

ONEG!

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff PARSHAS NITZAVIM

Nitzavim 5779

Are Nitzavim and Vayelech one Parashah?

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Chazal explain that when it says in Song of Songs, “I came to my garden”, the word “my garden” (גני) can be read as a reference to the 53 Parshiyos of the Torah (ג = 53), plus the Ten Commandments (י = 10). The Chida writes in *Chomas Onach* (Song of Songs, 20) that this idea is also found in other places including the Zohar (2:206b, see Chida’s *Nitzotzei Oros* there). However, Rabbi Moshe Zacuto (*Peirush HaRama* to the Zohar there) asks that if you really count up the different Parshiyos that we read every year, it comes out to 54, not 53?!

Rabbi Zacuto answers in the name of Rabbi Shmuel Abohav (and Rabbi Avraham Saba writes the same thing in his work *Tzror HaMor* to Parshas Shemos¹) that VeZos HaBracha ought to not be included in the total sum of the Parshiyos, because VeZos HaBracha is not always read on Shabbos like the other Parshiyos are, rather it is read

¹ Rabbi Saba writes (to Ex. 3:5) that the word “bush” (הסנה) alludes to the Ten Commandments (ה + ה = 10), the sixty tractates of the Mishnah (ס = 60), and the fifty Parshiyos of Chumash (י = 50). Rabbi Saba then notes that even though there are really 54 Parshiyos, VeZos HaBracha does not count (with the implication that the reason for this is obvious), and for some reason another three also do not count (and he notes that he does not know why not).

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on Simchas Torah.² Nonetheless, the Chida writes that this answer does not satisfy his thirst for a resolution to this question.

The Chida then mentions that he writes that he found an old manuscript which says that Nitzavim and Vayelech are one Parashah, so the sum total of all the Parshiyos is 53. Rabbi Zacuto mentions a similar thing and writes that in years that Nitzavim and Vayelech are read on separate weeks, each one is called “Half Nitzavim”. The Chida also offers another resolution: He writes that according to some commentators, Terumah and Titzaveh are considered one big Parashah, which is why Moshe Rabbeinu’s name is not explicitly mentioned in Titzaveh, rather he is the antecedent of the pronoun “and you...” in the beginning of the Parashah which simply continues on from Terumah. The Chida discusses this conundrum in several other places including *Abavas David* (end of Drush 14), *Dvash LeFi* (*Maareches* PEH, 3), and see also *Ashirah Lashem Bechayai* (Mishpatim).

Rabbi Yechezkel Weinfeld (in *HaChodesh Asher Nehfach*, p. 5, fn. 5) notes that if you look in the standard Chumashim which say how many verses are in each Parashah at the end of the Parashah, you will notice that at the end of Parshas Vayelech, it says that there are seventy verses—but this figure includes the forty verses of Parshas Nitzavim and the thirty verses of Parshas Vayelech. This implies that indeed Nitzavim and Vayelech are one Parashah. He also notes that in original printing of *Sefer HaChinuch* it listed the mitzvah of *Hakbell* (when the King reads the Torah in front of an assembly of the Jewish People) in Parshas Nitzavim, even though the verses concerning that *mitzvah* is within what we now refer to as Parshas Vayelech. This too demonstrates that Nitzavim and Vayelech are considered one Parashah. He also notes that when the Rambam (in the end of *Sefer Abavah*) lists all the Parshiyos, he does not mention Vayelech, so he presumably included it in Nitzavim. In early editions of Rashi’s commentary to the Chumash, at the end of Vayelech he has a note saying that he finished Nitzavim (and Rashi himself in *Sefer HaOrah* 73 writes that there are only 53 Parshiyos. And indeed Meiri explicitly writes in *Kiryas Sefer* (5) that Nitzavim and

² In Chutz La’Aretz, Simchas Torah can never fall out on Shabbos, so in Chutz La’Aretz, VeZos HaBracha is *always* read on a weekday. In Eretz Yisrael, Simchas Torah *can* fall out on Shabbos and in such years, VeZos HaBracha would be read on Shabbos, but the point is that it is not *always* read on Shabbos.

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Vayelech are one Parashah, even though sometimes they are split into two and read at different times.

A Time for Teshuvah

From choppers of wood to drawers of water (Deut. 29:10). *Kehillas Yitzchak* writes in the name of Rabbi Meir Sneifeskek that this verse alludes to the best time of the year for a person to repent: “choppers of wood” refers to Tu B’Av (the 15th of Av) which is the day in the summer that they would start chopping firewood to be used in the Holy Temple (see *Taanis* 31a) and “drawers of water” refers to Hoshanah Rabbah, which is the last day of Sukkos and thus the final day on which they would perform the *Simchas Bais HaShoevah* (The Celebration of the Drawing of the Water) in the Temple. From 15th of Av until 23rd of Tishrei includes the entire Elul, Rosh HaShannah, Yom Kippur and more and is the most optimal time for repentance.

The Talmud (*Sotah* 2a) says that forty days before the formation of a fetus, a Heavenly Voice calls out and says, “The Daughter of so-and-so [shall be married] to so-and-so”. Based on this, Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro of Dinov writes in *Bnei Yisaschar* (Tammuz-Av, 4:2) that the significance of Tu B’av is that it is exactly forty days before the day on which Hashem start to create the world. As we know, Adam was created on Rosh HaShannah (1st of Tishrei), which means that the sixth day of creation was on that day, so the first day of creation was on 25th of Elul. Forty days before the 25th of Elul is the 15th of Av—Tu B’Av. (Rabbi Chaim Palagi in *Birkas Moadecha L’Chaim* vol. 2, *Drush L’Chodesh Elul*, p. 537 in the Shuvi Nafshi ed. makes the same point.)

The Danites

Lest there be within you a man or a woman or a family or a tribe whose heart turns away today from Hashem your God... (Deut. 29:17). Midrash Shocheh Tov (Ps. 101) writes that “or a tribe” refers to the Tribe of Dan who were historically implicated in idolatry. Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin in *Pokeid Akarim* (4) discusses this at greater length. *Dorshei Reshumos* notes that the final letters of the phrase “Lest there be within you a man or” spells out the name Shimshon (פן יש בכם איש או = שמשון), who was from the Tribe of Dan and in some ways strayed from Hashem because of his relationships with Phillistine women.

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Take it Seriously

And it will be when he hears the words of this curse, and he will be blessed in his heart saying, 'there will be peace for me, for I will go in what is straight in my heart' in order for the quenched to provide for the thirsty. Hashem will not agree to forgive him, for then His anger and His zeal will flare up against that man, and all the curses written in this book will pounce upon him, an Hashem will wipe out his name from underneath the Heavens (Deut. 29:18–19). *Tanna DeVei Eliyahu Rabbah* (ch. 15) writes that for one who does not take *netillas yadayim* (the ritual handwashing before eating bread) seriously, it is a bad omen for him, and then the Midrash applies these verses to such a person. The Midrash concludes by saying that this teaches us that anybody who eats (bread) without washing his hands is considered to have fornicated with a married woman. The *Zekukin de-Nura* (13) explains that “it is a bad omen for him” means that he will become poor, because the angelic minister charged with poverty specifically comes to disgusting and dirty places. Rabbi Chaim Palagi (in his commentary *Luach Erez* to *Tanna DeVei Eliyahu*) writes that it is not for no reason that there is a Jewish rhyme, “Purity and cleanliness are half of wealth” (הטהרה והנקיות, הוא חצי עשירות) which is based on this idea.

The Quenched and The Thirsty

...and he will be blessed in his heart saying, 'there will be peace for me, for I will go in what is straight in my heart' in order for the quenched to provide for the thirsty... (Deut. 29:18). The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 76b) writes in the name of Rav Yehuda in the name of Rav, that if a man marries off his young daughter to an old man, or marries his young son to an older woman, or If he returns a lost item to an idolater, then about such a person the Torah says, “in order for the quenched to provide for the thirsty, Hashem will not agree to forgive him”. Rashi explains that “provide” is an expression of connection and addition. Rashi further clarifies that when one marries his young daughter to an old man, then the girl is “thirsty” for intimacy, while the old man has already been “quenched” of that thirst, and the same is true if one marries his young son to an older woman.

Rashi also explains that returning a lost item to an idolater is also problematic because he shows his connection to non-Jews and demonstrates that he does not return lost items because Hashem has commanded that there is a *mitzvah* to do so, but that he has his own considerations and is willing to return lost items even to gentiles, despite the

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fact that there is no *mitzvah* for him to do so. Rashi explains that idolaters are called “quenched” because they feel satisfied in their own religious activity and do not feel the need to connect more to their Creator, while the Jewish People are always “thirsty” because they constantly desire a deeper connection with God, to fear Him more and to truly fulfill His commandments. By returning lost items to idolaters, a Jew is forging a connection between the quenched people and the thirsty people.

Rabbi Efrayim Lunshitz (author of *Kli Yakar*) writes in *Olalos Efrayim* (vol. 2, 179) that the quenched and the thirsty also refer to the wicked and the righteous. The righteous are called “thirsty” as it says, “All the thirsty should go to the waters” (Isa. 55:1) which the Talmud (*Bava Kamma* 17a) explains refers to drinking the words of Hashem which are compared to water. On the other hand, the wicked are called “quenched” because they feel satisfied with their lives and do not see the need to better themselves.

Never Give Up!

And it will be when he hears the words of this curse, and he will be blessed in his heart saying, ‘there will be peace for me, for I will go in what is straight in my heart’ in order for the quenched to provide for the thirsty. Hashem will not agree to forgive him... (Deut. 29:18–19). Targum Yosanan writes that “he will be blessed in his heart” means that he will give up on himself because of hearing all the curses in the Torah and he’ll convince himself that everything will be okay and the curses won’t affect him while he continues to sin. *Bechor Shor* explains that this is precisely why Hashem created the day of Yom Kippur. If man did not have a special day every year on which his sins will all be forgiven, then he will just give up on trying to do the right thing because he will feel that he has accrued so many sins that they will overwhelm him. He compares this to a person who buys a new garment and is very careful to make sure it doesn’t get dirty. But once it gets even a bit dirty, he doesn’t care as much and now longer puts in the effort to keep this garment as clean. About this, King Solomon says, “At all times, your clothes should white” meaning a person should always look at himself as though he is free of sin and any one sin that he does will be the first stain on his clean record. Indeed, every sin does make an impact in dirtying us. Because of this, Hashem gave us a special day which cleans away our sins so that we can continue along rest assured that we have a clean record and we can be motivated to act extra carefully. With this in mind, he explains the verse “for forgiveness is with You, in order to be feared” which means that Hashem grants us

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forgiveness so that we will be motivated to continue fearing Him and doing the right thing. However, if a person does not take advantage of this chance for forgiveness to view himself in this light and renew his resolve, then he is simply feeding his thirst for sin and “Hashem will not agree to forgive him”. This also explains why the Talmud says that Hashem does not accept the repentance of a person who says, “I will sin and then I will repent”, because repentance and forgiveness is not just a mechanism to wipe away one’s sins, it is there to inspire a person to act better from then on, but this person is using repentance to behave in a sinful way, so Hashem does not grant him forgiveness.

Aleph without a Lamed

...’what is this great anger?’ and they will say, ‘because they had forsaken the covenant of Hashem... and He cast them out...’ (Deut. 29:23–24). The Chida in *Pnei David* (Nitzvaim 2) offers an explanation of this based on what It says in *Eretz Chaim* (to Ps. 27). It says that that before Hashem created the world, the letters of the Alef-Beis existed before Him, but the first letter was not called *alef*, it was called *Af*. The word *Af* means “anger” and Hashem saw that if the first letter of the Alphabet would be “anger”, then the world would not be able to be sustained because it will never fully meet His demands. So to alleviate this “anger” Hashem added the letter *lamed* to the *Af* in order to make it *alef*. Now, there is a chance that the world can continue to exist as long as the *lamed* (למד = studying) is perpetuated. But the moment people stop studying Torah, the *lamed* disappears and His attitude returns to “anger”. Based on this, the Chida explains the verse at hand as people asking “why is Hashem so angry that he treats the world with *Af*?” and the answer is “because they had forsaken the covenant of Hashem”, meaning because they stopped studying the Torah, He “cast out” the *lamed* from the word *alef* and allowed *af* to remain.

Castaway

...and He cast them out to a different land like today (Deut. 29:24). The Chida (*Pnei David*, 7) offers four ways of explaining this verse: ¹⁾ First, he uses the *Sefer Chassidim* (58) to explain why the letter *lamed* of the word “and He cast them out” (וישלכם) is written bigger than usual. *Sefer Chassidim* writes that since studying how to fear Hashem is the most important thing, the letter *lamed* (למד = studying) is written bigger to allude to this, and when the Jews are exiled from their home, it is precisely because they have failed to thrive in the realm of fearing Hashem. ²⁾ Alternatively,

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he explains that since Chazal tells us that the final redemption comes closer and closer through the collective Torah Study of the Jewish People, then the Torah wrote the letter *lamed* (למד = studying) bigger than usual to give us the key to the return from exile. ³⁾ Returning to the *Sefer Chassidim*, the Chida notes that the *gematria* of the name *lamed* (למד = 74) equals the word “know” (ידע = 74), such that the lesson of the big *lamed* is that we should “know” God and we should be cognizant of Him being above us at all times. And, he writes, that when a person sins, he should return to Hashem, as it says, “Return O Israel until Hashem your God”, and the word “until” (עד = 74) also fits into this sequences. ⁴⁾ The Chida also offers another explanation of this based on a Midrash. The Midrash says that Hashem did a great act of kindness to the Jewish People by the Babylonian Exile by first having the Babylonian king exile Yechoniah to Babylon along with the great Torah scholars so that they could establish the Torah infrastructure in the Babylonian diaspora, and only afterwards did He have the Babylonian king exile the rest of the Jews to Babylonia which already had in place the infrastructure for the Jewish People to continue keeping and studying Torah in their newfound land. This is alluded to in the fact that the Torah wrote the letter *lamed* (למד = studying) bigger than usual to hint to the “studying” infrastructure which He cast out of the Holy Land first in order to set up a viable framework for the rest of the Jews.

Seeking Sparks of Holiness

And Hashem will eject them from upon their land, with anger and with wrath, and with a great fury, and He will cast them out to a different land like today. The hidden things are for Hashem our God [to take care of], and the revealed things are for us and our children forever to do all the words of This Torah (Deut. 29:27–28). Rabbi Chaim Palagi (*Bikras Moadecha LC'haim* vol. 2, *Drush L'Chodesh Elul*, p. 532 in the Shuvi Nafshi ed.) explains the juxtaposition of these two verses (the exile and the hidden things) as teaching us the esoteric idea that it is not just because of His great fury and anger that He would send the Jewish People in exile, but that another reason for doing so is so that the Jewish People will spread all over the world and they will be able to absorb proselytes from all the nations of the world, such that all the sparks of holiness within those nations can be retrieved and subsumed by the Jewish People. See also Rabbi Chaim Palagi's *Nefesh Chaim*, Maareches gimmel 45–46.

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Reward for Mitzvos

The hidden things are for Hashem our God... (Deut. 29:28). The Chida (*Pnei David, Nitzavim* 6) writes that he heard from a great Torah Scholar named Rabbi Yehosef Konki that the rewards for *mitzvos* are not explicitly mentioned in the Torah except for the reward for honoring one's mother and father and the reward for sending away the mother bird because the former is a serious *mitzvah* and the latter is a lighter *mitzvah*, yet both of them yield the same reward: longevity. Based on this, he explains that "The hidden things are for Hashem our God" refers to the reward for all *mitzvos* which elude us, but He takes care of, yet "and the revealed things" refers to the rewards for the two *mitzvos* which we revealed to us which are both related to the child-parent paradigm teach "us and our children forever to do all the words of This Torah" because other rewards are yet to be revealed.

Editorial Dots and Erasures in the Torah

... and the revealed things are for us and our children forever... (Deut. 29:28). In a Sefer Torah, there are mysterious dots on top of the letters of the words "for us and for our children until" (לנו ולבנינו עד). The *Kasnos Obr* cites *Avos deRabbi Nosson* (ch. 34) for an explanation to these dots: Ezra the Scribe said, "if Eliyahu HaNavi comes along and asks why I wrote these words, then I will say that I put dots on top of them as a sign that they ought to be erased. And if he says that it was good that I wrote those words, then I will erase the dots and leave the text as is". There is a controversy between the various commentators as to whether this teaching refers to all dots on top of letters in the Torah (like in Gen. 18:9, 19:33, 33:4) or only to the dots on top of the letters in the verse at hand (see Chida's *Kisei Rachamim* to *Avos DeRabbi Nosson* and *Pnei David, Nitzavim* §3 where he discusses this. See also *Daas Zekanim* here).

Rav Moshe Feinstein in responsa *Iggros Moshe* (vol. 6, *Yoreh Deah* 3, §114) cites a slightly different version of this from *Piskei Tosafos* (*Menachos* 231) which says that Ezra would have said this to Moshe (presumably after the Resurrection of the Dead) and not to Eliyahu HaNavi. In this version, Ezra simply says that if Moshe asks why he added dots, he would reply that he didn't erase it (even though those dots are like an editorial comment that those words ought to be deleted). Rav Moshe then cites the version of *Avos deRabbi Nosson* and concludes that that version is clearly a mistake. He explains questioning why Moshe wrote something in the Torah or considering that it ought to be erased is heresy because it is a rejection of the Torah that was given to Moshe by

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Hashem. Moshe wrote every letter in the Torah at Hashem's command, and changing it in any way is a denial of that noble truth. Indeed, Rav Moshe points out that despite the *Binyan Yehoshuas* comment, even a prophet like Ezra does not have permission to change anything in the Torah, so he would have no right to add dots or erase anything. So Rav Moshe concludes that *Avos deRabbi Nosson's* version of this teaching which entertains the possibility of Ezra deleting words from the Torah is in error, and only the *Piskei Tosafos'* version of this tradition is sustainable. Indeed, Rav Moshe endorses the ruling of Rabbi Dovid HaLevi Segal (author of the *Turei Zahav* also known as *TaZ*). The *Taz* rules that if a Sefer Torah is written without the prescribed dots on top of certain letters, then even though it is missing a component of how a Sefer Torah should be written it is not disqualified because it is at least equal to the text of the Sefer Torah that Hashem transmitted to Moshe, even though it doesn't have the editorial dots that Ezra later added.

Clinging to the Lord

To love Hashem your God—to listen to His voice and to cling to Him... (Deut. 30:20). The Talmud (*Kesubos* 111b) asserts that while it is impossible to *literally* cling to Hashem, it is still true that anybody who marries off his daughter to a Torah Scholar, or does business for a Torah Scholar (i.e. invests their money for them so they can make a profit while having time to continue learning), or allows a Torah Scholar to derive benefit from his property, then about such a person it can be said that he is “clinging” unto Hashem.

The Talmud (*Chagigah* 27a) also says in the name of Rabbi Abahu in the name of Rabbi Elazar that the fires of *gebinnom* do not dominate Torah Scholars and derives this from an *a fioriti* argument from the legendary Salamandra. Just as a Salamandra (a type of animal that comes from the fire) comes from the fire and if you smear its blood on you, you are fire resistant, so too Torah Scholars who are entirely made of fire (because the Torah is compared to fire and Torah Scholars embody the Torah) are also fire resistant. This means that Torah Scholars can cling to fire and not get burnt, so anybody who clings to a Torah Scholar can also cling to a fire and not get burnt. There is another idea that Hashem Himself is called “a consuming fire”.

The Torah refers to those attached to Baal Peor as *nitzmadim* and to those who attach to God as *devekim*. The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 64a) has two opinions. It first suggests that

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worshippers of Baal Peor were attached to baal peor are attached to their god like an air tight lid to a vessel (צמיד פתיל) but that the Jews were only every attached to God like two dates in a cluster, who are less connected than an air tight lid. The second approach is that the Jews who were attached to Baal Peor were only loosely connected to Baal Peor, like bracelets (צמידים) loosely hang on the hand of a woman, while those who cling to Hashem were truly attached to him. Maharal explains that in fact, these two opinions are not at odds with one another. Rather, he explains, though the Jewish people were indeed attached to Baal Peor, it was a connection that caused them to lose their identities to the idol/ideology, in much the same way that a lid becomes a part of the vessel. Those connected to God, however, maintained their identity while also enjoying a relationship with Hashem. This is like two dates in a cluster, who remain individual dates, while also being part of one cluster. Thus, while its true that they “appeared” closer to Baal Peor, it was actually closer to Hashem, and looser (like the bracelet) with Baal Peor. The Talmud applies to the connection to God the verse, “And you who are attached to Hashem your God, are all alive today”. Life means having ones own source of life, and not being a taker, as is explained at great length in the introduction to the work *Shav Shmaytsa* who writes that the word *chaim* “life” implies something which is self-sustaining and does not require support from others to exist.