
THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Questions for self study - by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT NITZAVIM / VAYELECH

PARSHAT NITZAVIM
PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'

From BRIT SINAI to BRIT NITZAVIM

1. Review the first pasuk of the Sedra (i.e. 29:9), noting the meaning of the word 'nitzavim'. What is the 'shoresh' [root] of this word, and why do you think that Moshe Rabbeinu chose this word to describe this 'setting'?

In your opinion, does the noun 'matzeva' [a monument] stem from the same root? If so, explain why.

Now, review the opening psukim of Parshat Vayetze (Breishit 28:10-22), noting the Torah's use of both the verb 'nitzav' and noun matzeva. Based on their context, can you find a thematic connection between these two Parshiot?

2. Next, review 29:9-14 once again, this time noting how Moshe Rabbeinu's opening statement of 'atem nitzavim' relates directly to the covenant ['brit'] that he describes in 29:11. In fact, note how all the details in 29:9-14 relate to this brit. What is the purpose of this brit, and how does it relate to earlier covenants convened between God and Am Yisrael (that were mentioned earlier in Chumash; e.g. brit avot & brit Sinai)?

Now, review 28:69 in its context. How do 29:9-14 relate to the brit described in Parshat Ki Tavo?

In your opinion, does 'brit Nitzavim' relate to the main speech of Sefer Devarim? If so, how (and why)? In your answer, be sure to relate to the pasuk: "in order that you be His **nation**, and He will be your God - **as He spoke to you**, and **as He swore to Avraham...**" (29:12). [Be sure to relate to Devarim 26:16-19 and its context.]

Make sure that you can explain every phrase of that pasuk! In other words, where in Chumash had God already given this message to Bnei Yisrael, and likewise, where (and when) did He explain this to the avot?

Finally, in your answer, be sure to relate to the phrase 'lihiyot lachem I-Elokim' / see Breishit 17:1-9, Shmot 6:2-8 & 19:3-6, Vayikra 26:12 and its context.

[See also Yirmiyahu 11:1-5!]

3. With this background, review Shmot 24:3-8, i.e. the details of the covenantal ceremony that took place when Bnei Yisrael first declared 'na'aseh ve-nishma' (forty years earlier at Ma'amad Har Sinai).

Note as well the numerous parallels between that ceremony and the covenant described in Devarim 27:1-8, 28:69 & 29:9-11. Can you explain why there is a need for 'another' covenant specifically at this time in Jewish History, and how it relates to the original covenant convened at Ma'amad Har Sinai?

Did you find a parallel to the twelve monuments ('matzevot') that are described in Shmot 24:4, and to the 'leadership group' described in Shmot 24:1 & 9?

[In case you didn't notice this yet,] relate to Moshe's statement of 'atem **nitzavim**' in Devarim 29:9 and the continuation of the pasuk that includes 'kol ish Yisrael'. Can you find significance in both what is similar and what is different in this parallel?

4. Finally, study the first ten lines of the Ramban on 29:9. Even though he doesn't mention this parallel explicitly, note how his commentary relates to this parallel, alluded to in the above questions. [If you have time, see also the second section of the lengthy Ramban on Vayikra 25:1, beginning with 'lefi da'ati...' where he explains] why 'brachot & klalot' became a necessity in the second brit.]

MILAT HA-LEV

5. Review 30:1-10 (i.e. 'parshat ha-teshuva') paying special attention to the phrase 've-mal Hashem et levavcha ve-et levav zar'echa' (30:6). In your opinion, why does the Torah use the verb of 'mila' to explain how Hashem will help us do teshuva?

Can you relate this to covenant of 'brit mila' (see Breishit 17:7-11) as well as to the physical action of circumcision?

6. Now, see Ramban on this pasuk (30:6). Note how Ramban uses this pasuk to explain **how** life in 'messianic times' will be different! [This Ramban is quite long, but worth the effort. It is also worthwhile to see Ramban on Vayikra 26:12.]

Afterward, see the commentary of Ibn Ezra & Seforno to 30:6. How (and why) are their commentaries different than Ramban's?

PART II - QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION (for shiur)

1. Note how Parshat Nitzavim is actually part of an additional speech given by Moshe Rabbeinu that began with 29:1 (i.e. at the end of Parshat Ki Tavo). Be sure you study the speech itself, be sure to verify this, and attempt to identify as well precisely where this speech ends.

Then, study the contents of this speech, and attempt to identify its purpose, as well as its thematic connection to the Tochacha in chapter 28?

Based on your answer, suggest a reason why Chazal may have preferred to begin the Sedra of Nitzavim with 29:9 instead of from where the speech actually began in 29:1.

2. Recall how the 'tochacha' in Parshat Ki Tavo (i.e. chapter 28) explains how Am Yisrael can expect **reward** for following Hashem, and **punishment** for disobeying Him. In your opinion, could (theoretically) an individual have the right to 'back out' of the covenant - saying - 'I don't want neither the reward, nor the punishment'?

In your answer, relate to Devarim 29:13-20, especially to 29:18!

Relate also to Yirmiyahu 7:21-28, especially 7:24.

See also Yirmiyahu 11:1-10, especially 11:8.

Use this to explain why chapter 29 follows chapter 28.

3. Note that the psukim in 30:1-10 form a 'parshia'. What is basic message of this parshia, and how does it relate the warnings of the **tochacha** that were described back in chapter 28?

How does this parshia (30:1-10) relate to the primary themes of the main speech of Sefer Devarim? Towards what purpose does God promise that Am Yisrael will ultimately return to their land (and God)?

4. Similarly, note how 30:11-14 also forms a distinct parshia. Attempt to identify its main point, and (as above) how it relates to the main speech of Sefer Devarim. Can you explain why this message is given at this point?

5. Finally, note how 30:15-20 also forms a parshia. Compare the main points of this parshia to the Gan Eden narrative in Sefer Breishit (chapters 2->3). What is the most obvious parallel between these psukim and the story of Gan Eden?

What does this parallel suggest concerning the connection between God's placement of Bnei Yisrael in the Land of Israel and story of Gan Eden?

6. Relate this parallel to Mishlei 3:18, noting especially the overall context from 3:1-18.

Relate this pasuk as well to Breishit 3:24 & Shmot 25:21-22!

Note how this parshia concludes Moshe Rabbeinu's 'concluding' speech that began in 29:1.

Can you explain why this forms an appropriate conclusion not only for this speech, but also for this entire section of Sefer Devarim?

PART III - PARSHANUT

1. In 29:9-10, we find a lengthy list of the types of people who will now enter into this covenant. Take a careful look at this list and attempt to determine the logic of its order. In your opinion, does each category refer to a specific group of people, or are some of them more general categories (followed by sub-categories)?

In your opinion, does the word 'ish' in 'kol **ish** Yisrael' refer to 'everyone'; only the males; only the male adults; or only to the important people?

Explain what you base your answer upon.

Finally, in your opinion, are the 'chotvei etzim' [wood choppers] and 'sho'avei mayim' [water carriers] Jewish? On what do you base your answer? Can you explain why specifically these two professions are mentioned? [Do these names ring a bell?]

With these questions in mind, see the following commentators:

First, see Rashi on 29:10

How (and why) does Rashi reach this conclusion about these converts? Is it based primarily upon 'pshat' in Nitzavim, or based on the parallel 'professions' found in Sefer Yehoshua?

Next, see Chizkuni on 29:10 -

How does he explain these two 'professions'?

Would you say that he agrees with Rashi that they are converts?

Then, see Seforno on 29:10-

Note how he compares this to I Shmuel 15:3.

In what manner is his peirush totally different than Rashi's?

How does the local context of these psukim support Seforno?

Now, see Ibn Ezra on 29:9-10

What is his conclusion concerning the order.

How does this conclusion affect his understanding of the word 'rasheichem'?

[Note that Rashi offers a similar peirush on 29:9.]

Finally, see Ramban on 29:9-10 (in the middle- starting 'rasheichem...').

How does Ramban explain the order of this pasuk?

How does this differ from Ibn Ezra, and how does this affect his interpretation of each of these words? [Note Ramban's 'klal u-prat' approach.]

Finally, how is Ramban's suggestion that the 'wood-choppers' were from the 'erev rav' different from Rashi's interpretation? Can you explain the reason for this? What assumption (that isn't written) must each commentator make to explain his opinion?

2. Review, 29:28, noting the phrase 'ha-nistarot I-Hashem Elokeinu...'. In your opinion, what 'nistarot' [hidden things] is this pasuk referring to?

Is it what **Hashem** does in hidden ways?

Is it what **we** do in hidden ways?

Are they things that God may hide **from** us, but known to Him?

or possibly something else?

Furthermore, how does this final pasuk relate to the entire perek which precedes it?

In your opinion, which explanation seems most accurate?

After considering these questions, see (as usual) Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban [note how and why he may argue with Ibn Ezra], Rashbam, Chizkuni, and Seforno [on 29:8].

Do any of these commentators offer the **same** interpretation?

After you have understood each interpretation, attempt to explain **why** there are so many different opinions.

Be sure to note Targum Unkelos, as noted by Ramban at the conclusion of his peirush on 29:28.

3. See Rashi on 30:19, noting how he offers **two** different reasons for why specifically the 'shamayim va-aretz' were chosen as 'testimony'.

Explain the difference between these two interpretations.

[Can you relate this to 'yir'at Hashem' & 'ahavat Hashem'?]

How does Rashi's peirush relate to 'shirat Ha'azinu' (see 32:1)? How does 30:19, in its context relate to shirat Ha'azinu?

See also Chizkuni on 30:19. Which of Rashi's two peirushim is his peirush more similar to?

Can you explain why he supports his peirush specifically from the Tochacha in Vayikra 26:3-4, and then from Devarim 11:17?

Can you suggest an additional reason why the Torah, towards its conclusion, relates to shamayim va-aretz (based on Breishit 1:1, 2:4)?

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PARSHAT VAYELECH / Questions for self-study

PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'

TO WHOM DO WE PASS THE TORCH?

1. In 31:9, Moshe Rabbeinu gives the Sefer Torah (after it is written), specifically to the Levites ['bnei Levi'] **and** to the elders.

Can you explain the reason for this?

Be sure to relate to 33:10, 17:9-11 & 18:3-5.

Note also Nechemia 8:7-9! [In regard to **when** this event took place, see 8:1!]

See also Ibn Ezra on Devarim 31:9!

Relate this to the underlying reason for why God chose 'shevet Levi', and for why they did not receive their own 'nachala' in the land.

THE REASON FOR SHIRAT HA'AZINU

2. Did you ever notice that Parshat Vayelech explains the reason for the 'shira' in Parshat Ha'azinu?

If not, carefully read 31:16-30. Based on these psukim, be sure that you understand the purpose of shirat Ha'azinu. Then, review that shira and see how its details fulfill that purpose.

[This counts as a question for next week as well, but it is especially appropriate for Shabbat **Shuva**.]

To the best of your recollection, is it a mitzva to learn shirat Ha'azinu by heart (and understand it)? Relate your answer to 31:19. See also Parshanut section below (question #2).

FROM CHUMASH TO NVIIM

3. Review 31:1-8, and then compare these psukim with the first ten psukim of Sefer Yehoshua. How do these psukim help you better appreciate the manner in which Sefer Yehoshua begins?

How does the remainder of chapter 31, especially 31:16-21, relate to other chapters in 'Nevi'im Rishonim'?

HAKHEL & BRIT SINAI

4. Review the mitzva of **hakhel** and its various details as described in 31:7-13. Then compare these details to the detailed description of the ceremony at Ma'amad Har Sinai (when Bnei Yisrael declared 'na'aseh ve-nishma') as described in Shmot 24:1-11.

Can you explain the reason for these parallels?

Review the story in Yehoshua 8:30-35, as well as the original commandment to perform this ceremony, as described in Devarim 27:1-8. In your opinion, did Yehoshua follow that commandment exactly as he should have? How does the story in Yehoshua help us understand the commandment in Devarim?

Why is Yehoshua commanded to teach Bnei Yisrael the Torah on Har Eival, and to conduct this ceremony at the same time? In what manner is that ceremony parallel to the ceremony of **hakhel**?

What do these parallels suggest in regard to the purpose of the mitzva of **hakhel**, and why is this important?

PART II - QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION (for weekly shiur)

1. Review Parshat Vayelech, making note of all the various times when God commands Moshe to write something down. Make a list of each instance, and note what is to be written and why.
[Be sure to note 31:9-11,19,22,24-25,30 in their context.]

2. Be sure to see the various opinions of the commentators on **all** of the above psukim. Note the wide range of opinions concerning specifically what **Sefer Torah** Moshe Rabbeinu wrote down, and what 'torah' is to be read at **hakhel** etc. Can you explain the reason for this wide range of opinions?

3. If 31:9 refers to the entire Torah, then how could this pasuk be included in the Torah itself? How does Ramban answer this question? [Note Rashi as well.]

4. In regard to what was read at **hakhel**, see Rashi 31:11 and Masechet Sota 41a.

5. Based on 31:19, can you explain why there is a separate mitzva to write down specifically the 'shira'?

PART III - PARSHANUT

1. Read the first pasuk of Parshat Vayelech (31:1).

How did you understand 'va-yelech Moshe...' - in other words: to **where** did Moshe go? Where was he beforehand?

How does knowing 'where Moshe went' relate to the content of what Moshe says in the psukim which follow?

[In your answer, relate to 31:7 as well!]

a. See Ramban. How does he answer the above questions? Why does he relate this to what happened in Parshat Nitzavim?

b. See Ibn Ezra. Note how (based on this pasuk) he changes the chronological order of events from the order in which they are recorded. Can you follow his reasoning?

In what way is Ibn Ezra's approach different than Ramban's?

Can you explain why Ramban doesn't agree with Ibn Ezra?

c. Now, see Chizkuni! How is his peirush similar to Ramban, and in what way is it very different?

How does Chizkuni relate this pasuk to the events which take place from chapter 31-34? [Would you consider this approach 'realistic' or Midrashic?]

d. Finally, see Seforno. In what manner is his peirush totally different than all of the above?!

[Do you think that 31:7 affected his peirush?]

In your opinion, how strong are his proofs from Shmot 2:1 and Devarim 17:3? Can 'vayelech' in those psukim be explained in a different manner?

How does Seforno relate this pasuk to Parshat Nitzavim?

2. Review 31:19, noting that God's commandment is given in plural. Can you explain why? Afterward:

See Ibn Ezra. How does he explain the reason for the plural?

According to Ibn Ezra, is this also a mitzva for future generations to learn this shira by heart?

Next, see Ramban. How does he answer the above questions?

On what point does he disagree with Ibn Ezra?

Finally, see Chizkuni. What point does he add?

Would you say that he agrees or disagrees with Ramban?

be-hatzlacha,
menachem