



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

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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# **ROSH HASHANAH**

תשפ"ב

## **YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Rosh Hashanah**

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Nitzavim



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

### **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* says, ‘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 no 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. As the *Gemara* states, “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.

*Midrash*: The Holy Patriarchs were the location of the Divine Presence in Existence; 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.

## **Spiritual Orientation, A Prerequisite to Serve G-d**

*Torah*: Regarding the positive commandment of *hakeil*, “*Moshe* commanded them saying, ‘At the end of seven years, at the time of the Sabbatical year, during the festival of *Succos*, when all Israel comes to appear before *Hashem*, your G-d...you shall read this *Torah* before all Israel, in their ears. Gather together the people – the men, the women, and the small children... so that they will hear and so that they will learn, and they shall fear *Hashem*, your G-d, and be careful to perform all the words of the *Torah*.’”

*Torah*: On the second day of *Succos* (first day of *Chol HaMoed*) of the eighth year following the Sabbatical cycle, the entire Jewish People; men, women, and children, must gather on the Temple Mount to hear the reading of the Book of *Devarim* (*Mishna Torah*) by the King of Israel. The purpose of this reading is, “So that they (the Jewish people) should listen and learn to fear *Hashem*, your G-d, and be careful to perform all the

words of this *Torah*.” Thus, the objective of the *mitzvah* of *Hakheil* is so that the Jewish people should have fear and reverence for G-d. As a result of this reverence, they will observe the dictates of the *Torah* properly.

*Torah*: The Sabbatical year is when the Land of Israel must remain fallow and one is not permitted to engage in agricultural activities. The Sabbatical year is referred to by the *Torah* as, “*Shabbos L’ashem* (A Sabbath for G-d)”.

*Sforno* in his commentary (in *Behar*): *Shabbos L’ashem* is a year that one should be dedicated to *Torah* study, introspection, and meditation. The Sabbatical year should be devoted completely to spiritual growth and advancement. It is only after this year that the Jewish people gather on the Temple Mount in order to hear the King of Israel read the Book of *Devarim* to learn to revere G-d and keep His *Torah*. One would think that if the Jewish people were given an opportunity to dedicate an entire year (Sabbatical year) to spirituality through introspection and the study of *Torah*, they should first go to the Temple Mount and be inspired and impacted by the reading of the *Torah* by the King.

By hearing the Book of *Devarim* being read in this public setting in the presence of the entire Jewish people, one would become inspired and uplifted and thus revere G-d. One would then have the capacity to utilize the Sabbatical year in the most meaningful way. However, it is clear from the order given by the *Torah* that this is not so. But rather, after a full year of spiritual immersion followed by *Rosh Hashanah* (the day of judgment), the ten days of Repentance when a Jew must seek out G-d because He is closest at that time, and *Yom Kippur* (the day of atonement) – only then must the Jewish people ascend to the Temple Mount. Why is this the correct order of events?

For one to have the capacity to internalize and be the complete beneficiary of the reading of the *Torah* on the Temple Mount, one first undergo a spiritual orientation. In order to facilitate this, one must dedicate a full year to be immersed in *Torah* study and reflecting on one’s spirituality. This is done without any distraction whatsoever due to one’s livelihood. Thus, the Sabbatical year is truly a year dedicated for G-d (*Shabbos L’ashem*).

After dedicating a year in this context, one experiences *Rosh Hashanah*, the Ten Days of Penitence, culminating with *Yom Kippur*, during which one is spiritually purified

before G-d. As it states, “Before G-d you shall purify yourselves.” This is then followed by experiencing “You shall rejoice in your holidays” with *Succos*. It is only after all of this spiritual orientation and mentoring that one has the capacity and sensitivity to be a full beneficiary of the *Hakheil* event, the objective of which is to revere and fear G-d.

## Law and Order a Quantification of Value

*Torah*: “For you know we dwelled in the land of Egypt and how we passed through the midst of the nations through whom you passed.”

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: “*Moshe* said to the Jewish people, ‘You saw the nations who are idolaters and perhaps your heart may draw you to follow their ways. It is because of this (level of influence and attraction) I am binding you with an oath and a curse so that you should not transgress.’ It seems from the words of *Chazal* that being bound by an oath and curse is sufficient to dispel any consideration to sin.

*Mishna* in *Ethics of our Fathers*: One should pray for the welfare of government. If it were not for the fear of government, man would swallow his fellow alive. Meaning, without law and order being in place, a state of anarchy would develop to the point that people would devour one another alive. How is it possible that people who are truly ethical and moral fall to such a barbaric and uncivilized level?

Is it possible to say that the moral and ethical person only refrains from breaking the law because of his fear of consequences. If this is so, then the individual is truly not ethical and moral. As a human being is only able to evaluate a behavior pattern or a value when it is quantified through its consequence. If there is a governing body that legislates laws that determine the culpability and liability for the transgression of those laws then one is able to appreciate and recognize the criminality and wrongness of that particular action. When one is able to recognize the consequence of criminal behavior, one understands its wrongness. The consequence is then a quantification of the wrong. Therefore, *Chazal* teach us that the importance of praying for the welfare of government so that people should truly behave in an ethical and moral manner as proper human beings.

The safeguard of the legal system and societal behavior, which is enforced by the government, is limited only to those areas that are legislated by secular law. However, there are many aspects of life that the government does not address and thus does not legislate laws pertaining to them. If this is so, all the aspects of one's life that do not fall under the jurisdiction of the government will be difficult to contend with. If so, how is one able to gain clarity to appreciate what is truly proper behavior?

The *Mishna* sets forth the determining factor that gives one the ability to appreciate value. It is the fear of consequence. Since the *Torah* sets forth laws and obligations that pertain to every aspect of one's life, to sufficiently value the dictates of the *Torah*, one must have fear of G-d. The fear of G-d will be the catalyst that will give the Jew the ability to quantify and appreciate the value of what is proper and acceptable. When the *Torah* establishes and quantifies the liability and gravity of violating the *Shabbos*, if one has fear of G-d, understanding that the consequence can be enforced one will refrain from violating the *Shabbos*.

*Moshe* understood that since the Jewish people were exposed to the idolatry of Egypt and the nations through which they had passed through their midst, in order to dispel any consideration for being tempted by those beliefs and values, they were bound by G-d with an oath and a curse. When one is able to appreciate and internalize the wrongness of an action, he will be able to resist the temptation to transgress. For example, if one were tempted to eat a certain food item and later realized that it was laced with cyanide, his interest in it would dissipate immediately because its essence has been determined to be a detriment. Identically when the *Torah* quantifies the evil of idolatry through the oath and curse, one is able to appreciate the innate destructiveness of that behavior, thus causing that interest to be fully dispelled.

## **The Pathway to Repentance**

*Torah*: "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...Nor is it across the sea...Rather, the matter is very near to you it is in your mouth and your heart to perform it.'" There is an argument among the commentators as to which *mitzvah* "this commandment" is referring.

*Ramban*: "This commandment that I command you today" is referring to the *mitzvah* of repentance (*teshuvah*). The *mitzvah* of repentance is close to every Jew to fulfill. If one ceases to sin and has remorse for the past and commits himself to the future not to repeat the transgression, and makes a verbal confession, one will fulfill the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*.

*Rashi*: "This commandment" is referring to the *mitzvah* of the study of *Torah*. Regardless of one's intellectual capacity or level of proficiency, the *mitzvah* of the study of *Torah* can be readily fulfilled by every Jew.

It is interesting to note that the blessing in the *Amidah* for repentance states, "Bring us back, our Father, to your *Torah*, bring us near, our King, to Your service ... and influence us to return in perfect repentance..." It is indicated from the text of the blessing that the process of *teshuvah* begins with the study of *Torah*. In order for one to have the capacity to repent one must have a sense of the One who he is serving. It is only possible to have a sense of G-d and service if one enters into *Torah* study.

The study of *Torah* sensitizes and spiritualizes the individual by giving him an appreciation of his own spirituality. Therefore, the process of repentance is predicated on one's study of *Torah*.

*Yehoshua*: "You shall engage in it day and night."

*Mishna* in Tractate *Menachos*: Even if one only recited the portions of the *Shema* in the morning and evening he has fulfilled this obligation of *Torah* study. However, this is at the most minimal level of *Torah* study. To be spiritualized to the point that one can properly repent, one must occupy himself in *Torah* study to a greater degree by allotting for it a more substantial amount of time.

The verse states, "...the matter is very near to you it is in your mouth and your heart to perform it." One needs only to initially take the initiative to make the change and G-d will provide him with assistance to bring about the desired result. The name of the month "*Elul*" is alluded in the verse, "G-d will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your children." It is cited by many of the commentators that the name of the month of "*Elul*" is an acronym for "*Ani L' Dodi V'Dodi Li* - I am to my beloved as my beloved is to me." The acronym begins with "I am to my beloved" indicating that one

needs to take the initiative and only then “my beloved (G-d)” will come close.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: “One who attempts to purify himself will be assisted.” If one had not taken an initiative to any degree regarding spiritual change, then G-d will not assist that individual.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Berachos*: One *Amorah* had said the Traveler’s Prayer (*tefilas ha’derech*) that one recites when leaving the city in a singular context. When a colleague of his had heard him, he said that the prayer should be recited in the plural because when one includes the community it has a greater impact and acceptability. One’s focus is not only himself but also on the community.

When we recite the blessing for repentance we say “Bring us back, our Father, to your *Torah*...” which is in the plural. We supplicate G-d to not only give us as individuals Divine Assistance to repent but also provide it to the entire Jewish people. If one truly has an interest in the Jewish people as a whole, being given Divine Assistance to repent, G-d will provide it to the one who is supplicating.

*Torah*: “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, meaning every Jew is spiritually interconnected/intertwined with every other Jew. Therefore, when one performs a *mitzvah* obligation properly, he not only elevates and advances himself but also the entire Jewish people as a whole.

Conversely, when one individual sins, the consequence of his action is not limited to himself but it pervades the entire Jewish people and diminishes them. When one takes an initiative to repent, which is the equivalent of “I am to my beloved...,” seemingly it will affect another Jew. Every Jew is obligated to hear the blowing of the *shofar*. According to Jewish law, based on the principle of “*areivus*” one Jew can cover another in his obligation by blowing on that individual’s behalf.

However, the individual that is being covered must hear the blast of the *shofar* that is being blown in his behalf. This is based on the principle that every Jew is responsible for his fellow. Thus, if one supplicates G-d in the plural for repentance, it is considered an

initiative. Thus every Jew will be a beneficiary of what is stated “If you will open for Me an opening the size of the eye of a needle, I will open for you a opening the size of a large chamber.” Therefore the argument regarding the meaning of the verse “For this commandment...” (if it is referring to the *mitzvah* of repentance or *Torah*), if one chooses to study, it will bring him to the path of repentance.

*Torah*: After the Jewish people will experience the hardships of exile, they will return to G-d. “Then *Hashem*, your G-d will bring you back from captivity and have mercy upon you, and He will gather you in from all the peoples...*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.” This is an allusion to the repentance that one must do during the month of *Elul* before *Rosh Hashanah*.

*Ramban* citing the *Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: “‘Whoever comes to purify himself, they will assist him...’ If one wishes to purify himself from sin, he must take the initiative. (One needs to take only a small initiative. As *Chazal* tell us G-d says, ‘If you open for Me an opening as small as the eye of a needle, I will open for you a large ballroom’)...From the beginning of creation, man has had the ability to choose to be righteous or evil. Since the good that one does is as a consequence of his own choice, he is deserving of reward. If however he chooses to do evil, then he will be punished because the evil was consequence of his own choice.

“However at the time of *Moshiach*, the choice for good will be natural (one will no longer choose evil). One’s emotion and desire will no longer be for anything that is not appropriate because G-d will circumcise the heart of man. All desire and lust is an outgrowth of the covering of the heart. (The heart has an acute sense of right and wrong but it is occluded with a covering which stems from desire and lust)...At this time, man will revert to the state of *Adam* before the sin. Just as *Adam* did good because it was in his nature to do so, so too will one during the time of *Moshiach* do good naturally....There *Torah* will be inscribed one their hearts. It will become integral to one’s being. The evil inclination will be eliminated as the time of *Adam* before the sin.”

*Torah*: The Jewish people needed to establish six cities of refuge. At the time of the coming of *Moshiach*,

there will be an additional three cities of refuge that will be established in areas of the land that have not yet been conquered.

*Gemara*: If one killed another inadvertently, going to the city of refuge was part of his atonement for his sin. If at the time of *Moshiach* the evil inclination will be eliminated, why would there be a need for an additional three cities of refuge of the desire for sin would no longer exist? It is not because the inadvertent sin will be as a consequence of desire but rather as a result of an external issue.

Similarly, *Adam* was naturally inclined not to sin. However he was influenced to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. Just as *Adam* was influenced by an external force so too will one during the time of *Moshiach* have the susceptibility to be influenced by an external force. The desire to do good will however be natural to mankind at that time. The city of refuge is to atone for a sin that did not emanate from something internal to the person but rather circumstance that came upon him.

*Ramban*: "...The Jewish people will not need to influence one another to know G-d because all will know Him on their own. From the youngest to the oldest will be close to G-d. It is only because man is evil from the moment that he emerges from the womb of his mother that he needs to be taught to do good. However at the time of *Moshiach*, this will not be so."

*Yeshaya*: "You should seek out G-d when He is found. Call to Him when He is close."

*Gemara* in Tractate *Rosh Hashanah*: Regarding the individual, G-d responds to one's prayers during the time that He is closest, which is during the Ten Days of Repentance. There is also special Divine Assistance that is made available to the Jew from the beginning of *Elul* until the end of the Ten Days of Repentance that enables one to repent and come close to G-d. During this forty-day period one has a greater sense of G-d. If one takes the initiative during this time, G-d will assist him to repent to a greater degree.

## Spiritualization through Torah Study

*Torah*: In the fourth year of the Sabbatical Cycle, before the Passover Festival, one must make the confession of the Tithes. "You shall say before *Hashem*, your G-d, "I have removed the holy things from the house, and

I have also given to the Levite, to the proselyte, to the orphan, and to the widow, according to whatever commandment You commanded me ...Gaze down from your holy abode, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel, and the ground that You gave us, as You swore to our forefathers, a Land flowing with milk and honey."

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: "We have done all that you have decreed upon us. Now, You do what You are responsible to do for us. You had said 'If you will follow My Statutes and observe My Commandments and perform them; then I will provide for your rains in their time...'" According to *Chazal* cited by *Rashi* the verse 'If you will follow My Statutes and observe My Commandments...' is also referring to the proper distribution of tithes to the *Kohen*, Levite, widow, etc.

*Rashi* in *Bechukosai* citing *Toras Kohanim*: The verse, "If you will follow My Statutes and observe My Commandments and perform them; then I will provide for your rains in their time..." is referring to the one who is deserving of blessing because he toils in *Torah*. How do we reconcile the two statements of *Chazal*? Is the verse, "If you will follow My Statutes..." referring to the distribution of tithes or is it referring to the one toiling in *Torah*?

The individual who supplicates G-d predicates his request for blessing, "I have done all that you have commanded me...."

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: This verse can mean, "I have rejoiced and have caused others to rejoice." Meaning the individual who is distributing the various tithes and bringing the *bikurim* rejoiced when he distributed the tithes and the recipients rejoiced (those who received their rightful portion of grain and produce). It is understandable that the one who receives the tithes would rejoice, because he had received something of value.

However, how could the one who distributes a significant portion of his harvest experience joy when he has minimized his profits? It is only the individual who is sufficiently spiritualized, who can appreciate and internalize the innate value of a *mitzvah* regardless of its cost. One who has a sense of spirituality and understands that only through this distribution can he advance and thus address the purpose of his existence will rejoice. The only way one can achieve a sense of spirituality is through the toil of *Torah*.



When the individual becomes spiritualized through this process, he will have the capacity to appreciate the value of a *mitzvah*. Although the individual is foregoing a significant percentage of his profits when he gives the tithes and *bikurim*; nevertheless, because he appreciates the value of the *mitzvah* of distributing the tithes to the rightful individuals it will bring him joy. Thus, when one says to G-d, "I have rejoiced and caused others to rejoice" it is a confirmation that the one who is giving the tithes had sufficiently toiled in *Torah* and is thus able to experience joy when performing this *mitzvah*.

*Torah* in the *Tochacha* (curses): that the Jewish people will be subject to the curses because they did not serve G-d with "joy and goodness of heart." This is addressing the Jewish people who were in fact diligent in their observance of the *mitzvos*; however, they did not serve Him with joy. It is only because they did not toil sufficiently in *Torah* that they do not serve G-d with joy. They performed the *mitzvos* solely as an obligation and not as a privilege.

Why should these people who observed the *Torah* meticulously be subject to the Wrath of G-d? It is

because if one is lacking in joy and good-heartedness in his service of G-d, it is a clear indication that he does not truly appreciate and value what G-d has given him. If one would have a sufficient level of appreciation for what G-d had provided him, he would be motivated to eagerly reciprocate with joy to serve G-d his Master. He would see the *mitzvah* as an opportunity and a privilege to do the Will of G-d.

Rambam in his commentary on the *Mishna* in Tractate *Makos*: G-d gave the Jewish people an abundance of *mitzvos* (613) in order to bring them merit. One would think that having so many commandments would only give rise to a greater probability of failure. If G-d wanted to bring merit to the Jewish people, He would have perhaps given them fewer *mitzvos* because it would have been easier to content with.

*Rambam*: The ultimate achievement in life is for one to perform one *mitzvah* perfectly. Thus since G-d wanted to bring merit to the Jewish people, He commanded them with many *mitzvos* to give them the chance to do at least one *mitzvah* perfectly. If one toils in *Torah* sufficiently, he will be affected to be able to perform the *mitzvah* in a more perfect and complete manner.



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