

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Nitzavim

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkafa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Nitzavim

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. Hardship and Pain Temper the Jew

The Torah states, **"You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your G'd..."** The Midrash states, "You (G'd) turn over the evil one so that he does not exit, but the house of the righteous remains standing. When G'd scrutinizes the ways of the evil and evaluates them, they cannot remain standing. As we see regarding the generation of the Great Flood, He scrutinized their actions and they did not remain standing....He scrutinized the community of Sodom and they did not remain standing. He scrutinized the ways of Egypt and they did not remain standing. As it states, 'Not any of them remained but one...' He scrutinized the Babylonians after they destroyed the Temple and none of them remained standing. As it states, 'I will cut off from Babylon and there will be no descendant...' All the evildoers have been cast away and will not rise, but the Jewish people although they have fallen, they will rise. As it states, 'Even when I have fallen, I will rise...' Reb Chanina Bar Papa says, 'G'd said, 'There was never a nation that I have smitten that I needed to smite again. However, you, who are the children of Yaakov were not consumed. As it states, 'My arrows will be expended but they will not be expended.' The Jewish people are similar to a target. Although the arrows penetrate the target, it remains in place. Why are the nations of the world destroyed when they are punished, yet the Jewish people are able rise? It is because when difficulties comes upon the nations, they bolt and rebel against G'd. They do not mention His Name. As it states, 'Your Wrath should pour out upon the nations who do not know You. They did no call upon Your Name.' However, in contrast, when tragedy befalls the Jewish people they become humbled/subordinate themselves and pray."

Rambam writes in the Laws of Divorce that, although a writ of divorce (*get*) is only valid when it is given consensually, if the husband does not want to divorce his wife, the court is permitted to coerce him to do so, even through physical coercion, until he says "I consent." Rambam asks, how is it a valid *writ of divorce* if we are fully aware that the husband is only in agreement because he could no longer tolerate the pain? Why is this considered a valid *get*? Rambam explains that the will of every Jew is to do the Will of G'd. It is true that one may

be distracted or confused by his conflicts of interest and the evil inclination, but essentially the Jew wants to do what the Torah dictates. When the Jew is jolted through coercion, his conflicts of interest no longer interfere with his perception of truth and proper service of G'd. In contrast, when the non-Jew is jolted as a result of upheavals, he believes that he is being victimized. Since his essence is not spiritual, he does not become humbled and consequently repent, but rather he rebels against G'd. Therefore, in order to properly punish the nations of the world, G'd must continue to punish them until they are destroyed because they will not repent and change their evil ways.

Rambam explains regarding the Egyptians, they no longer had free choice at the time of their destruction. It was withdrawn from them as a punishment. As it states, **"He hardened the heart of Pharaoh."** If the Egyptians forfeited their ability to choose to change their ways, their state of defiance is unrelated to themselves because they had no choice. If so, how could G'd destroy them because they should not be culpable for their actions? Rambam explains that initially every human being has the power of choice; however, it is possible for one to forfeit and lose that ability through one's extreme level of evil. It is considered an abuse of choice, which is a privilege. When one chooses to behave in an extremely evil manner, G'd withdraws the gift of choice. Thus, if one is no longer in a state of being able to choose, he is nevertheless held fully liable for his actions because it was only through his initial choice of evil that he chose to forfeit ability to choose.

2. Honing One's Spiritual Capacity

The Torah tells us that during the first day of Chol HaMoed Succos of the eighth year of the Sabbatical cycle, the entire Jewish People; men, women, and children, must gather on the Temple Mount to hear the reading of the Book of Devarim (Mishna Torah) by the King of Israel. This Positive Commandment is referred to as Hakheil. The Torah states that the purpose of this reading is, **"So that they (the Jewish people) should listen and learn to fear Hashem, your G'd and be careful to perform all the words of this Torah."** The objective of the mitzvah of *Hakheil* is to instill the fear of G'd into the hearts of the

Jewish people. As a result of this reverence, they will observe the dictates of the Torah properly.

The Torah states regarding the Sabbatical year that the Land of Israel must remain fallow and one is not permitted to engage in agricultural pursuits. The Sabbatical year is referred to by the Torah as, “*Shabbos L’ashem (A Sabbath for G’d)*”. Sforno in his commentary explains that “*Shabbos L’ashem*” is a year that one should be dedicated to Torah study, introspection, and meditation. The Sabbatical year should be devoted completely to spiritual growth. It is after this year that the Jewish people gather on the Temple Mount in order to hear the King of Israel read Mishna Torah to learn to revere G’d and keep His Torah.

According to the understanding of “*Shabbos L’ashem*”, that the Sabbatical year is a time that is designated for spiritual pursuit, it would seem that the mitzvah of Hakheil should precede the Sabbatical year rather than follow it. If the purpose of the reading of Mishna Torah on the Temple Mount was to inspire the people to fear G’d to keep His Torah, it would seem that one should first gather on the Temple Mount to hear the Book of Devarim to be inspired. As a result of this inspiration, the following year should be dedicated to spiritual growth and introspection. However, the Torah states that this is not the proper order. Why is this so?

For one to have the capacity to internalize and be a beneficiary of a spiritual endeavor, one must hone his spiritual senses. In order to bring this about, one must dedicate a full year to be immersed in Torah study and reflecting on one’s spirituality. This should be done without any distraction whatsoever. The Sabbatical year is truly a year dedicated for G’d (*Shabbos L’ashem*). After dedicating a year in this context, one experiences Rosh Hashanah (the Day of Judgment), the Ten Days of Penitence, culminating with Yom Kippur, during which one is spiritually purified before G’d. As it states, “**Before G’d you shall purify yourselves.**” This is then followed by experiencing “You shall rejoice in your holidays” with Sukkos. It is only after all of this spiritual preparation that one has the capacity to be a full beneficiary of the Hakheil event.

Every day we recite in the blessing of Repentance in the Amidah, “Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah, and bring us near our King to Your service and influence us to return in perfect repentance before You.” We see from the words of the Men of the Great Assembly (who

had authored the Amidah) that the process to repent begins with the study of Torah. Only after one has studied sufficiently does he have an appreciation and understanding for what it means to be brought into the service of the King. Once one has internalized the study of Torah and actualizes G’d’s Will does one have the merit to be brought to perfect repentance. The Men of the Great Assembly understood from what is stated regarding the mitzvah of Hakheil that it is the only way that one can achieve a sensitivity for spirituality. One comes to “**listen and learn (the Torah)**” then subsequently it results in the “**fear Hashem**”.

3. The Order to Achieve Repentance

The Torah states regarding repentance, “**It will be that when all these things come upon you – the blessing and the curse...and you will return unto Hashem, your G’d, and listen to His voice...Then Hashem, your G’d will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, to love Hashem...When you will listen to the voice of Hashem, your G’d, to observe His commandments and His decrees...**” Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains, “In order to properly address repentance, one must pursue three levels of initiative. Firstly, one must engage in the study of Torah. As it states, ‘**You shall listen to His voice...**’ How does one do this? One must study Torah (as it is written in the Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers, ‘*Ein am haaretz chasid* – An unlearned person cannot be scrupulously pious’) ...As a result of heeding the Word of G’d, He will return the Jewish people from their exiles. As it states in the Zohar, ‘In the merit of the study of Torah the Jewish people will be redeemed.’”

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues, “How will one address the negative commandments? It states, ‘**Hashem, your G’d will circumcise your heart...**’ It is known that the covering of the heart is the source of all evil, lust, and desire...Thus, after G’d will remove the covering on the heart, it will allow the Jew to be refrain from all negative behavior. He will no longer lust for what is forbidden. How will one then address the positive commandments? It states, ‘**you will return...to observe His commandments and decrees...**’ The fulfillment of positive commandments requires initiative. As a result of fulfilling the positive commandments G’d will rejoice with you...” Thus, the repentance process begins with the study of Torah, then one needs to address the negative commandments. Only after one has distanced himself from the negative will he be overwhelmed with love for G’d,

which will motivate him to fulfill the positive commandments.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that Adam was created as a pure and holy being. In order for Adam to achieve perfection he needed to abide by one directive not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. However, after ingesting the fruit that contained evil, he introduced impurity into his being and thus became spiritually putrefied and contaminated. The only way one can rehabilitate and restore the purity of one's spirituality is to observe the negative commandments. Then, through the fulfillment of the positive commandments one will introduce a spiritual enlightenment into his being which will cause him to ascend spiritually.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh writes in the portion of Ki Savo that if one is not fully repentant regarding his sins, the positive mitzvah that he performs, although it may be performed on an advanced level (for its own sake – l'shema) its status is deficient. It is because of the impurity that the individual possesses that the mitzvah becomes spiritually tainted.

In order for one to achieve full repentance, one must engage in the process for a lifetime. If this is so, how does one contend with the spiritual impurity that he possesses? There will always be a level of interference that will not allow one's mitzvah performance to be complete. If one truly wishes to repent, G'd will recognize that purity of commitment in the individual and value it as something wholesome. By embarking on Torah study in conjunction with the repentance process, G'd will grant one the ability to be a full beneficiary of one's spiritual pursuits.

4. Giving One's Soul For G'd

The Torah states, **"You will return unto Hashem, your G'd, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you today...with all your heart and all your soul."** Sforno explains, "The verse, 'you will return unto Hashem, your G'd' means you will repent and return to G'd only to do His Will and no other motive. The Gemara in Tractate Yomah tells us that the repentance of one who repents purely for the sake of G'd ascends to the Heavenly Throne.

Every day we recite in the Amidah (Silent Prayer) in the blessing for the restoration of the Davidic Reign, "The offspring of Your servant David (Moshiach) may You speedily cause to flourish..." We supplicate for the

coming of Moshiach not for the purpose of alleviating the plight of the Jewish people in the world, but rather for the sake of G'd's Glory. It is for the sake of G'd's Name, which is being continuously desecrated and His Will not being not heeded. This is the focus and theme of our supplications on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We pray that all existence will recognize G'd and Glorify Him. All mankind should join together as one to serve Him with a complete heart. Although Rosh Hashanah is the day of judgment, when G'd judges the world, we do not supplicate Him for Mercy and forgiveness but rather we only address His Kingship and Glory.

The verse continues, **"...according to everything that I command you today...with all your heart and all your soul (b'chol nafshecha)."** The Mishna in Tractate Berachos explains "with all your soul (*nefesh*)" regarding the first paragraph of the Shema to mean that one's love for G'd must be so great that one must be willing to even give his life for His sake. Every living creature has a "nefesh" which is the life force that provides for every aspect of one's physicality. The "nefesh" of the human being links to his physical make up. In addition, man has the "spirit (*ruach*) and soul (*neshama*)." The "nefesh" is the source from which man's animalistic desires and needs emanate. These must be tempered by his spirituality "neshama" so that he may become spiritualized. Sforno explains, **"all your soul (b'chol nafshecha)"** to mean that when one repents at a special level and attains a unique level of clarity, he will no longer be impeded by his desires. There will no longer be any interference regarding his spirituality.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that during the time of Reb Yehudah there was drought and it had not rained for an extended period of time. Part of the procedure of prayer to address this problem, one must fast and remove his (leather) shoes. When Reb Yehudah would remove only as much as one shoe, it would begin raining immediately. However in later generations, regardless of how much they prayed and fasted the rains did not necessarily come. The Gemara asks, "Although the Torah sages in the generation of Reb Yehudah were proficient in only two sections of the Talmud (there are six); nevertheless, they were worthy of the rains coming. In later generations, although the Torah sages were proficient in all six sections of the Talmud, regardless of their supplications, the rains did not come." The Gemara explains that the difference between the generation of Reb Yehudah and the later generations is that they were willing to sacrifice for G'd. Even with a small initiative they

merited rain. However, other generations who did not sacrifice for G'd did not merit rain despite their efforts to bring it about.

The Gemara tells us about an incident in which a woman was dressed immodestly. Reb Yehudah witnessing this, he reacted to correct the breach of modesty, regardless of the consequence to himself. He had believed that it was a Jewish woman who was behaving inappropriately; however, after he had reacted it was revealed that she was a non-Jewish woman. He was financially penalized and disgraced for his behavior. The Gemara refers to his action as “he gave his soul to sanctify G'd.”

Being willing to give one's soul for the sake of G'd may mean actually giving one's life, but it can also mean being willing to compromise on one's status for the sake of G'd. This is similar to what Sforno explain regarding the individual who has a clear recognition of the truth and chooses to serve G'd with all of his soul. That individual does not allow his animal desires interfere with his service of G'd. Therefore, G'd was willing to alter nature for the sake of Reb Yehudah to bring about rain, which was not so with other generations.

5. Perceiving and Internalizing the Uniqueness of Torah *(from Ki Savo)*

The Torah states, **“This day, Hashem your G'd, commands you to perform these decrees and the statutes, and you shall observe and perform them with all your heart and with all your soul.”** Rashi cites Chazal, “When you perform the mitzvos and study the Torah you should see them as being new in your eyes. It should be as if you were commanded to observe them on this day (by G'd).” The Torah on several occasions emphasizes the point of needing to see the mitzvos as being “new.” For example, in the first paragraph of the Shema the Torah states, “Let these matters that I command you today be upon your heart.” Chazal explain that “today” means that the mitzvos must remain “new” in one's eyes. One would think that it is obvious that in order to maintain one's interest and commitment to one's Torah obligation, one must see it as being “new” and not as something of the past. If something is not seen as being unique and special, one's interest will definitely wane and ultimately dissipate. This does not only pertain to one's spirituality, it applies to every experience in life. However, since the Torah reiterates this point a number of times, it is

clear that the aspect of “being seen as new and unique” is not being emphasized.

It is interesting to note that the Sifri cited by Rashi adds, “It should be as if you were commanded to observe them this day by G'd.” Not only should one see the mitzvos and the Torah as being “newly presented” one should also feel that he was commanded by G'd Himself to observe them “today.” Meaning, the Sinai experience should not be seen as something of the past, but rather one must value it as if the directive of G'd is being continuously transmitted to oneself. The Torah itself, that was given to the Jewish people at Sinai is the medium through which G'd speaks to every Jew on a daily and ongoing basis. If one appreciates and internalizes that the Creator is commanding him to study the Torah and observe its mitzvos, he will not approach his obligation as something trivial. Being seen as unique and special is a result of seeing G'd Himself issuing the directive.

The objective and purpose of existence is to fulfill the Torah. If one does not internalize this fact, he will gloss over many opportunities to utilize existence for this purpose. In the morning blessing that precedes the Shema we say, “He renews, in His Goodness daily, perpetually, the work of creation.” Meaning, the world continues to exist not because it existed a moment ago; but rather, it is because G'd continuously Will's its existence every moment. If G'd needs to continuously renew His Willing of existence as if it were a new creation, then one can understand that He will only do so if the objective of Creation is being addressed. If it is not, then He will cease willing its existence. It is of the utmost importance for one to appreciate this reality in order to continue to be dedicated to the fulfillment of the Torah and its mitzvos. Jeremiah the Prophet states, “If not for My Covenant being in affect day and night, the extent of heaven and earth would not exist.” The Gemara in Tractate Nidarim explains that the verse is referring to the continuous study of Torah. If there should be a moment during which the Torah is not being studied or fulfilled, existence will cease to be. Thus, the process of creation is contingent on the ongoing study of Torah and its fulfillment. Therefore, it is essential that one must see it as “new” because G'd Himself is presently commanding him to see it as such.