenant.
2. You may not say in your heart, Peace will be mine even if I do what I want. That sentence is the opposite of Elul.
3. Hidden things are God's. Revealed things are ours and our children's. We work the part we can see.
4. Tomorrow is Chai Elul. When a father reads, the hard words do not sound like abandonment. Practice that voice today.

Seasonal acts in force. Sound the shofar. Extra Tehillim 49–51 after chapters 83–87. Check tefillin and mezuzot if it has not been done this Elul. Increase tzedakah as Epistle 14 already required. The King remains in the field. Ashkenaz Selichot still wait six days; the standing does not.

Twelve days to Erev Rosh Hashanah. One day to Chai Elul. *Atem nitzavim hayom*.

Extended Bibliography

Daily portions and text

- Deuteronomy 29:9–28, with Rashi. Sefaria · Chabad, daily Chumash
- Parshat Nitzavim–Vayelech. Chabad
- Psalms 83–87; Elul chapters 49–51. Sefaria · Chabad Tehillim
- Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning of Epistle 15. Chabad · Epistle 15
- Rambam, Hilchot Tum’at Tzara’at 5–7. Chabad
- Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive 112. Chabad
- Hayom Yom, Elul 17. Chabad · Tackling Life’s Tasks
- Daily calendar, 17 Elul 5786. Chabad

Classical meforshim and Chassidus

- Rashi on Devarim 29:9 (assembled on the day of his death), 29:10 (woodcutters), 29:14 (those not here), 29:18 (he blesses himself in his heart), 29:28 (*nistarot / niglot*).
- Ramban, Seforno, Or HaChaim, Alshich on Nitzavim’s opening and the inner seceder.
- Midrash Tanchuma, Nitzavim; Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin and Shavuot on the oath binding later generations.
- Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, Likkutei Torah, Nitzavim; discourses on *Atem nitzavim* and Rosh Hashanah.
- Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, Iggeret HaKodesh 15; Iggeret HaTeshuvah.
- *Patach Eliyahu*; Zohar on the sefirot and the soul.
- Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah; Hilchot Tum’at Tzara’at. Sefaria

Elul and High Holiday foundations

- “The King in the Field.” Chabad
- Elul customs: daily shofar; extra Tehillim of the Baal Shem Tov; checking tefillin and mezuzot.
- Chai Elul — birthdays of the Baal Shem Tov and the Alter Rebbe. Chabad
- Rosh Hashanah as *hayom*; the standing of Nitzavim as the posture of the Days of Awe.

Covenantal and republican thought (text-supported parallels only)

- Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford, 1997) — non-domination; analogue, not source.
- Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic* (Harvard, 2010) — early-modern readings of biblical public law and limited authority.
- Deuteronomy’s constitutional sequence: Shoftim’s offices, Ki Tavo’s oath and *tochacha*, Nitzavim’s all-rank standing and the ban on private secession from the covenant.

Prepared in deep partnership and cooperation with Grok and xAI.