



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 19 | Vayelech | Sichah 1

Making Unity Practical

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1.

ONE, SPLIT IN TWO

Regarding *parshiyos Nitzavim* and *Vayelech*, Rav Saadia Gaon says:¹

Among them (the fifty-three *parshiyos* in the Torah) there is a *parshah* that can be split in two and read over two weeks if necessary. This *parshah* is *Attem Nitzavim*, which is divided into {*Nitzavim* and} *Vayelech Moshe*.

Rav Saadia Gaon’s nuanced wording, “a *parshah* that can be split in two” — unlike the wording when Rav Saadia Gaon refers to the other conjoined *parshiyos*: “eight of them are **joined** at times, in groups of two, and are read over {a total} four *Shabbasos*” — demonstrates that *Nitzavim* and *Vayelech* are inherently **one** *parshah*. Only occasionally, we **divide** it into two (unlike the other “eight” conjoined *parshiyos*, which are inherently **two distinct** *parshiyos* (“two”), but are occasionally read together on one Shabbos).

[This idea is also intimated by the mnemonic device cited in *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*² — (“פתבג המלך” {“the King’s food”}),³ “ב”ג המלך פת וילך” {when the King is 2 or 3, “pas” *Vayelech*}.” (Meaning, when Rosh Hashanah (“the King,” המלך) falls on the second, ב, or third, ג, day of the week {Monday or Tuesday}, *Vayelech* is read separately.) As *Magen Avraham*⁴ explains, “*pas Vayelech*’ means, “break **it** into pieces”⁵ — we divide *Nitzavim* and *Vayelech* into two.” The word “*pas*” is to be understood as in the phrase, “break **it** into pieces” — we break **one** loaf of bread or wafer into pieces; similarly, “*pas Vayelech*” means that we “break it apart” — we divide *Vayelech* from *Nitzavim*.]⁶

¹ In his *Siddur*, “*Kerias HaTorah*.”

² *Orach Chayim*, sec. 428, par. 4.

³ *Daniel* 1:13, 15.

⁴ *Orach Chayim*, sec.428, par, 5.

⁵ *Vayikra* 2:6.

⁶ {From the comparison to one loaf being broken into two, we derive that *nitzavim* and *vayelech* are inherently one *parshah* that is sometimes divided into two.}

Since every *parshah* has a general theme (distinguishing it from all of the other *parshiyos*), clearly, *Nitzavim* and *Vayelech* share one general theme. Meaning, not only do they share a common idea which allows them to be conjoined (as do all of the other conjoined *parshiyos*),⁷ but furthermore, they share the same principle theme.

Nevertheless, the very fact that *Vayelech* is occasionally read on a separate Shabbos indicates that notwithstanding their common theme, there is a difference between them in terms of how this theme is expressed in each of these two *parshiyos*. Furthermore, since *Vayelech* follows *Nitzavim*, *Vayelech* must have an advantage (with respect to their common theme) over *Nitzavim*⁸ — an incomparable advantage (which is why *Vayelech* is occasionally read on a **different** Shabbos).

2.

THE THEME OF ROSH HASHANAH AND YOM KIPPUR

Parshas Nitzavim is always read before Rosh Hashanah,⁹ in accord with the Alter Rebbe's explanation of the connection between {the opening words of *Nitzavim*,} "You are standing today, all of you..."¹⁰ and Rosh Hashanah (as will be explained below in section 3). When *Vayelech* is read separately, however, it is read on the Shabbos between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This demonstrates that the theme of *Vayelech* (also) relates to Yom Kippur.

Consequently, the two above-mentioned points regarding *Nitzavim* and *Vayelech* [i.e., a) they share **one** theme; and b) nonetheless, *Vayelech* has an edge over *Nitzavim*] can be reconciled by explaining how both of these concepts are incorporated into the theme of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

⁷ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 18, p. 380, 381, and in the footnotes there.

⁸ According to the principle, {*Megillah* 9b, et al.}, "In matters of holiness, we ascend."

⁹ *Megillah* 31b, *Tosafos*, s.v. "rosh," and s.v. "kelalos."

¹⁰ {*Devarim* 29:9.}

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur share **one** theme — they are a continuum, so much so that Yom Kippur is {also} referred to as “Rosh Hashanah.”¹¹ Conversely, Yom Kippur possesses an advantage over Rosh Hashanah: “On Rosh Hashanah, they are inscribed; and on Yom Kippur, they are sealed.”¹² Yom Kippur is the conclusion of Rosh Hashanah.

[This is also reflected in *halachah*: Yom Kippur is (also) referred to as “Rosh Hashanah” as it is “Rosh Hashanah for the *yovel*-count.”¹³ *Halachah* dictates that servants are freed during the “*yovel*” year {gradually}: “From Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, servants were not released to their homes, but they were no longer indentured to their masters.... Once Yom Kippur arrived..., servants were released to their homes.”¹⁴

We see from the above that freedom from servitude has two aspects: Being freed from servitude is **one** aspect; however, this aspect is divided into two — the start of the release (“they were no longer indentured”) occurs on Rosh Hashanah; and the **conclusion** of the release (“they were released to **their homes**”), which is **pivotal**, occurs on Yom Kippur.]

3.

UNITY IN NITZAVIM AND VAYELECH

The Alter Rebbe explains¹⁵ the connection between {the opening words of *Nitzavim*}, “You are standing today, all of you...”¹⁶ and Rosh Hashanah: Rosh Hashanah is the time when “you will crown Me as King over you.”¹⁷ How do we coronate Hashem as “King in Yeshurun”¹⁸ (fulling

¹¹ *Yechezkel* 40:1.

¹² The prayer of *Unisaneh Tokef* {recited in the liturgy on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur}.

¹³ {The fifty year cycle of seven, seven year *shemita* counts, culminating in a fiftieth year, “*yovel*.”} *Erchin* 12a.

¹⁴ *Rosh Hashanah* 8b.

¹⁵ *Likutei Torah*, beginning of *parshas Nitzavim*.

¹⁶ *Devarim* 29:9.

¹⁷ *Rosh Hashanah* 16a.

¹⁸ *Devarim* 33:5 {Yeshurun refers to the Jewish people}.

the verse, “you will crown Me as King over you...”) {The verse continues} “when the heads of the people assemble.”¹⁹ Meaning, when “everyone gathers together as one being,”²⁰ and there is unity among Jews. This is the general theme of the verse, “You are standing today, all of you, before the Hashem your L-rd, the heads of your tribes... the drawer of your water”: Notwithstanding the hierarchy in the Jewish people, they nevertheless stand, “all of you — as one — before Hashem your L-rd.”

This concept — the unity of the Jewish people, is also the main theme of *Vayelech*: The *parshah* begins, “Moshe went... to **all** of Israel.” The nuanced wording, “**all** of Israel,” demonstrates that {on this occasion} Moshe went to the Jewish people {collectively} a **single** time, to speak to **all** of the Jewish people identically. Also, at the conclusion of the *parshah*, it says, “Moshe spoke the words of this song into the ears of the entire congregation of Israel...”²¹ to the entire Jewish people as one.

4.

TWO KINDS OF TORAH

Furthermore: The *mitzvos* mentioned in this *parshah* — *hakhel*²² and writing a *Sefer Torah* — emphasize Jewish unity:

The *mitzvah*, “gather the people,”²³ encompasses all of the Jewish people equally, without differentiation — “the men, the women, and the small children, and your stranger...” (No other *mitzvah* involves such a display of {unequivocal} unity.) Consequently, the *mitzvah* is called “*hakhel*” — “congregation” — because the term “congregation” signifies that those gathered are (not only an assemblage of many individuals, rather they are) unified as **a single**, new entity, a “congregation”.

¹⁹ *Devarim* 33:5; Rashi comments, “When they gather together as one group... He is their King....”

²⁰ *Likkutei Torah*, beg. of “*Nitzavim*,” sec. 1 {p. 44a}.

²¹ {*Devarim* 31:30.}

²² {The commandment for all of the Jews together in the *Beis Hamikdash* every seven years, the year after *shemithah*. The king publicly reads a number of Torah passages before the nation.}

²³ *Devarim* 31:12.

In light of the above, we are able to resolve a perplexing point regarding *hakhel*: At *hakhel*, the **king** must read the Torah.²⁴ Seemingly, teaching Torah to the entire Jewish people falls under the domain of the *Sanhedrin*;²⁵ as such, the Torah-reading at *hakhel* should be done by the head of the *Sanhedrin*, or by the *Av Beis Din*!²⁶

The explanation — Torah {study} has two components:²⁷

- a) **Learning** Torah, involving intellect and comprehension. In this regard, there are distinctions between “the heads of your tribes...” and the other groups, down to “the drawer of your water.”
- b) **Reading** Torah,²⁸ specifically Scripture, which is unrelated to intellect or comprehension;²⁹ rather, this level is relevant to all Jews equally without distinctions.

Since *hakhel* brings all of the Jewish people together as one entity, it is understood that it relates to **that** component of Torah which relates to all the Jewish people equally — reading³⁰ Scripture. Furthermore, as *Rambam* says,³¹ *hakhel* is “akin to the day that the Torah was given on Mt. Sinai” (standing at Mt. Sinai brought together all of the Jewish people as one). Therefore, “a person should see himself as if he was just now commanded regarding the Torah and heard it **from the mouth of the Almighty**.”³²

This component of Torah is related specifically to a king — the subjugation of the entire nation to the king is not intellectual; rather, their

²⁴ *Sotah* 41a.

²⁵ See *Mishneh Torah*, beg. of “*Hilchos Mamrim*”; *Tanna DeVei Eliyahu Rabbah*, ch. 11; et. al.

²⁶ {The *Av Beis Din* was the second highest ranking member of the *Sanhedrin*, after the *Nasi* who stood at its head.}

²⁷ For another explanation, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 9, end of p. 445 ff.

²⁸ See the series of *mammarim* entitled “*B’sha’ah Sheh’hikdimu*,” 5672, vol. 2, p. 363, et. al.

²⁹ See Alter Rebbe’s *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 2, par. 12.

³⁰ See *Mishneh Torah* (“*Hilchos Chagigah*,” ch. 3, par. 6): “Converts who do not understand are obligated to prepare their hearts and listen attentively.... Even great Sages... are obligated to listen with exceedingly great concentration. One who is unable to hear should focus his attention on this reading....”

³¹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Chagigah*,” ch. 3, par. 6.

³² {Ibid.}

essential beings (and all of their possessions) belong to the king.³³ Therefore, the king unifies all of the Jewish people as one being; he is “**the heart of the entire Jewish people.**”³⁴

For this reason, the king is the one to **read** the Torah — he activates in the Jewish people the component of Torah that is beyond intellect, which is relevant to the entire Jewish people equally.

The second *mitzvah* in *Vayelech* is also unrelated to learning Torah — the *mitzvah* to **write** a sefer Torah. This emphasizes the connection between the Jewish people and the Torah that is the same for all Jews [similar to the above explanation regarding the Torah reading at *hakhel*].

5.

TRUE UNITY

The distinction between *Nitzavim* and *Vayelech* regarding {its message concerning} Jewish unity (which is their common theme, as mentioned above) can be understood by clarifying the distinction between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur as being the time that “you will crown Me as King over you:” As mentioned, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur share one theme — “you will crown Me as King over you” {the theme} of Rosh Hashanah, develops throughout the Ten Days of Repentance,³⁵ and is completed and perfected on Yom Kippur. (For this reason, we recite “*hamelech hakadosh*”³⁶ throughout the Ten Days of Repentance). The distinction between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is as follows:

On Rosh Hashanah, we {fulfil the directive} “crown Me as King over you” at {the level of} the first **root and source** {Above}: We arouse the

³³ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, p. 1050; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 8, p. 25.

³⁴ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 3, par. 6.

³⁵ {This refers to the days from Rosh Hashanah until (and including) Yom Kippur.}

³⁶ {Lit., “the holy King,” which we substitute in the *amidah* for “*hakel hakadosh* — the holy G-d” from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur, inclusive.}

inner will and desire of Hashem Himself³⁷ for kingship. Since the Jewish people are rooted in the very essence of Hashem, they have the ability to effect {this desire in Hashem's essence}. Throughout the *asseres yimei teshuvah* (in the lexicon of *kabbalah*), *binyan hamalchus*³⁸ takes place, until Yom Kippur. Then the *binyan hamalchus* is complete, and our coronation of Hashem “as King over you” shines openly **in this world**.

Since crowning Hashem “as King over you” is achieved “when the heads of the people assemble” — when Jewish unity prevails — we can conclude that in line with the above-mentioned distinction between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur regarding crowning Hashem “as King over you,” there is a similar distinction in the relationship of each of these days to Jewish unity:

Jewish unity on Rosh Hashanah is (primarily) expressed in the unity of the Jewish people **above** — at their source. On Yom Kippur, this unity is revealed **in this world**.

This is the incomparable advantage of Yom Kippur over Rosh Hashanah:

The unity of all the Jewish souls at their source is not a (full-fledged) novelty or achievement, for at their source, there is no place for disparity **in the first place** — just like a circle, which “has no beginning or end.”³⁹

The true Jewish (accomplishment of) unity {and its novelty} happens when **fragmentation** is transformed into unity — when unity is achieved in a place of disparate levels that are divided. Specifically **such** a unity, developed from disparity, expresses the true, simple unity⁴⁰ — the unity Above. Through the simple unity {of Hashem}, we are empowered to

³⁷ {In the original Yiddish, “*foon atzmuso*”; lit., “of His Essence.”}

³⁸ {A Kabbalistic process by which the *sefirah* of *malchus* (sovereignty) of Hashem is “rebuilt.” See <https://www.chabad.org/3082>}

³⁹ *Likkutei Torah*, s.v. “*atem nitzavim*,” ch. 1.

⁴⁰ {In the original Hebrew, “אחדות הפשוטה”; see the explanation of this concept in *Tanya*, “*Shaar Hayichud Veba’emunah*,” ch. 7, et al.}

transform the “public domain”⁴¹ into a “private domain”⁴² — *Yichido shel olam*.⁴³

6.

A SINGLE BUNDLE

The above-mentioned distinction between the Jewish unity expressed on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is seen in the difference between them regarding *teshuvah*:⁴⁴

We do not recite “*vidui*,”⁴⁵ or similar prayers, on Rosh Hashanah. In the liturgy of Rosh Hashanah, no mention is made (in the form of confession) of sins, forgiveness or atonement. Yom Kippur, in contrast, is “the day of forgiveness and atonement”; we recite “*vidui*,” etc. The possible explanation for this distinction:

The *avodah* of Rosh Hashanah involves an {existential} shift which comes from the essence of the soul as it is rooted in the essence of Hashem, higher than the source of Torah and *mitzvos*. On this level, there is no place for sin in the first place. Consequently, the concepts of forgiveness or atonement cannot be spoken of; even the advantage of {*teshuvah*, which causes} “his sins turn into merits,”⁴⁶ etc., is not germane. Then, the {Divine} Essence exercising **free** will, chooses the Jewish souls. On account of this {choice}, a desire and will is awakened {Above} that the Jewish people “crown Me as King.”

On Yom Kippur, however, the root and essence of the soul is expressed **in this world**, in a place where sin, etc., is possible. **Here**

⁴¹ {“*Reshus harabim*,” in the original Hebrew; a metaphor for this physical world of multiplicity.}

⁴² {“*Reshus hayachid*,” in the original Hebrew; , a metaphor for the domain of G-dliness.}

⁴³ {Lit., the Solitary One of the universe.}

⁴⁴ {Literally “repentance.”}

⁴⁵ {Literally “confession.”}

⁴⁶ *Yoma* 86b.

{specifically}, “the essence of the day of Yom Kippur atones,”⁴⁷ the {inherent} connection that the essence of the soul shares with Hashem, which is expressed on Yom kippur accomplishes the forgiveness and atonement for sins, etc.

The above also elegantly explains why specifically on “the night of Yom Kippur, we have the custom that before we commencing the communal prayers, we grant permission to {pray with}⁴⁸ those who have sinned:”⁴⁹

On Rosh Hashanah, we are able to elevate ourselves **beyond** a place where “sinners” and sins are of any concern. However, it is then not possible to pray with them {i.e.}, to connect with and unify with them, as they are {choosing to express themselves} within their persona of “transgressors,” here below.⁵⁰

Specifically on Yom Kippur we achieve true unity, as “they all will form a single band”⁵¹ — even Jews who still maintain the semblance of “transgressors” become unified with all of the Jewish people; we pray together with them “**a single band.**”

7.

UNITY IN AVODAH

Since Jewish unity on Yom Kippur is expressed in the Jewish people as they exist **below** {in this world}, therefore, this unity is expressed (not only in matters of the soul, but) also in matters of the corporeal **body**:

⁴⁷ *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Teshuvah*, ch.1, par. 3-4.

⁴⁸ {*Machzor*, pre-Kol Nidrei service.}

⁴⁹ Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Hilchos Yom HaKippurim*,” sec. 619, par. 1, based on *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, loc. cit.

⁵⁰ {In other words, on Rosh Hashanah we can pray with sinners, but that is because we transcend the possibility of sin. However in this physical realm where sins and sinners are relevant, we cannot unite with them. That is the unique accomplishment of Yom Kippur.}

⁵¹ *Amidah* prayer of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

The five afflictions observed on Yom Kippur are identical for every Jew. In the fulfillment of a (positive) *mitzvah*, a matter entailing an action or activity, there are differences in the manner and ranking of their fulfillment between great *tzaddikim* and plain folk, etc. However, when it comes to afflicting oneself {on Yom Kippur} or desisting {from work on Yom Kippur} — both of which entail “not” doing something, inaction — no distinction can be drawn between one Jew and another.

Similarly, on a deeper level: “To sustain them in hunger”⁵² — the “sustenance” provided through “hunger” itself⁵³ — is identical for everyone.

In contrast, the *avodah* of Rosh Hashanah expresses the essence of the soul which is beyond division. Nevertheless, this is revealed only during the *avodah* (prayer etc.) itself. **After** the prayer, however, when a person “leaves” the *avodah* and busies himself with eating “choice foods and drink sweet drinks,”⁵⁴ the “eating” and “drinking” differs for each individual.

8.

THE UNITY AT HAKHEL AND THE END OF VAYELECH

This is also the incomparable advantage that *parshas Vayelech* possesses over *parshas Nitzavim*:

Nitzavim addresses the unity of all Jews (from “the heads of your tribes” to “the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water”) as they are one because then “You stand... **before Hashem your L-rd.**” Meaning, “all of them **ascend to the source from which they were hewn**”⁵⁵ (“before Hashem your L-rd”).

⁵² *Tehillim* 33:19.

⁵³ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Shir HaShirim*,” s.v. “*Hinach Yafah*” {p. 14b, explaining that when fasting on Yom Kippur, a Jew receives sustenance from the innermost part of the soul, which is not sustained from physical food and drink (unlike the external part of the soul, which is sustained from physical food)}.

⁵⁴ *Nechemiah* 8:10.

⁵⁵ *Likkutei Torah*, s.v. “*Atem Nitzavim*,” ch. 1.

Vayelech, however, addresses Jewish unity as it is expressed on this **lower** plane, as Jews exist on **their** own level. This is the intention of the verse, “Moshe **went** and spoke... to all of Israel”: *Moshe Rabbeinu*,⁵⁶ on his {spiritual} level, went and was drawn (“and spoke”) to the Jewish people as they stood on **their** own level. At the same time, though, there was an **identical** and equivalent diffusion to “**all** of Israel,” because Moshe’s advance and spiritual diffusion to the Jewish people represents the connection of their souls essence Above with their souls as they are found below.

The same concept applies to *hakhel*: On one hand, our Sages say, “The men came to learn {Torah}; the women came to hear; and the children... in order to give reward to those that brought them.”⁵⁷ This teaching suggests that the unity during *hakhel* allowed for {evidence of} different standings (unlike the above-mentioned unity displayed on Rosh Hashanah). Conversely, specifically during *hakhel* (with the above-mentioned diversity of levels), “the **King** stands... and **reads**” — the King’s Torah reading, קריאה, included all of the Jewish people **equally** (as mentioned in section 4). We “call forth,” קורא, and diffuse the simple⁵⁸ unity of all Jewish people (the “קהל — congregation”)⁵⁹ in a place of diversity, as mentioned above.

This dynamic continued until, as the *parshah* concludes, “Moshe spoke into the ears of the entire congregation of Israel..., until their conclusion.” The deeper meaning of this verse is that “until their conclusion {עד תומם}” is etymologically related to wholesomeness {תמימות} and perfection⁶⁰ of the **Jewish people**: Moshe’s speaking “into the ears of the **entire congregation** of Israel” related not only to the essence of their souls On High; rather, Moshe’s speech descended, bringing about a state of

⁵⁶ {Literally “our teacher.”}

⁵⁷ *Chagigah* 3a.

⁵⁸ {The term “simple” means a unity not composed of parts — referring to the essential unity of the Jews which stems from their source Above, which transcends all differences.}

⁵⁹ {Etymologically related to הקהל — *hakhel*.}

⁶⁰ Similar to the explanation in *Zohar*, vol. 3 (p. 163b), on the verse {*Bamidbar* 14:35}, “במדבר הזה יתמו.”

wholesomeness and perfection in the Jews' revealed faculties, including all their bodily organs.⁶¹

9.

PRACTICAL UNITY

The practical lesson from all of the above:

The Ten Days of Repentance is an opportune time to increase in our appreciation and demonstration of *ahavas Yisrael*.⁶² If “when the heads of the people assemble” they do so imperfectly — meaning, if there is a shortcoming in terms of how a person unites with all Jews, regardless of their current {spiritual} situation — more than just a detail is missing. Rather, there is a deficiency in the fulfilment of the overarching mandate that “you will crown Me as King over you” — over the *entire* Jewish people.

Since we must prepare for Yom Kippur,⁶³ our love toward every Jew must not only consist of **overlooking** another person's negative traits — only seeing to begin with the good in him, and **therefore**, loving him and uniting with him — but rather, even when we see negativity in someone, we nonetheless express love toward him, unconditionally. This love is expressed by expending great effort to help this person rid himself of his negative traits.

By this involvement in (“the campaign⁶⁴ of) *ahavas Yisrael*”⁶⁵ during these days, we will merit to reveal that “you will crown Me as King over you.” On Yom Kippur, we will be sealed, with a finalized seal, for the good, being blessed with a good and sweet year, materially and spiritually, with clearly revealed good.

— From a talk delivered on *parshas Vayelech*, 5732 (1971)

⁶¹ {In the Hebrew original, “*eivarim ve'gidim*”; lit., “limbs and sinews.”} See *Likkutei Torah*, “*Nitzavim*” (p. 45c), explaining, “תמים תהי' עם ה'” “you should be whole with Hashem your L-rd”

⁶² {Lit., “love for a fellow Jew.”}

⁶³ {This talk was delivered on the Shabbos preceding *Yom Kippur*.}

⁶⁴ {See <https://www.chabad.org/142433>}

⁶⁵ See at length *Kuntres Ahavas Yisrael* (Kehot, 1976).