



# NITZAVIM-VAYELECH

UNITY TORAH

*Taking Your Part in a Community Legacy*

# PARSHAH OVERVIEW

## *Nitzavim*

The *parshah* of *Nitzavim* includes some of the most fundamental principles of the Jewish faith:

The unity of Israel: “You stand today, all of you, before the L-rd your G-d: your heads, your tribes, your elders, your officers, and every Israelite man; your young ones, your wives, the stranger in your gate; from your wood-hewer to your water-drawer.”

The future Redemption: Moses warns of the Exile and desolation of the Land that will result if Israel abandons G-d’s laws, but

then he prophesizes that in the end, “You will return to the L-rd your G-d. . . . If your outcasts shall be at the ends of the heavens, from there will the L-rd your G-d gather you . . . and bring you into the Land that your fathers have possessed.”

The practicality of the Torah: “For the mitzvah that I command you this day, it is not beyond you, nor is it remote from you. It is not in Heaven. . . . It is not across the sea. . . . Rather, it is very close to you, in your mouth, in your heart, that you may do it.”

Freedom of choice: “I have set before you life and goodness, and death and evil, in that I command you this day to love G-d, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments. . . . Life and death I have set before you, blessing and curse. And you shall choose life.”

# PARSHAH OVERVIEW

## *Vayelech*

The *parshah* of *Vayelech* (“and he went”) recounts the events of Moses’s last day of earthly life. “I am 120 years old today,” he says to the people, “and I can no longer go forth and come in.” He transfers the leadership to Joshua, and writes (or concludes writing) the Torah in a scroll that he entrusts to the Levites for safekeeping in the ark of the covenant.

The mitzvah of *Hakhel* (“gather”) is given: every seven years, during the festival of Sukkot of the first year of the *shemita* cycle,

the entire people of Israel—men, women, and children—should gather at the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, where the king should read to them from the Torah.

*Vayelech* concludes with the prediction that the people of Israel will turn away from their covenant with G-d, causing Him to hide His face from them, but also with the promise that the words of the Torah “shall not be forgotten from the mouths of their descendants.”

If you were not part of a community or group, what—if anything—would be missing?



# TEXT 1

*Deuteronomy 31:19*

וְעַתָּה כְּתֹבוּ לָכֶם אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת וְלַמָּדָה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
שִׁמָּה בְּפִיהֶם, לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה לִּי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְעֵד בְּבִנְי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל.

And now, write for yourselves this song, and teach it to the Children of Israel. Place it into their mouths, in order that this song will be for Me as a witness for the Children of Israel.

## TEXT 2

Rabbi Levi ben  
Gershon, *ad loc.*

כבר נתבאר אחר זה שהשירה היא דבר התורה בכללם עד תומם, שנאמר: "ויכתוב משה את השירה", "ויהי ככלות משה לכתוב את דברי התורה הזאת על ספר עד תומם", וזה מעיר שהשירה הזאת רצה בו כל דברי התורה בכללם וגם השירה עמהם, והנה שירה שזה הוא ענין התורה בכללה, שנאמר: "לקוח את ספר התורה הזאת ושמתם אותו מצד ארון ברית ה'".

It's clear that "song" here means the entire Torah, as the verse states just below, "And it was, when Moses finished writing the words of this Torah in a scroll, until their very completion" (Deuteronomy 31:24). This indicates that "this song" includes the entire Torah, with the song of *Haazinu* as well. Further indication that it's the entire Torah is the verse, "Take this Torah scroll and place it alongside the ark of the covenant of G-d" (Deuteronomy 31:26).



Every Jew is responsible to write a Torah scroll.

# TEXT 3

*Maimonides, Sefer  
Hamitzvot, Positive  
Mitzvah 18*

היא שצונו שיהיה כל איש ממנו כותב ספר תורה לעצמו, ואם כתבו בידו מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו קיבלה מהר סיני, ואם אי אפשר לו לכותבו צריך שיקנהו או ישכור מי יכתבהו לו, והוא אמרו: "כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת".

G-d commanded that everyone should write a Torah scroll for themselves. And if they write it with their hand, Scripture credits it to them as if they received it at Mount Sinai. But if it is impossible for them to write it, they should buy it or hire someone to write it for them. This is the meaning of the verse, "Write for yourselves this song."



## QUESTION

Historically, the Jewish community has not carried out the mitzvah of personally writing a Torah scroll.

Why not?

## TEXT 4

*Deuteronomy 31:22*

וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא,  
וַיְלַמְדָהּ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

And Moses wrote this song on that day, and he taught it to the Children of Israel.

## QUESTION

Why, upon first receiving the mitzvah of writing a Torah scroll, didn't the people carry it out?

## TEXT 5

*Rabbi Yosef Caro,  
Shulchan Aruch,  
Choshen Mishpat 163:1*

כופין בני העיר זה את זה . . . ולבנות להם בית הכנסת,  
ולקנות ספר תורה נביאים וכתובים כדי שיקרא בהם כל מי  
שירצה מן הציבור.

The town's inhabitants can compel one another . . .  
to build a synagogue and purchase a Torah scroll,  
along with the other Scriptures, so that anyone  
from the community can come and read from it.

## ANSWER

The community purchases a communal Torah scroll, and with that, every individual member fulfills their mitzvah.

# TEXT 6

*Rabbi Chaim Elazar  
Wax, Responsa Nefesh  
Chaya, Yoreh De'ah 75*

אך לפי זה נראה לפי עניות דעתי דמשום הכי כשהציבור כתובים לעצמם ספר תורה וכן חברה כולם קיימו מצות "ועתה כתבו לכם" . . . שפיר יוצאין במה שהציבור כולן כותבין לעצמם ספר תורה לקרות בו.

זאת נראה לי ברור בעזרת ה' ליישב מנהג העולם מה שנוהגים שחברה כותבים לעצמם ספר תורה ויוצאים בו מצות כתיבת ספר תורה.

I would suggest that when the community, or any other group, commissions a Torah scroll to be written on their behalf, that constitutes fulfilling the mitzvah of, “And now, write for yourselves . . .” Writing the scroll and then reading from it is a legitimate form of carrying out this mitzvah.

This is the clear solution in my mind to justify the long-standing tradition: by commissioning a scroll for the community, they fulfill the mitzvah.

# TEXT 7

*Leviticus 23:40*

וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרֵי עֵץ הָדָר כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים וְעֵנָף  
עֵץ עָבֹת וְעַרְבֵי נָחַל, וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לְפָנַי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים.

And you shall take for yourselves, on the first day, the fruit of the *hadar* tree, date palm fronds, a branch of a braided tree, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before G-d for a seven-day period.

## A Community *Etrog*

Though the verse states that it must be “for you,” the community purchases one *etrog* in a way that enables everyone to legally use it.





# TEXT 8

*Rabbi Shmuel ben  
Me'ir, Bava Batra 137b*

ומנהג שלנו שנהגו לברך כל הקהל באתרוג אחד, דעתנו מסכמת לתת כל אחד במתנה את חלקו לחבירו, כדאמרינן גבי רבן גמליאל ורבי יהושע במסכת סוכה. ואף על גב דלא פריש כמאן דפריש דמי, דלא גרע ממתנה על מנת להחזיר, דלהכי מיהא דעת כל הקהל שוה שינתן לכל אחד עד שיברך עליו ואחר כך יחזיר.

Our custom is for every community to make the blessing over one *etrog*, as every community member agrees to gift their portion of ownership in the *etrog* to the individual on condition that it's returned. Even if they don't explicitly stipulate as such, we consider it as if they did. After all, the entire community would certainly be of one mind to grant conditional ownership to each member so they can make the blessing.

# TEXT 9

Rabbi Yosef Caro,  
*Shulchan Aruch*, Orach  
Chayim 658:9

מה שנוהגים במקום שאין אתרוג מצוי שכל הקהל קונים אתרוג בשותפות, הטעם מפני שכיון שקנאוהו לצאת בו, מסתמא הוי כאלו פירשו שכל הקהל נותנים חלקם לכל מי שנוטלו לצאת בו על מנת שיחזירוהו להם.

The prevalent custom today in a situation where there aren't many *etrogim* available is that the community purchases one communal *etrog*. The logic is that inasmuch as the community wishes to fulfill their obligation with this *etrog*, it's as if they have clearly stipulated that each member conditionally grants their partial ownership to anyone who wishes to fulfill the mitzvah.



Every time the Torah scroll is taken out and the community reads from it, each member is granted their individual moment of ownership, for he or she is personally reading, listening to, and studying from it then.

## ANSWER

As far as the generation in the desert was concerned, Moses carried out the mitzvah on their behalf, as their communal representative.

# TEXT 10

*Midrash, Devarim*  
Rabah 9:9

אָמַר רַבִּי יַנַּאי: כָּתַב מֹשֶׁה שְׁלֹש עֶשְׂרֵה תּוֹרוֹת, שְׁנַיִם  
עֶשְׂרֵה לְשָׁנַיִם עֶשְׂרֵה שְׁבָטִים, וְאַחַת הַנִּיחַ בְּאֲרוֹן.

Rabbi Yanai said, “On that day, Moses wrote thirteen Torah scrolls, one for each tribe and another to stow away in the holy ark.”

# TEXT 11

*Rabbi Meir Simchah of  
Dvinsk, Or Same'ach,  
Hilchot Sefer Torah 7:1*

פשטיות המקרא צווח שתיכף כאשר ציווהו ה' לכתוב השירה וללמדה לבניו עשה מיד משה "ויכתוב משה את השירה הזאת וילמדה". הרי חזינא דמשה קיים בכתיבתו ביום מותו י"ג ספרי תורה מצוות עשה של "כתבו לכם את וכו'" . . .

למדו רבותינו זכרונם לברכה דמצוה לכל יחיד, מדכתב: "כתבו לכם . . . ולמדה" . . . מכל מקום מקרא צווח שבכתיבת משה קיימו מצותה.

A plain reading of the verse virtually shouts that immediately after G-d's command to transcribe this song and teach it to His children, Moses immediately carried out "and Moses wrote this song . . . and taught it." We clearly see that by writing thirteen Torah scrolls on the day he died, Moses carried out the mitzvah of "write for yourselves this song." . . .

Now, our sages derived from this verse that every individual must write a Torah scroll. . . . However, the verse shouts at us that Moses carried it out for everyone with his own transcription.

As a way to actively fulfill the mitzvah, the Rebbe launched the Torah scroll campaign, encouraging every Jewish man, woman, and child to purchase their own letter in a Torah scroll.



# TEXT 12

*Rabbi Yosef Chaim of  
Baghdad, Ben Ish Chai,  
Genesis, p. 7*

ובזה יובן בסיעתא דשמיא "הן גאלתי אתכם אחרית כראשית",  
רוצה לומר, תהיה הגאולה על ידי שתעשו האחרית — שהיא של  
ספר תורה — כראשית, מצות פרו ורבו.

In the liturgy for the Shabbat and festival Musaf prayer, we say, “I have redeemed you at the end as in the beginning.” This means that the future Redemption will come by carrying out the final mitzvah—to write a Torah scroll—as well as the first mitzvah, to have children.





As the final mitzvah in the Torah, this mitzvah is uniquely situated to hasten Mashiach's arrival, which is the final chapter in our collective story.

## TEXT 13

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 24, p. 215*

דורך דעם וואס אלע אידן וועלן האבן אן אות אין א ספר תורה —  
וואס מצות כתיבת ספר תורה איז דער "סיום" פון אלע תרי"ג מצות  
— וועט מען בקרוב ממש זוכה זיין צום סיום הגלות, גלותינו וואס  
אלע אידן גייען ארויס פון עם, בביאת משיח צדקנו.

The mitzvah to write a Torah scroll is the conclusion of all 613 *mitzvot*. So, when all Jews will have their own personal letter in a Torah scroll, we will speedily merit the conclusion of this Exile, a Redemption in which every Jew will be liberated, with the coming of Mashiach.

By purchasing a unique letter, each Jew links up with another, while amplifying their individual importance in the overall Jewish community.



# TEXT 14

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Torat  
Menachem 5742:3, p.  
1502*

אף על פי שענין האחדות נפעל על ידי כל מצוה ממצוות התורה, אף על פי כן, ישנה הדגשה ועילוי מיוחד באחדותם של ישראל הנפעל על ידי המבצע דכתיבת ספרי תורה כלליים, שעל ידי זה מתאחדים כל בני ישראל בכתיבת ספר תורה, כאשר לכל יהודי יש אות אחת בספר תורה, כדלקמן.

ובהקדים — הביאור שעל ידי התורה נפעלת אחדותם של בני ישראל:

כאשר אומרים ליהודי שעליו להתאחד עם כל בני ישראל מ"ראשיכם שבטיכם" עד "חוטב עציך ושואב מימך", נשאלת השאלה: כיצד יתכן הדבר? הרי החילוק בין "ראשיכם שבטיכם" ל"חוטב עציך ושואב מימך" הוא מן הקצה אל הקצה, ואם כן, כיצד תובעים ממנו להתאחד עם "ראשיכם שבטיכם", וביחד עם זה, להתאחד גם עם

Every mitzvah in the Torah achieves unity among the Jewish people. Still, this campaign of communal Torah scrolls achieves a superior form of unity, for it brings Jews together through the act of writing a Torah scroll and bequeathing a unique letter to each Jew, as we'll explain.

But first, let's explore the idea that the Torah is what possesses the power to unite the Jewish people:

When a Jew is told that he or she must unite with every other Jew, from the "heads of tribes" to the "wood-hewers [and] water-drawers," one cannot help but ask: How is this even possible? The gap between "heads of tribes" and "wood-hewers [and] water-drawers" is quite extreme, so how is it possible to unite with both a "head of tribe" and "wood-hewers [and] water-drawers?" They are polar opposites! . . .



# TEXT 14

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Torat  
Menachem 5742:3, p.  
1502*

"חוטב עציך ושואב מימך?" הרי זה ב'  
הפכים בנושא אחד! . . .

מובן, שעל ידי התורה יכולים להתאחד כל  
בני ישראל מ"ראשיכם שבטיכם" עד "חוטב  
עציך ושואב מימך", למרות שהחילוקים  
שביניהם הנם מן הקצה אל הקצה.

ועל פי זה מובן שכאשר מדברים אודות  
אחדותם של בני ישראל על ידי ענין של  
מעשה בפועל, הנה למרות שישנם ריבוי  
ענינים דמצוות מעשיות שעל ידם נפעל עילוי  
זה, ישנו עילוי מיוחד בפעולת האחדות  
הנעשית על ידי זה שכל יהודי קונה אות אחת  
בספר תורה, כאמור לעיל, שכללות ענין  
האחדות דבני ישראל נפעל על ידי התורה.

The answer is that only the infinite Torah has the power to unite all Jewish people from “heads of tribes” to the “wood-hewers [and] water-drawers,” despite the vast distance between them.

This helps us understand just how great is the unity achieved through a tangible action. There are many other practical *mitzvot* that achieve the same result, but there’s a unique quality to the unity achieved through every Jew purchasing a letter in the Torah scroll, for, as just explained, the entire notion of unity among Jews is achieved only through the power of Torah.



The “general Torah scroll”:  
[www.chabad.org/409282](http://www.chabad.org/409282)

The “children’s Torah scroll”:  
[www.kidstorah.org/buy-a-letter](http://www.kidstorah.org/buy-a-letter)

## KEY POINTS

1. The final mitzvah in the entire Torah is to personally write a Torah scroll or commission a professional to do so on your behalf.
2. Historically, this mitzvah has not been carried out in that fashion.
3. One explanation is that due to logistical and financial difficulties, the community chips in to carry it out together. A similar custom with similar logic exists regarding the mitzvah of *etrog*.
4. Indeed, already in the desert, Moses fulfilled this mitzvah on the Jews' behalf, as their communal agent.

## KEY POINTS

5. The Rebbe strongly encouraged the “letter in the Torah scroll” campaign as an expression of this mitzvah, and as a uniquely suitable way to hasten the final Redemption.
6. Participating with a letter in a Torah scroll is also an expression of Jewish unity.



