

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES
Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilech
 September 6, 2007

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, Hashkofa, 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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Yad Avraham Institute
New York
September 6, 2007

B"H

Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilech

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. Growth Through Suffering

The Torah juxtaposes the Portion of Nitzavim which begins, “**You are standing today, before Hashem, your G’d...**” to the previous portion of the curses (*tochacha*). What is the significance of this juxtaposition? Rashi cites the Midrash which explains that when the Jewish people had heard the 98 curses that would come upon them if they should violate the Torah, they were taken aback. In response, Moshe said to them that it is only through these curses that the Jewish people are able to maintain their clarity and remain on the path of Torah.

The Midrash states, “Why is it that when tragedy befalls the nations of the world, they are ultimately destroyed? However the Jewish people are able to survive the many tragedies that have come upon them? 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 not call upon Your Name.’ However, in contrast, when tragedy befalls the Jewish people they become humbled/subordinate themselves and pray.” Because of the humility of the Jewish people in the face of tragedy, they are able to recognize their shortcomings/spiritual failings and supplicate G’d for forgiveness. In contrast, the nations of the world react to tragedy with defiance and rebelliousness against G’d, rather than understanding their culpability. This is why they are ultimately destroyed.

The Gemara in Tractate Yevamos tells us that there are characteristics that are unique to the Jewish people because they descend from Avraham, our Holy Patriarch. The Jew possesses the characteristics of “Compassion/mercy, shame/conscience, and the propensity to do acts of kindness/*gemilas chasadim*.” It is because of their spiritual pedigree, that the Jewish people have the capacity to sense the wrong in their behavior. It is because of this conscience that the Jew becomes humble, introspects, and repents as a result of tragedy. On the other

hand, if one is arrogant and self-absorbed, because of his conflicts of interest, he believes he is justified in his actions.

Avraham was able to recognize G’d because he possessed a unique level of “shame/conscience.” The Torah tells us that Avraham compared himself to “dust and ash.” Meaning, his level of humility was such that he had negated his self-interest- thus allowing him to have a unique level of objectivity. Because of his level of humility, he had the clarity to recognize G’d as the Creator creation saying, “Who is the Master of this magnificent citadel (creation)?” He was the only one from beginning of existence to recognize and appreciate that there must be an Omnipotent Being Who wills all existence. If one’s sense of self value is that the world exists only to accommodate his needs, then he will be conflicted and not recognize that he is subject to G’d’s Will Who is the Creator.

The Torah tells us that when Moshe addressed the Jewish people he said, “...you are the minority (*m’aat*).” Rashi cites Chazal who explain that “*m’aat* (small)” means that when G’d extols the Jewish people they are humbled. Despite the fact that the Jew may be worthy to reap the glory that is bestowed upon him by G’d, he subordinates and negates himself before Him. It is because of this innate humility, that the Jew is able to repent in the face of difficulty and adversity.

2. The Jewish Profile

The Torah states, “**For this commandment that I command you today- it is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in heaven, (for you) to say, ‘Who can ascend to heaven for us...it is in your mouth and your heart to perform it.’**” There is an argument among the commentators as to which mitzvah this verse is referring. One opinion is that “**this commandment that I command you today**” is referring to the mitzvah of repentance (*teshuvah*). The other opinion is that the verse

is referring to the study of Torah. Every Jew has relevance to doing teshuvah as well as the study of Torah.

Baal HaTurim explains, “In the verse ‘**Who can ascend to heaven (mi yaale lanu ha’shameima)**’ the first letter of each word, if read together, spell ‘milah’ (circumcision). The letters that conclude each word, if read together, spell ‘YKVK (Hashem- G’d the Omnipotent Being)’. This is to teach us that a Jew cannot ascend to heaven to be in the proximity of G’d without being circumcised.” It is interesting to note that circumcision has relevance both to teshuvah and to Torah. Thus, the explanation of Baal HaTurim applies to both opinions regarding to which mitzvah the verse is referring.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the initial intent of Creation was that physical/terrestrial level of existence should be the location of G’d’s Presence. However, because of the sin of Adam, the world became spiritually putrefied- causing G’d to ascend from the physical level. The Zohar tells us that Adam was created without a foreskin. It was only after he had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge (of Good and Evil) that he developed a foreskin. The foreskin is an expression of the impurity that was infused into man. The mitzvah of circumcision is intended to reinstate the individual to a similar level of Adam before the sin.

After the receiving of the Torah, G’d commanded the Jewish people to build a Mishkan (Sanctuary) so that He should dwell amongst them. The Mishkan was the location, on the terrestrial level, that reflected the intent of creation before the sin of Adam. The Torah states regarding the service of Yom Kippur, “**With this Aaron shall enter into the Holy...**” The Jerusalem Talmud explains that “with this” means “with circumcision.” Aaron, as the High Priest, was only able to enter into the “Holy” because he was circumcised. It was only because Aaron was reinstated to a state which had relevance to the pre-sin level of Adam was he able to enter into the location that reflects the intent of Creation which preceded the sin.

Jeremiah the Prophet states, “If not for My Covenant (Bris) being in affect day and night, the extent of heaven and earth would not exist.” There is an argument in Tractate Nidarim whether “My Covenant (Bris)” is referring to circumcision (bris milah) or the study of Torah. R’ Akiva Eiger explains that the opinion that states that “Bris” is referring to Torah concurs that “Bris” also is referring to circumcision. In order for one to have relevance to Torah, he must be circumcised. The Zohar states, “The Jewish people, the Torah, and G’d are all one.” Meaning, the only way the Jew can cleave to G’d is

through the study of Torah. Being circumcised is a prerequisite to engaging in Torah and meriting the Divine Assistance to comprehend G’d’s Wisdom. The Midrash tells us that the Torah had preceded existence by more than 900 generations. In addition, the Torah was the blueprint for creation. As it is stated, “He gazed into the Torah and created the world.” One can only have relevance to Torah if he reflects the state of man which was pre sin. Thus, the Jew can only cleave to G’d through the study of Torah if he is in a circumcised state. With this we can have an appreciation for Baal HaTurim who explains based on the opening and closing words in the verse, “**Who can ascend to heaven (mi yaale lanu ha’shameima)...**” – that the only way a Jew can have relevance to G’d is by being circumcised.

3. The Key To the Jewish Soul

There is a positive commandment (Hakheil) that in the eighth year after the seven-year Sabbatical cycle, the king of Israel must read the Book of Devarim to the entire Jewish people gathered on the Temple Mount. The Torah states regarding this mitzvah, “**At the end of seven years...when all Israel comes to appear before Hashem...you shall read this Torah before all Israel, in their ears. Gather together the people – the men, the women, and the small children...they shall hear and they shall learn to fear/revere Hashem...**” The Torah is communicating to us that the purpose of the Jewish people gathering to hear the reading of the Torah is so that they should study it and learn to fear/revere G’d.

Ohr HaChaim explains that although a woman is not obligated in the mitzvah of Torah study, she nevertheless must observe the mitzvos which have relevance to her life. Thus, she must hear and learn the mitzvos that pertain to her. In contrast, men are obligated in the study of Torah independent of it being the prerequisite for the performance of mitzvos. As a result of studying Torah, the Jewish people will learn to fear/revere G’d and come to observe all the mitzvos properly. The only way one can come to revere G’d is through the study of Torah. The Torah itself has the innate ability to touch upon the spirituality of the Jew to cause him to have a sense of G’d. Thus, in addition to understanding one’s obligation, the study of Torah sensitizes the Jew to spirituality. Without being impacted by the study of Torah, the spirituality of the Jew remains dormant.

Midrash *Eicha* states, “G’d said, “Better that you (the Jewish people) would have abandoned Me (for idolatry) and kept the Torah- because its illumination

would have brought you back to good (proper path).” If one engages in Torah study (with a sincere commitment) the innate holiness of the Torah, will have a profound illuminating effect upon him. It will activate his spirituality. Just as when one bathes himself, regardless of intent, he will be cleansed (because he is fully immersed). Identically if one immerses himself in Torah study, one will develop a spiritual sensitivity that will cause him to become enlightened. He will then fear/revere G’d.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *The Gates of Repentance*, that the prerequisite for repentance (teshuvah) is the recognition and appreciation of one’s sins. If one does not understand the nature and gravity of his transgressions, he will not repent. What is the process that one must undertake in order to appreciate his shortcomings and cause him to repent?

We say in the blessing for repentance in the Amidah (Silent Prayer), “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 this blessing that the process to do teshuvah is predicated first engaging in Torah study. He must then actualize that Torah study through the observance of mitzvos. It is only after studying Torah and performing mitzvos that one has relevance to returning in “perfect repentance before G’d.” It is only through the study of Torah that one can truly appreciate the wrong that he has done. Thus, the process of teshuvah is similar to that of Hakheil – that the Jewish people must hear the Torah in order to study it to come to fear G’d. If one does not experience G’d as a reality in his life, he will not have the capacity to repent.

The study of Torah is the key to ignite the Jewish soul. As it is stated, “The mitzvah is the lamp and the Torah is the light.”

4. *The Expectation of Man*

The Torah states, “**I call heaven and earth today to bear witness against you...**” Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “G’d said to the Jewish people, “You should look at the heaven and the earth which I have created to serve you... Did it ever happen that the sun did not rise in the east and illuminate the world? The earth that I created to serve you – did it ever change its function? Did you ever plant and it did not grow? Did you ever plant wheat and barley grew in its place? If the creations of heaven and earth do not deviate from their function despite the fact that they are not deserving of reward when they function

as they were intended to or receive punishment if they should fail, should it not be more so that the Jewish people not deviate from their responsibility because they are deserving of reward and subject to punishment?”

One of the methodologies given at Sinai as an approach to interpret the Torah is known as *kal v’chomer*. This logical principle states, for example, if one is deserving of reward for doing less, how much more so is one deserving for doing more (minimally the same degree of reward). To give the Jewish people a greater understanding of their responsibility, Moshe uses heaven and earth as the model to establish the *kal v’chomer* to give them an appreciation of the value of their actions. It seems that the function of heaven and earth is not comparable to the function of a human being. Heaven and earth are not “beings” that have the ability to choose. Therefore, they perform the function for which they were created. However, the human being who is a creature of choice continuously contends with an inclination which makes his choice difficult. If so, there is no basis for the *kal v’chomer*. Since the Torah communicates this as a valid *kal v’chomer* we must understand why it is the case.

Rambam writes in *Hilchos Yisodei HaTorah* that *malachim* (angels) who were created to carry out the Will of G’d are not spiritual robots. An angel is a spiritual being who does not deviate from carrying out the Will of G’d because it recognizes and understands who G’d is. It has such a level of clarity that doing His Will is not a struggle.

We find on the third day of Creation that G’d decreed, “**Let the earth give forth fruit trees producing fruit.**” Meaning that not only should the fruit of the tree be edible, but even the tree itself should be edible. However, G’d’s Command only brought about a tree which was itself inedible but that produced edible fruits. For some unknown reason, the angel, who is the spiritual being, who carries out the agency of G’d, did not follow the order as it was given. Thus, the result was not as perfect as G’d had wanted it to be. Now that we understand that the function of the angel is based on its own understanding of G’d, we are now able to appreciate the *kal v’chomer* which is being drawn by the Torah (from heaven and earth to the behavior of the human being).

Although the angel is not deserving of reward or punishment it does not deviate from His Will because it is cognizant of the Will of G’d. The Jew who is subject to reward and punishment should definitely be cognizant of His Will because if not, he will be held culpable for its violation or deserving of reward for its fulfillment. The only reason a Jew fails is because of his lack of clarity.

The function of the evil inclination is to distract and overwhelm the Jew so he will not appreciate the Will of G'd. He will lose perspective regarding his behavior. If one would continuously reflect on the consequences of his actions – for the positive or negative – then he would be no different than the angel. In fact the Jew would be even more inclined than the angel to do the Will of G'd because he is eligible for reward while the angel is not.

The Gemara in Tractate Succah states, “I (G'd) created the evil inclination, and the Torah as its antidote.” The Torah is needed to give one the clarity to appreciate the consequences of his actions. It is when one achieves clarity through Torah study that he is able to subdue the evil inclination.

The Torah tells us that at the end of time G'd will circumcise our hearts and the hearts of our children. Sforno explains this to mean, “G'd will remove all confusion from our hearts. He will open our eyes and thus be removed from the pitfalls of life.” One will have the clarity to want to do “good” because the state of confusion in which we exist will be lifted. In order not to have this happen, one only has to realize the invaluable benefit of doing the Will of G'd and the grave consequences that result from deviating and not following His Will.

The Gemara in *Tractate Taanis* tells us that a Torah Sage angers because the fire of Torah is within him. As the verse states, “Are not My Words like fire...” Rashi explains that the Torah contained within the Sage causes him to become angry. The Torah itself gives one an appreciation and depth of understanding of the wrong that is being perpetrated. However others who are not advanced in their Torah knowledge do not have the capacity to sense the wrong in what is contrary to the Torah.

It is only by gaining clarity that one can attain a semblance of the understanding of an angel. Thus, the comparison that is drawn by the Torah between the Jew and the angel is valid.

5. *The Expression of Service of G'd* (From Ki Savo)

The Torah tells us that there is a positive commandment **“You must serve G'd with all of your heart...”** The Gemara in Tractate Berachos explains, “What is the meaning of ‘service (*avodah*) of the heart’? It is tefillah (prayer).” *Avodah* (service) also manifests itself through the bringing of sacrifices in the Temple. Ramban writes that as a result of one’s transgression, one deserves

to die. However, through the Mercy of G'd, the sinner is allowed to bring a sacrifice in his own stead. When the sinner sincerely repents and understands that in truth, G'd is accepting the sacrifice in the place of his own life, then he will merit atonement. This perspective is rooted in one’s understanding of G'd’s dominion over existence.

Ramban cites Sifre in the Portion of Re’eh who states, “What is the mitzvah of ‘**Him you shall serve...**’ – It is the study of Torah and the bringing of sacrifices.” Ramban explains that one fulfills this positive commandment of serving G'd by studying Torah and reflecting upon it. One’s mind must be continuously occupied with the Torah that he had studied. The essence of the human being is his mind. If one’s mind is permeated with Torah thoughts then he has truly dedicated and consecrated himself to the service of G'd. Ramban adds that we see from Sifre that the study of Torah regarding the mitzvah of “Him you shall serve...” has the equivalent value of bringing sacrifices. Just as an offering is an expression of one’s own dedication to the service of G'd, so too is the ongoing preoccupation with Torah study an expression of one’s selfless and total dedication to G'd.

From the beginning of the month of Elul through the festival of Shemini Atzeres, we recite the Psalm, “Of David, Hashem is my light/illumination...” The Midrash explains that “my light” is referring to Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgment. On Rosh Hashanah one stands before G'd in judgment and his spiritual record is carefully scrutinized. Even the angels in heaven tremble from the exactness of G'd’s judgment. One must therefore prepare for this monumental day. This is brought about through introspection, making amends, correcting one’s shortcomings, and committing oneself not to transgress again in the future. How does one create within himself a sensitivity to be able to recognize and appreciate his shortcomings? In order to do proper teshuvah (repentance) one must have a sense of the wrong of his failing. This sensitivity can only be brought about through qualitative Torah study.

King Solomon writes in Proverbs, “The mitzvah is the lamp and the Torah is the light.” As the Midrash explained that Rosh Hashanah is the light/illuminator so too is Torah. Rosh Hashanah, because its essence is based in exacting judgment, is a day which causes clarity. However, this is only at the moment that one stands in judgment. The study of Torah, on the other hand, brings about a continuous level of clarity whenever one engages in its pursuit. It is because Torah study on an ongoing basis is considered “the service of G'd”, through which one merits a unique level of Divine Assistance that

provides the individual with special illumination –thus giving one the ability to internalize his spirituality as a reality in his life.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states, “One who comes to purify himself, (G’d) will assist him.” In order for one to have the desire to purify himself and ultimately access the Divine Assistance that is needed, one needs to enter into the service of G’d. This process begins by dedicating oneself to Torah study.

YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos (Maharal)
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar – Derech Hashem
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Chulin
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

- 11:30 – 12:30pm **Talmud: Taanis**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street
- 12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Pesachim**
Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue
Between E.51st and E.52st

Tuesday

- 12:10 - 1:10pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
Location: Yad Avraham

Wednesday

- 11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Taanis**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street
- 1:00—2:00 pm **Daas Tevunos**
Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

- 10:30 –11:30am **Duties of the Heart**
Location: Yad Avraham
- 12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Taanis** Sunrise Capital 641
Lexington (25th FL)