

# The Quantification of a Person As Revealed By His **YEARNING**

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Nitzavim



### The Quantification of a Person As Revealed By His **YEARNING**

#### **Elul, a Month of Introspection and Opportunity**

*Torah:* “(Moshe said to the Jewish people), Hashem, your G-d will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, to love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”

*Torah:* There is a “covering on the heart (*orlas ha’leiv*)” which is the equivalent of the foreskin that must be removed to be considered circumcised. This verse is an allusion to the month of *Elul*, which is a month of repentance. It is a time that one introspects and reflects upon his behavior so that he may repent.

The month of *Elul*, which is the month that precedes the day of judgment (*Rosh Hashanah*), is considered to be a month of mercy. The name “*Elul*” is an acronym which alludes to the closeness between G-d and the Jewish people. The acronym for *Elul* is: “*Ani l’dodi v’dodi li* (I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me

(G-d being the beloved).” It is alluded to within the verse, “G-d will circumcise your heart (*es levavecha*) and the heart of (*v’es levav*) your offspring...”

*Ramban:* “The verse ‘Hashem, your G-d will circumcise your heart...’ is referring to what is explained in the *Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*, “When one comes (desires) to purify himself, he will be assisted.” If the Jew takes the initiative to repent, G-d guarantees that he will succeed in his initiative because He will assist him.

In contrast, the *Gemara* states, “When one comes to (spiritually) contaminate himself (through sin), they open the way before him (he will be allowed to do so).” G-d does not encourage or assist one to fail; however, if one chooses to do so, G-d will not prevent him from pursuing the path of his choice.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: The physical world was created with the spirituality of the letter “hey”. The

letter “hey” is comprised of a horizontal line which rests on a vertical line on the right and has a vertical line on the left which does not quite touch the horizontal line above it (or roof). There is a small opening on the left side of the letter between the left leg and the roof of the letter. The *Gemara* tells us that the shape of the letter signifies the extent of one’s choice regarding one’s physical existence. The wide opening between the right and left leg represents the degree of free choice. The world is wide open for one to choose whatever one desires, regardless of the consequence of that negative choice.

However, if one had fallen into to the spiritual abyss and wants to return, the shape of the letter indicates how this is done. He cannot return to spirituality on the same path from which he exited. He must enter and return through the small opening on the left side of the “hey” which is close to the roof of the “hey” and far from the location from which he exited. This is so that he should not succumb to temptation and transgress again. He must live life with many constraints and fences within the physical so that he should not violate again.

In order for one to be able to return to his initial spiritual state before he had sinned, one establish for himself more secure fences so that he should not transgress again. *Ramak* in his work *Tomer Devorah* explains that if one sins at a minimal level, then ordinary fences are sufficient to distance him from sin. However, if one has sinned in an extreme manner, and has become accustomed to sin, then he must impose upon himself more extreme fences, in order to guarantee that he is sufficiently distant from sin. This is alluded to by the small opening on the left side of the letter “hey.” The small opening represents the degree of constraints and fences that one must impose upon himself in order to not fail again.

*Ramban*: The verse regarding the circumcision of the heart refers to the nullification of evil at the end of time with the coming of *Moshiach*. Evil will then be purged from existence and man will naturally do good. The heart of man will no longer lust after anything that is contrary to spiritual advancement and service of G-d. The removal of evil is the equivalent of the removal of the covering of the heart.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Sukkah*: G-d will slaughter the evil inclination.

Regarding the month of *Elul* which is alluded to in this verse, “Your heart and the heart of your offspring...” the *Torah* is telling us that the degree of Divine Assistance that one receives in order to repent, is a semblance of the removal of evil at the end of time. Meaning, the effect of the Divine Assistance will cause one to come upon truth and thus repent more easily during this month than any other time of the year. Understanding the opportunity at hand, one must take advantage of the moment to introspect and repent.

## **The Merciful One Wants the Heart (Rachmana liba ba’ee)**

*Torah*: “(Moshe said to the Jewish people), *Hashem*, your G-d will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring...”

*Ramban*: “It seems from the verses that since the time of Creation it was in the hands of man to do as *Adam* was inclined to do. He did only the Will of G-d and it was not within his will to do anything contrary to that.

*Yirmiyah*: ‘Behold! The days are coming during which I (G-d) will enter into a new covenant with the House of *Yehudah* and the House of Israel. This covenant will not be similar to the initial covenant that I had with their forefathers... Because of this covenant that I will enter into with the house of Israel after those days, I have given My *Torah* in their midst and on their hearts I will inscribe it.’

This is referring to the nullification of the evil inclination to establish that one’s heart should naturally do what is appropriate. Therefore the verse states, “I will be their G-d and they will be My people. One will no longer need to teach his fellow, ‘You should know G-d, because you will all know Me, from the youngest to the oldest.’ And it is known that the heart of man is evil from the time of his birth and therefore initially one needs to be taught the correct way to behave. However, at the end of time one’s evil inclination will totally cease to be.”

*Ramchal* in the Path of the Just: The capacity of the heart of man is to love.

*Torah* regarding the love of G-d: “You shall love your G-d with all your heart.” While it is true that regarding the physical function of the heart is to provide blood

to the body as the source of life, its emotional capacity is to love. This love can be directed towards G-d or it may be directed to one's self. The evil inclination influences the individual to be self-absorbed and thus to love himself in order to seek the fulfillment of his needs and desires above all else.

However, at the end of time, as mentioned by *Ramban*, because the evil inclination will be nullified the heart of man will naturally only love G-d. The heart will function in its natural capacity as it did before the sin of *Adam*.

*Ramban*: "It states in *Yechezkel*, 'I will give you a new heart and a new spirit. And I will put in your innards and I will cause that you will walk in My statutes.' The new heart alludes to one's nature and the new spirit alludes to one's interest and desire. This is what *Chazal* refer to in the *Gemara* Tractate *Shabbos*, 'The years will come and you will say, 'I no longer have an interest.' These are the days of *Moshiach* when there is no longer merit and no longer liability. It is because during this time, man will not be concerned with his own interests but rather he will only do the Will of G-d. Therefore, there will be no merit or liability for one's action since these are determined by one's will."

*Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk* in *Shemos*: "After *Moshe* received the *Torah* at *Sinai* directly from G-d, was it possible for him to become a heretic?" He answers, "It was not possible." After the *Torah* was transmitted to the Jewish people through *Moshe*, he no longer had choice in this particular area.

*Reb Meir Simcha*: If *Moshe* would have the choice to deny G-d's existence, it would render the *Torah* meaningless. The basis for the divinity of *Torah* is *Moshe's* credibility as G-d's spokesman. If he were to become a heretic, then the entire *Torah* would become obsolete. Therefore, G-d withdrew *Moshe's* choice regarding his becoming a heretic after *Sinai*. If this is so, why should *Moshe* be worthy of receiving reward for believing in G-d if he no longer had choice to believe otherwise?

*Moshe* merited to be in a position to be qualified to receive the *Torah* on behalf of the Jewish people due to all the choices he made to become the most humble man who ever lived. He chose to bring himself to a level in which he would forfeit his choice to deny G-d's existence for the sake of the eternity of *Torah*.

We supplicate G-d to bring *Moshiach* and to vanquish evil. If so, we are praying for a time in which one will no longer have an evil inclination and thus no longer be worthy of reward for his actions. Doing the will of G-d would be natural.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: If we are meritorious we will be able to bring *Moshiach* sooner. If so, then being put in a position of having no choice would be as a result of our supplication. If that would be so, despite the fact that we would no longer have choice, we would be fully accredited for that moment because it was do to our choice that we no longer have choice.

## **Rosh Hashanah, the Illuminator**

*Rosh Hashanah* is the Day of Judgment during which G-d judges all existence.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Rosh Hashanah*: On this Day of Judgment there are three ledgers that are open before G-d. There is the ledger of the devoutly righteous, the ledger of the evil ones, and the ledger of the ones who are in the middle (*beinonim*). From *Rosh Hashanah* until the culmination of *Yom Kippur*, there are the ten days of repentance during which one must introspect and repent. It is during this period of time that G-d avails Himself to the Jew in order to hear his supplications and to provide him with Divine Assistance to Repent.

*Rambam* in The Laws of Repentance: Although one can repent throughout the entire year, it is an obligation for the Jew to repent on *Yom Kippur* because it is the "end of the time for forgiveness." As it states in the verse regarding *Yom Kippur*, "Before G-d you shall be purified..."

*Reb Yisroel Salanter*: "Why does *Rosh Hashanah*, the day of judgment precede the day of *Yom Kippur*? Seemingly, the logical order should have been that first we are given the opportunity to repent in order to correct our ways and merit G-d's Great Mercy and then be judged according to our record on *Rosh Hashanah*."

King David in Psalms: "G-d is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?"

*Midrash*: "G-d is my light" alludes to *Rosh Hashanah* and "my salvation" alludes to *Yom Kippur*.

*Reb Yisroel Salanter*: In order for one to be able to appreciate and understand the gravity of his predicament due to his spiritual record, he must first stand before G-d in judgment, which is at the most intense level. We read in the prayer of *Rosh Hashanah* that even the angels in heaven tremble before G-d on the Day of Judgment. Only after being jolted by the feat of G-d's Judgment does one have the capacity to reflect responsibly and take the necessary steps to repent. Thus, *Rosh Hashanah* is the illumination. It is the enlightening moment that gives the individual a glimpse of his true spiritual state. This is the reason *Rosh Hashanah* precedes *Yom Kippur*. It is the entry point to the ten days of repentance.

*Rambam* in the Laws of Repentance: "If one is evaluated as being a *tzaddik* (righteous) on *Rosh Hashanah* he is sealed for life. One who is evaluated as *rasha* (evil) is sealed for death." If the majority of one's deeds are good, he is classified as "*tzaddik*;" however if the majority of one's actions are negative, he is classified as "*rasha*." It is important to note that this is not a quantitative evaluation but rather a qualitative one.

*Rambam*: "It is only G-d who is All - Knowing that can make such an evaluation." If one is classified as borderline (*beinoni*) – one with an equal amount of positive and negative deeds – his judgment is held in abeyance until *Yom Kippur*. If the *beinoni* merits to do *teshuvah* (repents) then he will be sealed in the book of life. If he does not merit to repent, then he will be sealed in the book of death.

One would think that since he stands in the balance between good and evil it would be sufficient for him to do one additional *mitzvah* in order to sway the scale to be considered meritorious and thus be sealed in the book of life. However, we see from *Rambam* that this is not so. It is only if he "merits" to repent. Doing more good deeds is not sufficient to be sealed for life.

Based on the explanation of *Reb Yisroel Salanter*, that G-d set the Day of Judgement to precede the day of atonement is only to give the individual an understanding of the gravity of his deeds in order to enable him to repent properly. However if the individual does not appreciate what could have been drawn from the Day of Judgment to repent, he will not be worthy to be sealed in the book of life.

## The Jewish People's Innateness for Truth

*Torah*: "You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your G-d..."

*Midrash*: "You (G-d) turn over the evil ones and they no longer exit, but the house of the righteous remains standing. When G-d scrutinizes the ways of the evil and evaluates them, they no longer 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*: '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 compared to a beam. Although the archer shoots his arrows into the beam, it remains in place although the arrows are expended. Why are the nations of the world destroyed when G-d begins punishing them, yet the Jewish people are able to remain intact? 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 and subordinate themselves and pray."

*Rashi* citing the *Midrash*: "Why does the *Torah* juxtapose the portion of *Nitzavim* to the portion of the curses?" It is because when the Jewish people had heard the ninety-eight curses that would come upon them if they should transgress, they were taken aback

and were overwhelmed with hopelessness. *Moshe* explained to them that it is only through punishment that the Jew regains his spiritual equilibrium and thus has the capacity to repent.

Why are the Jewish people able to gain clarity through their suffering and are thus able to be spiritually reinstated, when the nations of the world cannot?

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: When the Jewish people accepted the *Torah* at *Sinai* the spiritual impurity (*zooamah*) that was infused into Eve by the original snake when he had come upon her was vaporized (*paska zooamasan*) due to the intensity of G-d's Presence.

This impurity is the basis for man to be overwhelmed by his desire for evil. At *Sinai*, the Jewish people had ascended to the level of angels and thus had no relevance to death. They were no longer classified as "mortals." However, after they had failed with the sin of the golden calf, the Jewish people reverted to being subject to death.

Although spiritual deficiency once again became innate in the Jew, the intense impurity of the snake did not return to them. In contrast, the nations of the world who were not exposed to G-d's Presence at *Sinai* still retain the intense impurity as a result of the snake. The non-Jew has an innate obstruction to spirituality and thus does not have the capacity to embrace spirituality in a meaningful way. Although the Jew must still contend with his evil inclination, he has the capacity to be sensitive and recognize his spiritual failing and repent.

Due to the *Sinai* experience, the essence of the Jew was transformed into a spiritual being. His circumstance as a human being is only there to present a context of choice.

*Gemara*: "A Jew only sins when a spirit of instability enters into him." When one experiences great suffering, which is a consequence of his sin, he is able to regain his focus and extricate himself from his foolishness.

*Torah*: "Yaakov is a rope to his inheritance..."

*Sforno*: "Yaakov and his children will be G-d's subjects, unlike the nations of the world, that although you may find among them one who is devoutly pious, it will not be carried on by his children."

As a result of the *Sinai* experience, the intense impurity from the original snake, which was innately part of the Jewish people no longer existed. It was therefore possible to perpetuate the sense and value of one's spirituality from generation to generation. However, regarding the nations of the world, because they still possess this spiritual obstruction from the impurity of the snake, righteousness cannot be passed on to one's progeny.

The Holy Patriarchs were the location of the Divine Presence in Existence, as the *Midrash* tells us they were similar to the Holy of Holies in the Temple. Thus, the impurity of the snake was expunged from them. The experience of the children of *Yaakov* (Tribes of G-d) was similar to the *Sinai* event because they were exposed to their holy father *Yaakov*, who represented the location of the Divine Presence. Although their own impurity was expunged from them; however, because they at that time did not assume their own identity as a nation (who was connected to G-d), their progeny was still seen as being part of the rest of humanity. Thus, they were subject to the impurity of the snake. It was not until *Sinai*, when they became G-d's holy people, that the impurity was expunged from all the Jewish people until the end of time.

## Perceiving Something Correctly

*Torah* regarding the positive commandment of *bikurim* (first fruits): "It will be when you enter the Land that *Hashem*, your G-d, gives you...that you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground...." One must bring the first of his produce to the Temple and make a declaration to the *Kohen*, "And you will say to him... An *Aramean* tried to destroy my forefather..." In this declaration, one gives thanks to G-d and recounts all that He had done for himself and the Jewish people since the time of *Yaakov*, our Patriarch.

*Rashi* citing *Sifrei*: When the *Torah* states, "And you will say to him ..." it means that the individual is declaring, "I am not an ingrate (*kafui tova*)."

The term "*kafui tova*" does not only mean that one is not appreciative, but rather it refers to one who regards what is ultimately good as something that is the equivalent of evil. He sees the good as something that is a detriment to him. In essence, this individual

sees the good as evil, which is the equivalent of seeing something backwards.

The examples of individuals who were “*kafui tova*” that are given by *Chazal* are *Adam* and the Jewish people in the desert when they complained about the *Manna* in the fortieth year.

*Torah*: After *Adam* had transgressed the Word of G-d by eating of the Tree of Knowledge, G-d confronted him by asking, “Why did you eat from the tree of knowledge?” *Adam* responded by saying, “It was because of the wife You gave me.” This implied that G-d was the cause of his failing. It was due to *Chava’s* insistence that he had eaten of the Tree. The reason G-d had created for *Adam* a wife was for his full benefit. She was to be his helpmate in order to assist him in achieving a state of spiritual perfection. Rather than acknowledging the ultimate good that G-d had provided for him, *Adam* perceived it the basis for his failing. G-d thus classified him as an “ingrate (*kafui tovah*).”

*Torah*: After the Jewish people had benefited from the *Manna*, in the desert for forty years, they complained saying, “...our soul is disgusted with this insubstantial food (*lechem haklokel*).” The *Manna* nourished and sustained the Jewish people for forty years in the physical and spiritual sense. It was completely absorbed in their innards without being expelled from their bodies. (After ingesting and being sustained with this food that was the same sustenance of the angels, they complained regarding their abnormal function within existence.) They said that since they had been ingesting the *Manna* for many years without expelling it from their bodies, they were concerned that it would ultimately expand in their intestines and cause them to burst and die.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Avoda Zarah*: After the Jewish people complained about the *Manna*, G-d characterized the Jewish people by saying, “You are ingrates who descend from an ingrate.”

*Gemara*: This is referring to them as the decedents of *Adam*, who was the original ingrate of the human species. Thus, the individual who sees things in an inverted/backwards manner is considered to be a “*kafui tovah*.”

*Mishna* in Tractate *Berachos*: “Just as one blesses for the good, one must bless for the bad (*Baruch Dayan*

*Ha’emes*).” The Rabbis promulgated the recitation of the blessing of “*shehichianu*” when good fortune comes upon an individual. Identically they legislated the recitation of the blessing “*Dayan Ha’emes*” when tragedy comes upon an individual.

*Shulchan Aruch*: When one recites the blessing of “*Baruch Dayan ha’emes*” it must be said with the same level of joy as one recites the blessing of “*shehichianu*.” How is it possible for one to experience the same level of joy for tragedy as good fortune? Factually, since G-d is the True and equitable Judge “*Dayan ha’emes*” everything that comes upon the individual is in his best interest. G-d only brings upon the Jew what is for his ultimate good in order to address his standing. Just as one celebrates something that is obviously good fortune, so too one must also realize and internalize that something that is even tragic is for the sake of spiritual rehabilitation.

*Gemara*: If one has all of his fortune on a ship and it sinks in the ocean, one must recite the blessing “*Baruch Dayan ha’emes*.” If a person for a moment would begin to question the good or benefit of what has come upon him, then he would be considered an ingrate “*kafui tova*.” Since G-d only brings the ultimate good upon the Jew, to think otherwise would be a demonstration of the characteristic of an ingrate. Thus immediately upon hearing tragedy one must recite the blessing “*Baruch Dayan ha’emes*” to demonstrate that he is not an ingrate.

*Torah* in *Bereishis* regarding the first day of Creation: “It was evening and it was morning....”

*Gemara*: In a number of locations that the nighttime period represents physical existence (prior to the coming of *Moshiach*) and the daytime period represents the time when evil will be purged from existence at the end of time (post *Moshiach*).

G-d’s Presence will be revealed in existence to all mankind and man will be endowed with the clarity to see that everything is good. In contrast, physical existence is similar to the nighttime period because the truth is obscured by the darkness. At night everything is distorted. From a distance, things seem to be one thing and as one comes closer it becomes evident that it is something else.

Because of one's inner conflict between his physical needs and desires and spirituality, it causes things to be distorted. The only mechanism that was given to man that is able to pierce the darkness of existence and shed light is the *Torah* itself.

King Solomon in Proverbs: '*Neir mitzvah v'Torah ohr* (the *mitzvah* is the fuel and the *Torah* is the light/illumination).'

Life is filled with challenges in which one is not able to see the truth with clarity. However, if one has faith in G-d (*bitachon*) he will be able to perceive what even seems to be tragic in his best interest. Being an ingrate is due to a lack of faith in G-d. When the Jew brings the *bikurim* and makes the declaration of thanks he is declaring that he has absolute trust and faith in G-d. He is thus not an ingrate.

*Rambam* in The Laws of Deos: The prophet before the destruction of the First Temple warned the Jewish people to change their ways or the Temple would be destroyed. The Jewish people did not heed the words of the prophet, but rather they blamed him if there would be any tragedy. The prophet responded by saying, "The people are seeing the light as dark and the dark as light." Meaning, the Jewish people at the time of the destruction of the Temple had such a convoluted perspective of existence that darkness was seen light. This was a confirmation that they did not have trust in G-d and were thus ingrates.



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