

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
**WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES**

*Parshas Nitzavim*

September 30, 2005

*Shana Tova*

**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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## Parshas Nitzavim

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

### 1. Sensing and experiencing One's Own Spirituality

The Torah states, “**Moshe said to the Jewish people, ‘Haskeis u shema’**” The Midrash explains “**Haskeis u shema**” to mean, “One must first analyze the subject matter, then he will have the ability to understand it. Another interpretation of ‘haskeis’ is Moshe said to the Jewish people ‘Divide yourselves into small groups to enter into Torah dialogue so that you should listen (understand) to the words of Torah.’” Another interpretation of ‘**Haskeis u shema**’ is that Moshe said to the Jewish people, “Break (haskeis) your hearts and your physicality (nefesh) to hear the words of Torah (shema) with all of your heart.” If one is only impressed with the intellectualism of the Torah, he will not be impacted or influenced by it. One must first penetrate his heart/emotion in order to subordinate and condition his physicality to become more spiritual to be impacted by the words of Torah.

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah states, “One who says ‘I have toiled (in Torah) and have come upon it’ –should be believed. One who says, ‘I have not toiled and I did come upon it’ –is not to be believed.” One can only come upon the truth of Torah through toil and total dedication. However, regarding one being affected by the Torah (which one studies and fulfills), one must first subordinate his inclinations to go against his natural desires and interests.

We pray every day that G’d should open our hearts with His Torah and put into our hearts reverence and love for Him so that we can serve Him with total dedication. If the truth of Torah is so compelling, why should the mere intellectual understanding of it not be enough to affect the individual? It is only when one truly dedicates himself to Torah and sacrifices for it, will his physicality be conditioned to have the capacity to be affected by its spirituality.

The Torah states, “**Haskeis u shema**” in order to teach us that one must reflect upon the Torah and be willing to sacrifice for its sake. Before Moshe passed away, he blessed the Jewish people. He had said to them, “G’d loved the tribes greatly...they (the Jewish people) have fatigued their feet ...” Rashi cites the Midrash which explains, “This is referring to the Torah Sages who wear out their feet by traveling from location to location for the sake of the study of Torah.” The Torah Sage is committed to sacrifice for the sake of acquiring the Torah. It is only when one is willing to forgo the comforts and conveniences of life, that he can have the capacity to be receptive to the spirituality of the Torah.

King Solomon writes in Proverbs regarding the fear of heaven (reverence of G’d), “You must desire it as silver and seek it out as a treasure – then you will understand the fear of G’d.” One may study Torah and be exposed to many sources of Torah information and believe that G’d is the Omnipotent power, but if one does not desire Torah to the degree that King Solomon explains, he will not have a sense of G’d’s existence to revere Him. The fear of G’d and appreciation for His Torah is contingent on one’s ability to condition and subordinate his inclinations/physicality – as Moshe says “**Haskeis u shema**– Break your hearts and your physicality (nefesh) to hear the words of Torah with all of your heart.”

In order to maximize on the benefits of Rosh Hashanah one must begin to condition himself well in advance of the day. It is not enough to enter the Day of Judgment understanding that it is an important day when G’d judges existence. Only through the recitation of Selichos and reflecting/introspecting on our behavior/actions of the past and committing oneself to improve, does one have a chance to sense the shortcomings of his own spirituality. One must maintain a continuous consciousness of accountability to be able to internalize the necessity for improvement.

## 2. The Jewish People – One Entity

The Torah states, **“You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your G’d...”** Moshe presented the Jewish people with the covenant of communal responsibility- the covenant of “areivus”- *“kol Yisroel areivum ze la ze* – every Jew is responsible for his fellow.” This is a fundamental principle of Judaism based on the reality that every Jew is spiritually interconnected/intertwined with every other Jew. When one fulfills his mitzvah obligation properly, he elevates and advances himself as well as the entire Jewish people. Conversely, when one fails he not only diminishes himself, but also the entire Jewish people.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that at the time of the destruction of the Temple, G’d had instructed the Angel of Death to paint the letter “tuf” in red on the foreheads of all of the *reshaim* (evil people) so that they should be marked for death. However, regarding the tzaddikim (righteous people) G’d instructed that the letter “tuf” should be painted in black on their foreheads to indicate that they should be spared. Satan came before G’d and claimed that the tzaddikim should also be marked with the letter “tuf” in red because they did not intercede and protest when the evil were sinning. They remained silent. Thus they also deserve to die. G’d responded to satan that even if the tzaddikim had protested, their admonishments would not have been heeded. Satan responded, “Although it is true what You say, the tzaddikim were not aware that their rebuke would have been ignored and fallen on deaf ears. Since they did not protest, the tzaddikim also deserve to die.” G’d concurred. As a result, the tzaddikim as well as the *reshaim* were punished based on the principle of areivus (communal responsibility).

The Midrash explains the principle of areivus with an allegory. Two people were traveling in a boat. One of the passengers decided to bore a hole under his seat through the hull. His fellow passenger attempted to stop him. The individual responded, “What is it of your concern. The hole that I am boring is under my seat and not under yours!” His fellow replies, “Do you not understand - if you continue boring the hole, the entire boat will sink!” Every Jew is a component of a massive spiritual network. If one of its components were to fail, the entire network malfunctions.

The Torah states, **“Perhaps there is among you a man or woman...whose heart turns away from being with Hashem, our G’d...And it will be that when he hears the words of this admonishment, he will bless himself in his heart, saying, ‘Peace will be with me,**

**though I walk as my heart sees fit’...Hashem will not be willing to forgive him, for then Hashem’s anger and jealousy will smoke against that man...and Hashem will obliterate his name from under heaven. Hashem will set him aside for evil among all the tribes of Israel.”** Since every Jew is interconnected with his fellow it is incorrect for one to believe that his actions only affect himself. Thus, the individual mentioned in the verse, who acts solely on his own initiative with complete disregard for everyone else, will incur the wrath of G’d at the most extreme level.

This individual chose to ignore the dictates of the Torah and act upon his own will. His actions will not negatively affect the Jewish people. How do we understand this? Based on the principle of areivus, the entire Jewish people should have been affected.

There is a positive commandment to admonish one’s fellow if he is spiritually faltering. If after being admonished, the individual chose to transgress, he not only chose to ignore the Torah and do nothing, he chose to take a path that could negatively impact the entire Jewish people. His behavior is also a breach of the positive commandment of loving his fellow as himself, since he acted in a manner that could spiritually harm his fellow. However, it is a kindness of G’d that his actions do not impact negatively upon the Jewish people because **“Hashem will set him aside for evil among all the tribes of Israel.”** G’d removes this individual from among the Jewish people. His actions indicate that he has no interest in being part of the whole.

It is incumbent upon us to understand the ramifications of our actions- they not only affect ourselves but also have a profound impact on all existence. Therefore we should act with a cognizance and understanding that we are responsible for the well-being of our fellow and the entire Jewish people.

## 3. The World’s Understanding of G’d’s Relationship with the Jewish People

The Torah states regarding the destruction that will be brought about as a result of the Jewish people abandoning the Torah, **“The later generation will say...and the gentile who will come from a distant land – when they will see the plagues of that Land and its illnesses with which Hashem has afflicted it: ‘Sulphur and salt, a conflagration of the entire Land, it cannot be sown and it cannot sprout, and no grass shall rise upon it; like the devastation of Sodom and**

**Gomorrhah..., which Hashem overturned in His anger and wrath. And all the nations will say, 'For what reason did Hashem do so to this Land' why this wrathfulness of great anger?...Because they (the Jewish people) forsook the covenant of Hashem, the G'd of their forefathers, that He sealed with them when He took them out of the land of Egypt, and they went and served the gods of others..."**

After witnessing the degree of devastation that came upon the Land, even the nations of the world will understand that it could not have come about through natural means. They will have the clarity to comprehend that the only reason G'd brought about such destruction was because the Jewish people had abandoned Him and worshiped other gods. If the nations of the world will have such clarity to understand the basis of the calamity before them, then why will they not repent, acknowledge G'd, and change their idolatrous ways?

The pagans did not believe that G'd is the Omnipotent Being. Rather He is a deity among other deities. Just as each nation is bound to its deity, the Jewish people are bound to G'd. They were subject to such a level of devastation because they violated their exclusive covenant with Him. Since they believe that the nations of the world are not bound to G'd, witnessing the destruction is no reason for them to repent and change their pagan beliefs.

The nations of the world believe that whatever exile, displacement and devastation that may come upon the Jewish people is because their G'd is angry with them. G'd's wrath is unrelated to the gentile's behavior vis-à-vis himself or towards the Jew. Therefore, they may persecute the Jew without any culpability or recourse because if the G'd of the Jews wished to save them He would do so. If He does not intercede then it is because G'd has abandoned His people.

After the destruction of the Second Temple, Christianity was introduced into a new existence. Christianity accepted semi-monotheistic beliefs and rejected paganism. With this new belief system, they perpetrated a falsehood that has continued for over 2000 years. They professed that because G'd allowed the Temple to be destroyed, it was a clear indication that the Jewish people were no longer the Chosen people of G'd. The Jew was forsaken by G'd in favor of the Christian who had become the new favored son of G'd. The reason the Jewish people have been exiled and persecuted throughout history is only because G'd had abandoned

them. The only way they could be redeemed is to accept Christianity.

The Torah states, **"Moshe said, 'As a man punishes his child, so does G'd punish you (the Jew).'"** No nation has suffered as the Jewish people have. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that if one sees the child of another behaving in an unacceptable manner, he will not become pained and angered (punish the child). However, if his own child were to misbehave in this manner, he would reprimand and punish him as severely as necessary because of his love to him as a father. Similarly, G'd does not punish the nations of the world despite their conduct as he does the Jewish people, because they are "His Children." The suffering and punishment brought upon the Jewish people is only an indication of G'd's unique and special love for His Children.

#### ***4. Appreciating the Change of One's Predicament***

The Torah states, **"It will be that when all these things come upon you – the blessing and the curse that I have presented before you- then you will take it to your heart among all the nations where Hashem, your G'd has dispersed you; and you will return unto Hashem, your G'd, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and all your soul. The Hashem, your G'd, will bring back your captivity and have mercy upon you, and He will gather you in from all the peoples to which Hashem, your G'd, has scattered you."**

The verse states that after "the blessing and the curse" come upon the Jewish people, they will come to recognize their failings, repent, and return to the path of G'd, He will gather them from their exile. It is usually the case that one reflects upon his predicament and repents only if he has experienced difficulties and discomfort. Seemingly the verse should have stated, "It will be after the curse comes upon you..." However, the Torah tells us that even after the blessing will come upon the Jewish people they will repent. If one's life is overflowing with blessing and affluence why should he reflect upon his predicament? How could that individual experience remorse and repent if he is overwhelmed with blessing?

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that if one experiences unexpected blessing or curse, he should introspect and reflect on the cause. By contrasting the blessing and the curse one will come to understand the consequence of his behavior and actions. Initially the

Jewish people experienced unlimited blessing when they followed the Will of G'd. However, when they deviated from the proper path, curse came upon them. In order to process these changes in circumstance, one needs to reflect upon them.

It is interesting to note that there are those who meticulously perform the Will of G'd and experience curse, while those who do not adhere to the Torah in any way experience blessing. This reality causes confusion in analyzing and understanding the system of reward and punishment. If the consequences of our actions were to be obvious, then one's power of choice would be diminished. If one were immediately rewarded with blessing after performing a mitzvah, there would be no question that he would continue to do so. There needs to be the situation of a rasha (evil person) experiencing blessing and the tzaddik experiencing difficulty in order to perpetuate free choice.

Reb Meir Simcha in his commentary in the beginning of the Portion of Bechukosai tracks the history of all the exiles and migrations of the Jewish people from the time of the destruction of the First Temple. He states that when the Jewish people went into exile in Babylon after the destruction of the First Temple, they were initially treated as sub-humans. As time progressed and the Babylonians realized and understood the capabilities of the Jewish people, they were able to ascend the economic and social ladder. However as the situation for the Jewish people improved in Babylon, they began to stray from the path of the Torah and forget G'd. Initially, the Jewish people experienced "curse" and later they experienced "blessing", which has been the pattern in all the subsequent exiles over the centuries. Whenever the Jewish people have experienced blessing in exile, they have faltered in their observance of the Torah. As a result of this, G'd responded by bringing suffering upon the Jewish people.

The Gemara in Tractate Yomah tells us that at the end of time if the Jewish people do not repent, the redeemer will not come to gather in the exiles. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that if the Jewish people do not repent at the end of time, G'd will install a king whose decrees will be even more severe than Haman, the evil one. As a result of this intense persecution, the Jewish people will be forced to do teshuvah (repent). The Jew will contrast the situation of curse with his previous circumstance of blessing and repent – thus bringing the ultimate redemption.

## 5. Life Has No Middle Ground

The Torah states, **“See- I have placed before you today the life and the good, and the death and the evil, that which I command you today, to love Hashem your G'd to walk in His ways...”** Sforno explains that “blessing” is something that goes beyond what is adequate while “curse” is something that is less than what is needed. There is no “middle ground” – either something is blessing or curse- good or evil. Why should there be no middle ground? It is true that one may not be engaged continuously in mitzvah activity, but at the same time, he is not transgressing. Why should that be regarded as something evil?

Yeshaya the Prophet states, “I (G'd) created this existence for My glory.” Meaning the only purpose of this world is to glorify G'd – every moment in this existence must be invested properly with the intent of glorifying G'd. G'd gave man the ability to choose between good and evil. Ramchal explains that man has the ability to transgress against G'd in the most extreme manner and G'd Himself gives man this ability to bring about a desecration of His Name. It is because of this ability to choose to do the most extreme negative action that there is value to performing mitzvos. If it were not for the ability to choose between good and evil, the value of either would be meaningless. Thus, in order to give man the opportunity to bring about the ultimate glorification of G'd's Name, He gave man the ability to choose to transgress at the most extreme level.

In the morning blessing of the Shema we say, “He renews, in His Goodness daily, perpetually, the work of creation.” Meaning, the world continues to exist because it existed a moment ago; but rather, it is because G'd continuously Will's its existence every moment. We see from the words of the Prophet that one must invest his life in glorifying G'd. Thus, if creation is renewed every moment and its purpose is to glorify G'd then if one is not dedicated to that goal every moment he is not fulfilling his purpose. Therefore there cannot be a “middle ground.” If one is not engaged in doing the Will of G'd every moment – then by definition he is not fulfilling his purpose or the purpose of existence.

The verse states, **“See- I have placed before you today the life and the good...to love Hashem your G'd to walk in His ways...”** If one loves G'd and emulates His ways, then he is engaged in the good/life. If one turns his heart away from G'd then it brings about evil. Ramban writes that initially the heart of man was naturally inclined to do the Will of G'd. However, after the sin of Adam, the

heart became impaired, tainted and covered with impurity. The heart began to lust after things that are contrary to the Will of G'd. The Torah tells us that at the time of Moshiach, the impure covering of the heart will be removed and the heart will be restored to its original nature of doing the Will of G'd. Although the original nature of the heart is to love G'd, the tainted heart causes man to love himself above all else. Thus while man has the potential capacity to love G'd with all of his heart and to dedicate himself totally to His service, he is more inclined to focus completely on his own needs and desires.

The Torah needs to tell us that the only way to bring about the good/ life and not evil/death is to love G'd. One will either overcome his inclination and love G'd – thus bringing about the good - or be distracted by the tainted heart and pursue the material/evil, which one is inclined to do. It is only a matter of conditioning. Since the heart constantly seeks something to love one must continuously satisfy that desire with the love of G'd.

One cannot assume a neutral posture. One must dedicate every aspect of his life to G'd. Eating, sleeping, earning a livelihood can all be regarded as mitzvah activity if the intent is to utilize the activity as a means to bring about the glorification of G'd. However if one's involvement with the material is solely for its own sake, then it brings about evil/death because it is utilizing existence for something other than its purpose.

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5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30- 7:25 am	Halacha
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi

2:00pm Mincha

**Special Weekday Classes**

**Monday**

11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
Enter on 54<sup>th</sup> Street

12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Pesachim**  
Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue  
Between E.51<sup>st</sup> and E.52<sup>st</sup>

**Tuesday**

12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**  
Location: Yad Avraham

**Wednesday**

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
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1:00—2:00 pm Derech **Hashem**  
Location: Yad Avraham

**Thursday**

10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**  
Location: Yad Avraham

12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
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