



Nitzavim-Vayelech

The Power of Standing Still

Why the Paradox of Jewish Law Actually Sets Us Free

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Nitzavim-Vayelech

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

Nitzavim-Vayelech

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."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Is there room for self-expression in a religion as regimented as ours? Why is Judaism so scripted?

The Jewish calendar doesn't always match the number of *Shabbosim*, so some portions are combined or separated.



TEXT 1

Rabbi Saadia Ga'on,
*Sidur Rasag, Makitzei
Nirdamim* (Jerusalem,
1963), pp. 364–365

וּכְבֹּר אֱמָרְנוּ שְׁהַפְּרָשׁוֹת הֵן נ"ג.
וְצָרִיךְ לְבָאֵר שְׁשִׁמוּנָהּ מִהֵן
מִצְטָרֶפֶת פְּעָמִים שְׁפִימִים שְׁפִימִים
בְּיָסֵד, וְנִקְרָאת בְּאַרְבַּע שַׁבָּתוֹת . . .

וּמִהֵן פָּרָשָׁה הַמִּתְחַלֶּקֶת לְשְׁפִימִים
וְנִקְרָאת בְּשֵׁפִי שַׁבָּתוֹת אִם יֵשׁ
צוּרֶךְ בְּכָךְ. וְהִיא אֶתֶם נִצְבִּים
הַנִּחְלָקֶת בְּ"וַיֵּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה" בְּשָׁנָה שְׁיֵשׁ
שַׁבָּת בֵּין יוֹם כִּיפּוּר וְסוּכּוֹת.

כִּי אִזּוֹ מִחְלָקִים אֶת הַפָּרָשָׁה הַזֹּאת,
וְקוֹרְאִים חֲצִיָּה מִן וַיֵּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה עַד
הַסּוֹף בְּשַׁבָּת שְׁבִין רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה
יוֹם כִּיפּוּר, וְהַאֲזִינוּ בְּשַׁבָּת שְׁבִין
יוֹם כִּיפּוּר וְסוּכּוֹת.

We have already explained that there are fifty-three Torah portions, eight of which are often combined into four bundles of two, chanted on four Shabbats in the year. . . .

Then there is one portion that is sometimes divided into two and read on two consecutive Shabbats if necessary. It is the portion called *Nitzavim* that is sometimes divided into two, the latter portion beginning with the words, "And Moses went" (*Vayelech Moshe*). This occurs when there is a Shabbat between Yom Kippur and Sukkot [in which case we require an additional portion to read].

In such cases, we divide this Torah portion into two and chant the [first half on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah and the] second half—from the words, "And Moses went," until the end—on the Shabbat that falls between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The portion *Haazinu* is read on the following Shabbat, which falls between Yom Kippur and Sukkot.

NITZAVIM VAYELECH

They are one portion that is read together
when there are fewer weeks.

NITZAVIM



VAYELECH

And it is split into two when there's an extra week
or a Shabbat between Yom Kippur and Sukkot.

QUESTIONS

1. If they are one portion, how can we split it into two?
2. And if we can divide them, what makes them one?

TEXT 2

Rabbi Menachem
Mendel of Lubavitch,
Or HaTorah, Devarim,
pp. 1201–1203

וַיָּזֶהוּ נִצָּבִים לְשׁוֹן קִימָה וַעֲמִידָה . . . פִּירוּשׁ
נִצָּבִים הוּא בְּבַחֲיַנַּת תּוֹקֶף יוֹתֵר מֵעֲנִיָּן עוֹמְדִים .
. . וַיָּזֶהוּ קָמָה אֱלֹמָתִי וְגַם נִצָּבָה.

The word *nitzavim* means to rise and to stand. . . .
Nitzavim [standing firmly] implies more firmness than to
merely stand. . . . Consider the passage, “My bundle arose
and also stood firmly” (Genesis 37:7).

TEXT 3

Talmud, Berachot 64A

אָמַר רַבִּי חִיָּיא בֶּר אָשִׁי אָמַר רַב: תְּלַמְיֵי חֲכָמִים
אֵין לָהֶם מְנוּחָה לֹא בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְלֹא בְּעוֹלָם
הַבָּא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "יֵלְכוּ מִחֵיל אֶל חֵיל, יֵרָאֶה אֶל
אֱלֹקִים בְּצִיּוֹן".

Rabbi Chiya, son of Rabbi Ashi, said in the name of Rav,
"Torah scholars have no rest in this world or in the World
to Come. As the passage states, 'They will go (*yelchu*) from
strength to strength, and they will appear to G-d in Zion'
(Psalms 84:8)."

נִצָּבִים — “stand firm”

nitzavim

וַיֵּלֶךְ — “and he walked”

vayelech

It seems contradictory: one means moving forward and growing, the other means standing firm and fixed.
How can they be **one portion**?

TEXT 4

Sifra, Leviticus 26:46

"אלה החקים והמשפטים
והתורות" (ויקרא כו, מו):

"החקים", אלו המדרשות.

"והמשפטים", אלו הדינים.

"והתורות", מלמד ששתי תורות

ניתנו להם לישראל, אחד בכתב

ואחד בעל פה . . .

"בהר סיני ביד משה", מלמד

שניתנה התורה הלכותיה

ודקדוקיה ופירושיה על ידי

משה מסיני.

"These are the edicts, the laws, and the
Torahs . . . [on Mount Sinai by the hands of
Moses]" (Leviticus 26:46):

"The edicts" are the studies of biblical
exegesis.

"The laws" are the rules of the Torah.

"The Torahs" [in the plural] teach us that two
Torahs were given to the Israelites: one was
written, the other was oral. . . .

[“On Mount Sinai by the hands of Moses”:]
This teaches us that the Torah and its laws,
permutations, and explanations were given
to us from Mount Sinai through Moses.

WRITTEN TORAH

Dictated by G-d to Moses to record exactly as given. It forms the *Chumash* and *Tanach*, the foundational texts of Jewish law, history, and teachings.

ORAL TORAH

Taught verbally by G-d to Moses to explain and apply the law. It has been passed down through generations, it was later compiled and written in the *Talmud* around the 2nd century.

TEXT 5

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Torah Fundamentals 9:1

דָּבָר בְּרוּר וּמִפְרָשׁ בַּתּוֹרָה שֶׁהִיא מִצְוָה עוֹמֶדֶת לְעוֹלָם וּלְעוֹלָמֵי עוֹלָמִים. אֵין לָהּ לֹא שְׁנוּי וְלֹא גִרְעוֹן וְלֹא תוֹסֶפֶת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "אֵת כָּל הַדִּבָּר אֲשֶׁר אֶנְכִּי מִצְוֶה אֶתְכֶם אֹתוֹ תִשְׁמְרוּן לַעֲשׂוֹת, לֹא תִסֹּף עָלָיו וְלֹא תִגְרַע מִמֶּנּוּ" (דְּבָרִים יג, א) . . . הֵא לְמִדָּתָּ, שְׁכָל דְּבָרֵי תּוֹרָה מְצִוִּין אֲנוּ לַעֲשׂוֹתָן עַד עוֹלָם. וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר "חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְדוֹרֵיכֶם" (וַיִּקְרָא ג, יז).
וְנֶאֱמַר, "לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הִיא" (דְּבָרִים ל, יב). הֵא לְמִדָּתָּ שֶׁאֵין נִבְיָא רִשְׁאִי לְחַדֵּשׁ דְּבָר מֵעַתָּה.

It is clear and explicit in the Torah that the Torah is G-d's commandment, which stands forever. It cannot be changed: we may not add to it nor subtract from it, as the passage states, "All these matters which I command you, you must be careful to perform. You may not add to it or subtract from it" (Deuteronomy 13:1). . . . This teaches us that we are commanded to fulfill all the words of the Torah forever. It is similarly stated, "It is an everlasting statute for all your generations" (Leviticus 3:17).

And the Torah states, "It is not in the heavens" (Deuteronomy 30:12). This teaches that a prophet cannot add a new precept to the Torah.

The Written Torah is
meant for us to read and
receive exactly as given.
We cannot change even a
single letter, for it is G-d's
word and eternal like Him.





The Oral Torah is shaped through our understanding: some laws were given at Mount Sinai, while others were developed by sages. And it continues to guide us in addressing new questions today.

TEXT 6A

Rabbi Shneur Zalman
of Liadi, *Shulchan
Aruch HaRav*, Laws of
Torah Study 2:2

וַיִּפְנֶה כָּל יָמָיו לְעִיוֹן הַתַּלְמוּד, לְסִבּוּר סְבָרוֹת בִּהְלָכוֹת, וּלְפִלְפֹּל בָּהֶן
בְּקוֹשְׁיּוֹת וּפִירוּקִים, לִירֵד לְעוֹמֶק הַסְּבָרוֹת וְטַעְמֵי הֵהָלָכוֹת. לְהִבִּין
דָּבָר מִתּוֹךְ דָּבָר, וּלְצַמּוֹת דָּבָר לְדָבָר, וּלְחַדֵּשׁ חִידוּשֵׁי הֵלָכוֹת רַבּוֹת
לְפִי רוּחַב שֵׁינָם בְּלִבּוֹ וַיֵּשׁוּב דַּעְתּוֹ. כִּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ, "לִיגְמֹר אֵינֶנּוּ
וְהֵדָר לִיסְבֹּר" (שַׁבָּת סג, א).

Devote all your days to scrutinizing the Talmud; suggest new legal theories, and debate them with questions and answers until you reach the theory's depth and the reasons behind the laws. Work to derive one thing from another and cross-reference Talmudic concepts until you innovate many new laws, each according to the breadth of their understanding and mental temperament. This is what our sages meant when they said, "First study, then theorize" (Shabbat 63a).

Nitzavim and *Vayelech* express a constant Torah theme: the Written Torah, which stands firm, and the Oral Torah, which continues to grow and develop.



TEXT 6B

Maimonides,
Mishnah, Sanhedrin,
ch. 10, Introduction

וְאִין זְמַן שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה בּוֹ הַתְּבוּנָנוֹת וְחִדּוּשׁ הָעֲנִינִים. וְהָיוּ
חֲכָמִי כָּל דּוֹר מְשִׁימִים דְּבָרֵי הַקּוֹדֶמִין עֵיקָר, וְהָיוּ לוֹמְדִין
מֵהֶם וּמַחֲדָשִׁים עֲנִינִים. וְהָעֵיקָרִים הַמְּקוּבָּלִים לֹא נִחְלְקוּ
בָהֶם . . . וְגִזְרוּ גִזְרוֹת וְתִקְּנוּ תִקְנוֹת.

There was never a time when scholars did not delve into the text to innovate new ideas. The sages of each generation treat the words of their predecessors as canonical, deriving and innovating from them. They never disputed the received traditions . . . but formulated new edicts and enactments.

The Oral Torah can grow and develop, but its foundation remains fixed. Any new laws must follow the original rules and cannot simply be invented.



TEXT 7

The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, *Likutei
Sichot* 29, p. 176

עס דארף זיין "לאפשה לה בכל יומא" (זהר
א יב, ב). מחדש זיין אין תורה. אבער עס
מוז זיין פארבונדן און מיוסד נאר אויף די
כללים ויסודות פון תורה, און אין פולסטער
איינשטימונג מיט הלכה. וואס אין זיי (די
יסודות כללים והלכות) איז ניט שייף קיין
שינוי, "התורה זו לא תהיה מוחלפת".

און כמאמר רבותינו זכרונם לברכה הנזכר
לעיל: "כל מה ששלמיד ותיק עתיד לחידוש
הכל ניתן למשה בסיני" (ירושלמי פאה ב,
ד). דלכאורה איז דאס א סתירה מיניה
וביה. לחידוש, מיינט דאך אז דער תלמיד
האט עס מחדש געווען בשכלו, איז ווי זאגט
מען אז דאס איז ניתן למשה בסיני?

We must "expand the Torah every day" (*Zohar*
II, p. 12b). We must develop new ideas. Still,
they must be bound to and exclusively
founded upon the Torah's foundations and
principles in complete alignment with the
Torah's established law. These (foundations,
principles, and established laws) are
immutable. [As Maimonides declared in the
ninth of his Thirteen Principles of Faith], "This
Torah will never change."

Our sages wrote, "Everything a veteran
student will innovate was given to Moses at
Mount Sinai" (*Jerusalem Talmud, Pe'ah, 2:4*).
At first glance, this seems paradoxical. How
can a student's original idea have been
previously given to Moses at Mount Sinai?

TEXT 7

The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, *Likutei
Sichot* 29, p. 176

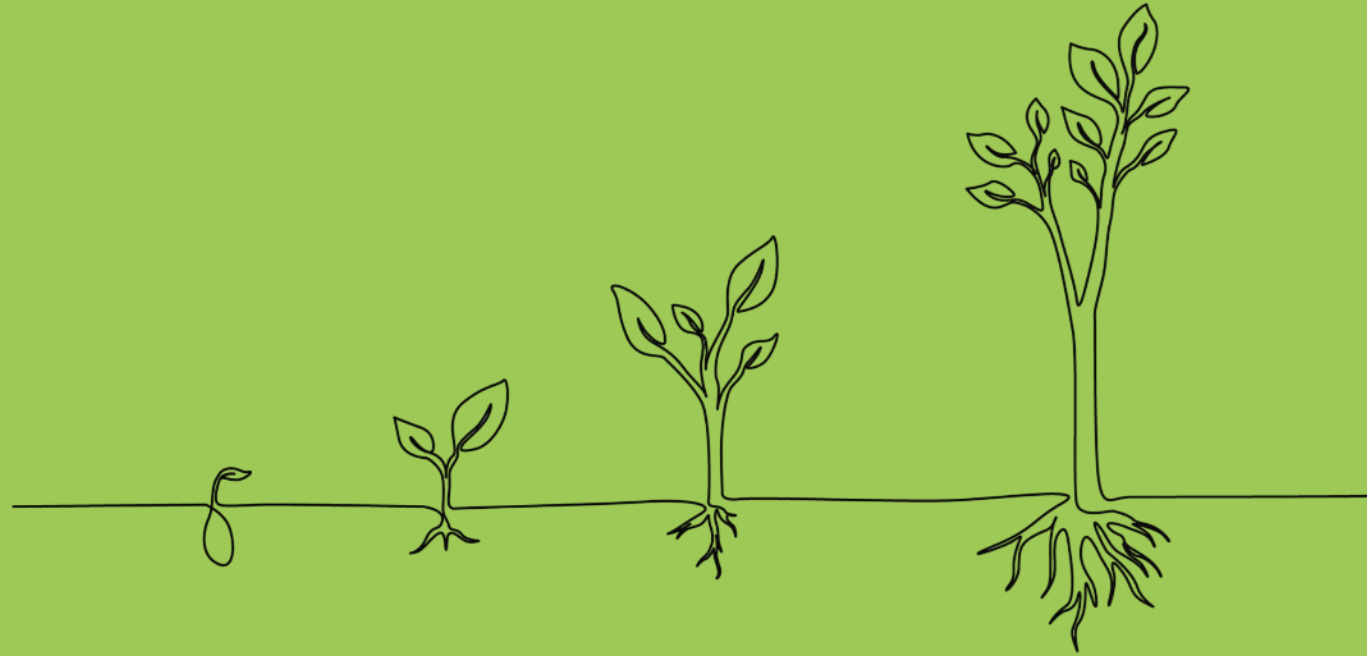
נאָר דער ביאָור בָּזֶה, די סְבָרָא פֿרִטִּית איז
אַ חִידוּשׁ פֿון דעם תּלְמִיד וְתִיק גְּעֵבוּיִט אוֹיף
די כָּלְלִים ווְעֵלְכֶּה מֹשֶׁה הָאֵט מְקַבֵּל גְּעוּוֹעֵן
בְּסִינִי. און דער חִידוּשׁ בִּאשְׁטִיט אין דעם
וְנֹאס עָר איז מְגִלָּה די סְבָרָא וְהֵלְכָה פֿרִטִּית
מִן הַכָּלֵל, כִּהְלָכָה.

אויב נִיט, רַחֲמָנָא לְאָלֵן, איז עס כִּפְשׁוּט
הִיפּף הַתּוֹרָה. און כְּדָבָר הַמְשָׁנָה "הַמְּגִלָּה
פָּנִים בַּתּוֹרָה שְׁלֹא כִהְלָכָה, אַף עַל פִּי שִׁישׁ
בְּיָדוֹ תּוֹרָה וּמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים, אֵין לוֹ חֵלֶק
לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא" (אָבוֹת ג, יא).

The explanation is that the student's particular theory is original, but it is predicated on [known] principles that Moses received at Mount Sinai. The theory is original only in the sense that the student correctly revealed a specific theory and law from the general (previously accepted) principle.

If it were not so, G-d forbid, the innovation would obviously be heretical to the Torah. As our sages wrote, "Those who offer a Torah teaching that is inconsistent with established Torah law have no share in the World to Come, even if they are legitimate scholars or people of good deeds" (Mishnah, Avot 3:11).

Since Moses, each generation builds on the past.



The Oral Torah grows like *Vayelech*, yet remains firm like *Nitzavim*, rooted in unchanging principles.

OPTIONAL

This dual dynamic is also present in *mitzvot*: we remain firm in established laws and principles, while also striving to grow higher and enhance our practice.



OPTIONAL

TEXT 8

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Megilah and Chanukah 4:1

כַּמָּה נֵרוֹת הוּא מְדָלִיק בְּחֲנֻכָּה? מִצְוַתָּהּ שְׂיִהְיֶה כָּל בֵּית וּבֵית מְדָלִיק נֵר אֶחָד, בֵּין שְׂהִיוּ אֲנָשִׁי הַבַּיִת מְרַבִּין בֵּין שְׂלֹא הָיָה בּוֹ אֶלָּא אָדָם אֶחָד.

וְהַמְהִיר אֶת הַמִּצְוָה, מְדָלִיק נֵרוֹת כַּמִּנּוֹן אֲנָשִׁי הַבַּיִת, נֵר לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד, בֵּין אֲנָשִׁים בֵּין נָשִׁים.

וְהַמְהִיר יוֹתֵר עַל זֶה וְעוֹשֶׂה מִצְוָה מִן הַמִּבְחָר, מְדָלִיק נֵר לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד בְּלִילָה הָרִאשׁוֹן, וּמוֹסִיף וְהוֹלֵךְ בְּכָל לַיְלָה וְלִילָה נֵר אֶחָד.

How many candles do we kindle on Chanukah? The basic *mitzvah* is performed when one lamp is kindled in each household, regardless of how many people live there.

One seeking to enhance the *mitzvah* lights a lamp for each person in the home, man or woman.

One who seeks to further beautify the *mitzvah*, and perform it in its most desirable way, kindles one lamp for each person in the household on the first night of Chanukah, then adds a candle each night [for each member of the household].

QUESTIONS

1. Why does Judaism demand both? Why follow this process?
2. It seems G-d wants us to do both, but how can two opposites become one?

TEXT 9

Midrash, *Shemot*
Rabah 12:3

מַשָּׁל לְמָה הַדָּבָר דּוֹמֶה?

לְמֶלֶךְ שֶׁגָּזַר וְאָמַר: בְּנֵי רוֹמִי לֹא
יֵרְדּוּ לְסוּרְיָא, וּבְנֵי סוּרְיָא לֹא
יַעֲלוּ לְרוֹמִי.

כֹּךְ כְּשֶׁבָרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת
הָעוֹלָם, גָּזַר וְאָמַר: "הַשָּׁמַיִם
שָׁמַיִם לַה', וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לְבְנֵי
אָדָם" (תְּהִלִּים קטו, טז).

כְּשֶׁבִקֵּשׁ לָתֵן הַתּוֹרָה, בִּטֵּל גְּזָרָה
רִאשׁוֹנָה וְאָמַר: הַתַּחְתּוֹנִים יַעֲלוּ
לְעִלְיוֹנִים, וְהָעִלְיוֹנִים יֵרְדּוּ
לַתַּחְתּוֹנִים. וְאֲנִי הַמִּתְחִיל,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיֵּרֶד ה' עַל הַר סִינַי"
(שְׁמוֹת יט, כ).

To what may this be compared?

A king decreed that the people of Rome may not descend to Syria, and the people of Syria may not ascend to Rome.

Similarly, when G-d created the world, He decreed, "The Heavens are the Heavens for G-d, and the earth He gave to the sons of man" (Psalms 115:16).

When He wanted to give us the Torah, He dissolved the earlier decree. He said the lower realm may ascend to the higher realm, and the higher realm may descend to the lower realm. And I will be the first to initiate the merging, as the passage states, "And G-d descended upon Mount Sinai" (Exodus 19:20).

G-d created **two** realms.

1. **Heaven:** fixed values
2. **Earth:** changing values

At Mount Sinai He joined them, forming a continually growing partnership on firm foundations.



TEXT 10

Rabbi Mordechai
Dinerman, *Judaism
Decoded*, Rohr Jewish
Learning Institute

The goal is not to find G-d by eschewing our own personality (that is the higher realm without the lower realm); at the same time, the goal is not to be a soulless physical creature (that's the lower realm without the higher realm): the goal is for physical creatures and their personality to express G-dliness.

When human beings come up with their own laws, they might be wonderful ideas, even crucial for a functioning society, but they are not (necessarily) G-dly. This endeavor does not transcend the lower realm.

When human beings read, hear, and memorize Divine laws, that is very G-dly, but it is not very human. The person does not play a major role in the process. His intellect—a key factor in his personality—remains, to a degree, distant and unconnected. The higher realm does not fully penetrate the lower realm.

The perfect synthesis is when human beings discover and derive new laws, when they toil with their own minds to uncover the Divine intent embedded in the Torah.



G-d is unchanging, humans are always growing, and Judaism merges the two through the Written and the Oral Torah.

TEXT 11

Rabbi Lord Jonathan
Sacks, *Covenant and
Conversation, We Will
Do, and We Will Hear*,
www.rabbisacks.org

If you look carefully at Exodus chapters 19 and 24, you will see that the Israelites accepted the covenant three times. But the three verses in which these acceptances took place are significantly different:

1. The people all *responded together*, "We will do [*na'aseh*] everything the L-rd has said." (Ex. 19:8)
2. . . . *they responded with one voice*, "Everything the L-rd has said we will do [*na'aseh*]." (Ex. 24:3)
3. . . . They responded, "We will do and hear [*na'aseh ve-nishma*] everything the L-rd has said." (Ex. 24:7)

Only the third of these contains the phrase *na'aseh ve-nishma*. And only the third lacks a *statement about the people's unanimity*. The other two are emphatic in saying that the people were as one: the people "responded together" and "responded with one voice." Are these differences connected?

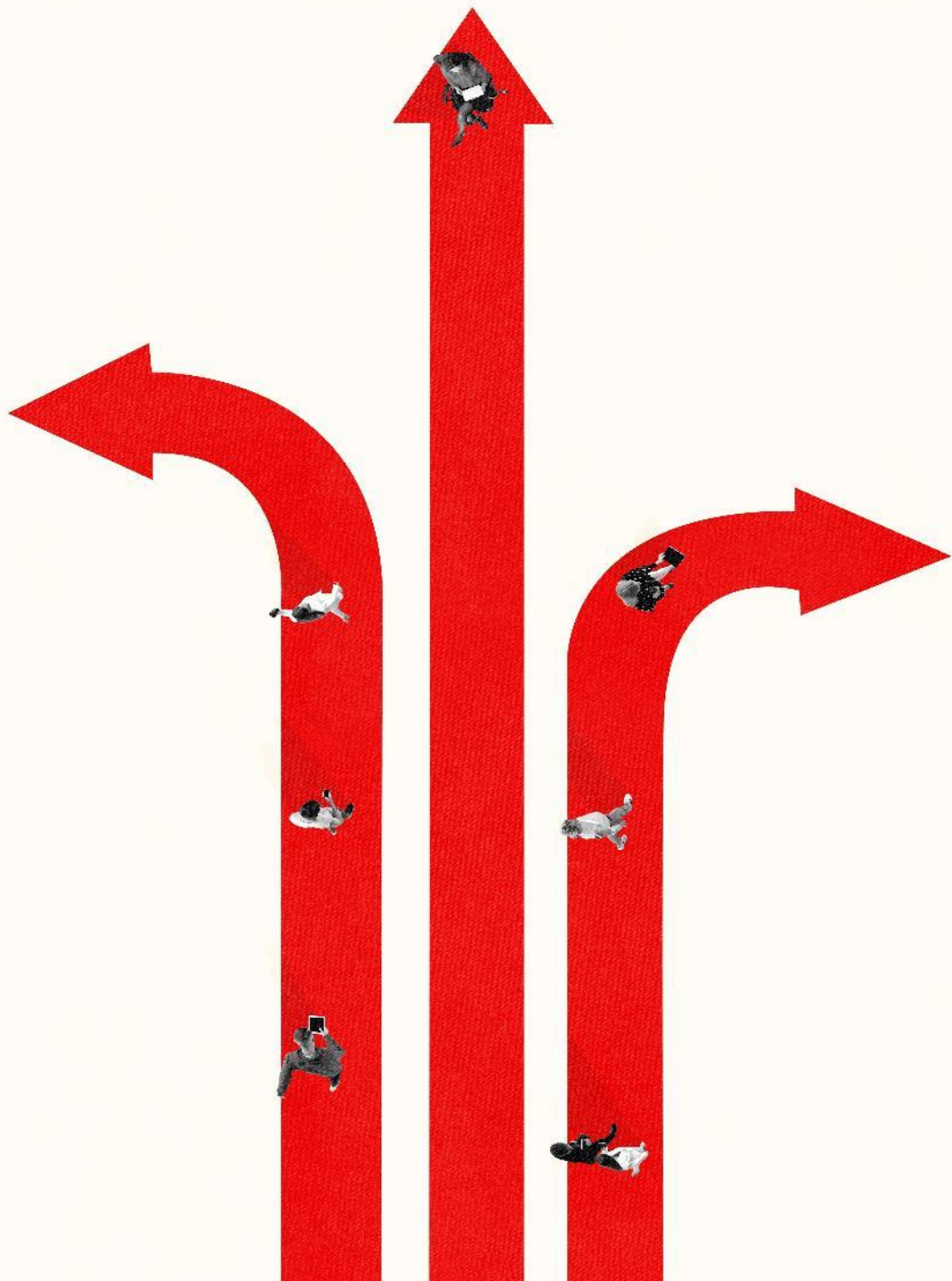
TEXT 11

Rabbi Lord Jonathan
Sacks, *Covenant and
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It is possible that they are. At the level of *na'aseh*, the Jewish deed, we are one. To be sure, there are differences between Ashkenazim and Sefardim. In every generation, there are disagreements between leading *poskim*, halachic authorities. That is true in every legal system. Poor is the Supreme Court that leaves no space for dissenting opinions. Yet these differences are minor in comparison with the area of agreement on the fundamentals of *halachah*.

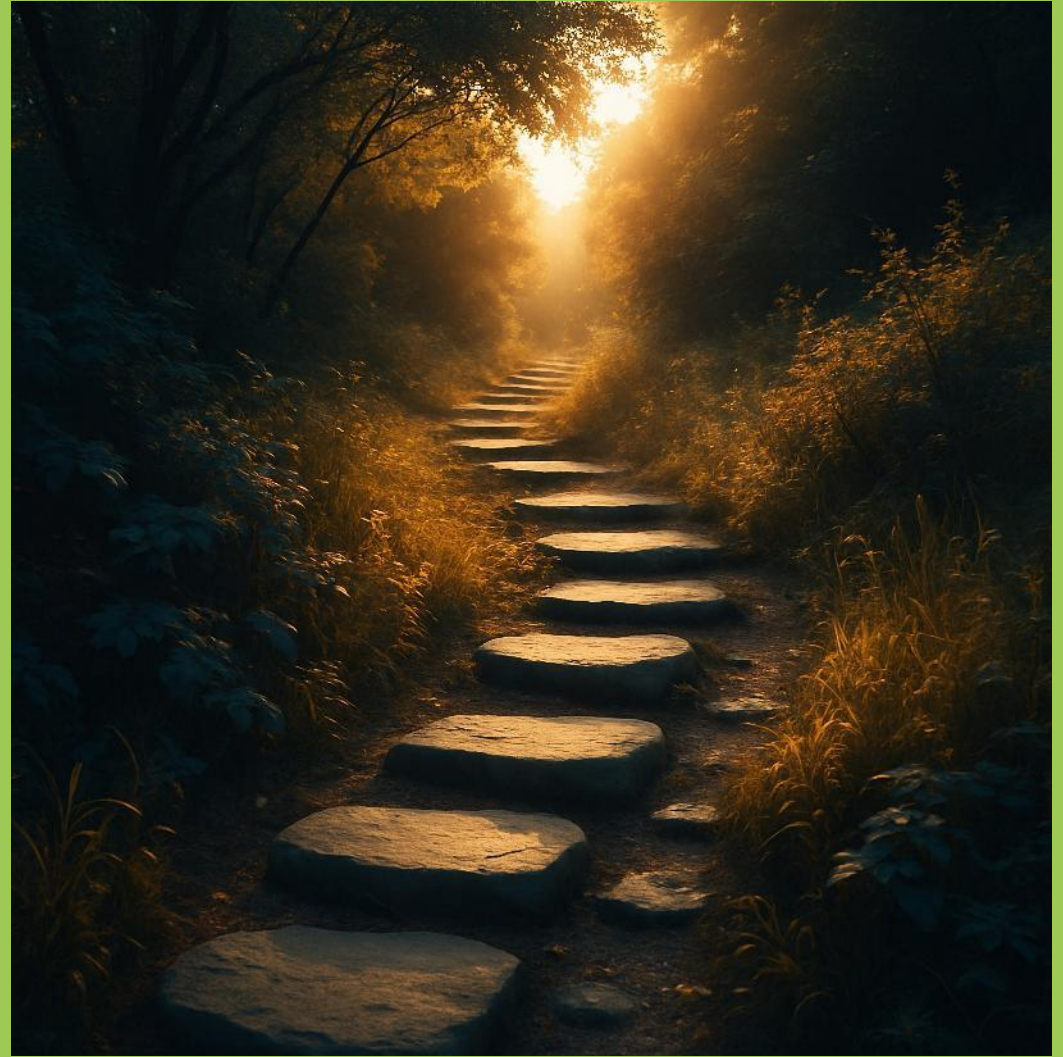
This is what historically united the Jewish people. Judaism is a legal system. It is a code of behavior. It is a community of deed. That is where we require consensus. Hence, when it came to doing—*na'aseh*—the Israelites spoke “together” and “with one voice.” Despite the differences between Hillel and Shammai, Abaye and Rava, Rambam and Rosh, Rabbi Yosef Karo and Rabbi Moshe Isserles, we are bound together by the choreography of the Jewish deed.

At the level of *nishma*, understanding, however, we are not called on to be one. Judaism has had its rationalists and its mystics, its philosophers and poets, scholars whose minds were firmly fixed on earth and saints whose souls soared to heaven.



Hillel and Shammai shared the same Torah yet reached different conclusions, showing how Judaism balances firm principles with room to grow.

Judaism stands on unchanging foundations while encouraging growth and progress, staying grounded as we move forward.



TEXT 12

The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson,
Likutei Sichos 29, p. 178

און דאס איז אויך דער טעם וואס אַתם
נאָכבֿים און ווײַלך ווײַנען נײַט נאָר צוויי
סדרות וואס ווערן לפעמים נאָטירט, נאָר
זיי ווײַנען בעצם איין סדרה.

ווייל דער פֿללות הענגן פון עבודת ה'
מאָנט בייַדע זאָכן. נאָכבֿים, דער בלתי
שינוי מצד דעם נותן התורה ומצווה
המצוות. און ווײַלך, די הליכת האדם מחיל
אל חיל.

און דערפֿאר איז דאס איין סדרה, ווייל
אין יעדער עבודה פון ווײַלך, תנועה פון
שינוי, מוז דער יסוד זיין דער חלק פון
תורה ומצוות פון נאָכבֿים, ווי עס קומט פון
(נאָכבֿים) "אני ה' לא שניתתי" (מלאכי ג, ו).

This is also why *Nitzavim* and *Vayelech* are not two portions that are sometimes combined into one; they are essentially one portion.

Serving G-d demands both approaches. *Nitzavim*: we must be firmly rooted in the Torah with an absence of change that comes from the Giver of the Torah and the Commander of its *mitzvot*. Then *vayelech*: a person's journey from strength to greater strength.

It is one Torah portion because every movement, every change of *vayelech*, must be rooted (*nitzavim*) in the Torah and its commandments that come from "I, G-d, have not changed" (Malachi 3:6).

ANSWER

Nitzavim and *Vayelech* are one portion, showing the union of G-d and us. We can split them because they are two sides of the same coin: first the firm foundation, then growth, always rooted in G-d's unchanging principles.



The entire point of Judaism
is to express G-dliness
through our unique selves
while staying rooted in His
unchanging laws.

TEXT 13

Miriam Kellner, “Is
There Room for Self-
Expression in Judaism?”
www.Tzofia.org

It is an observable fact that those who follow *halachah* are not people of dull uniformity. Jewish leaders over the ages, masters of *halachic* conformity, have been individuals of fiery passion, men and women of vastly ranging inclinations and contributions. There is nothing remotely monotonous or cookie-cutter about the robust discussions these great people handed down to us, and there is no end to the scope of interests and ideas they engaged in.

Today, orthodox communities create individuals who are decidedly colorful. We are artists and accountants, speakers and seekers, intellectuals and creatives. We come in shades of introverted and extroverted, run the gamut from vivacious to earnest, and feature the full range of emotional, social, and psychological differences. We span the political spectrum from end to end.

This is the intended result of the halachic system, to properly refine and aim our unique *nefesh* [soul] to achieve the most potent delivery of our gifts and talents. The magnificent kaleidoscope we create when we are all true to ourselves and true to the word of Hashem is *ayin panim la'Torah*, the seventy facets of the One Truth.

KEY POINTS

1. Judaism is heavily scripted: each ritual is inviolate, and each word of the Torah is unchanging.
2. Judaism demands human involvement to continue the unfolding of Divine law in each generation.
3. Yet, the human contribution must be rooted in the unchanging axioms laid out in the Torah. We may not veer away from the Torah's foundations.
4. This is because Judaism is a platform that fuses G-d and human with contributions from both: the immutable word of G-d, synthesized and integrated with the fallible human mind.
5. The unchanging word of the Torah is G-d's contribution to the partnership. The Torah sage's effort to deepen and broaden our understanding of the Torah is our contribution.

