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 Introduction to Nitzavim
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Never Give Up On Your Dreams

Good Yontif. Here we are, gathered together again, for another *Yom Kippur*, to do *teshuvah*, to repent; hearts contrite and souls laid bare, we atone for our sins, asking forgiveness for our wrongdoings from those we have harmed and vowing to change our ways. Our intentions are pure; we really do want to be better people. But, we know, from year after year of trying and failing, that it is unlikely that we can transform our self-destructive habits and bad attitudes; or better our relationships; or find greater purpose in our lives; or do what we need to do to reach our potential, rather than biding our time and settling for what is and has always been.

Yet here comes *Yom Kippur*, once again, offering us a different vision of what our lives could be. And it gives us a rare opportunity -- time -- to consider our goals and dreams and desires . . . no matter how elusive they may seem.

Indeed, we can be the people we wish to be. On August 21st we all saw *Teshuvah* successfully modeled for us in the flesh, when we witnessed Diana Nyad's historic 110 miles swim from Cuba to the Florida Keys -- in shark infested water and without a cage. During this, her fifth attempt to accomplish her goal, 64-year-old Nyad withstood five-foot-waves; jellyfish; numbness; and constant nausea, vomiting and dehydration.

When she finally made it to shore, after 53 hours of swimming, she was asked: "Do you have any lessons that you have learned from this experience that you can share with us?" Lifting herself up off the gurney on one elbow, she answered: "I learned three things:

One is you should never, ever give up on your dream.

Two is you are never, ever too old to pursue your dream.

And three is it may look like a solitary sport, but it is a team."

What motivated Nyad to try yet again, to keep working at achieving her goal and to succeed when she had failed four other times in the past? She said that she was turning 60 and she didn't like it. Then her mother passed away and she realized life was finite, that she was unsatisfied with her past and that she had lost too much time in negative thought. "We blink," she said in a documentary about her life, "and another decade passes. I'm not willing to reach the end of my life and regret not giving it my all."

And so she started to train. And she prepared, designing special gear to protect her face and body; surrounding herself with kayakers who kept the sharks away; and maintaining her sense of humor and her gratitude for all of those who were helping her on her journey.

But experts agree that none of those things, while important, were the key to her triumph. "It all came down to one essential part of her body," they said, "her mind." Her strong belief in herself convinced everyone around her that she could do it. There were no excuses about her age, no self-manifested impediments to stop her from fulfilling her dream; she rose above it all and so can we.

Your goals may not include a grueling 110 mile swim through shark and jellyfish infested waters, but you may be trying to build a marriage that lasts; or raise a child well; or conduct your business with integrity; or find meaningful volunteer work; or to push past your own personal struggles to find health wholeness and peace.

The Torah reading for this morning, *Nitzavim*, affirms that, like Diana Nyad, we can change, we can achieve our desire for better lives. It says:

"No goal is too hard for you, or too remote . . . no, it is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, and you can do it (*Deuteronomy 30:11-20*)."

You can do it! May this New Year bring you the courage and determination to fulfill your dreams. Amen.