



Parasha Nitzavim

September 20, 2025

Torah: Deuteronomy 29:9-30:20
Haftarah: Isaiah 61:10-63:9
Ketuvim Shlichim: John 12:35-50; 21:1-17

Shalom Mishpacha! Our *Torah* portion today is *Nitzavim*. It is the last portion we will read in Hebrew Year 5785 because Year 5786 begins at sunset on Monday evening. Today is also the last Shabbat of *Elul*, and much of our previous three messages have focused on personal righteousness. You have heard the expression, “beating a dead horse.” This subject certainly doesn't fall into that category because it is a very current issue, one that is extremely important to our relationship with Yeshua, and it's important that we keep riding this horse.

Last *Shabbat*, we read these words of Yeshua: 15 “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*” (John 14:15 TLV). We know what His commandments are. We have been over that many times. But Yeshua's following statement tells us that we don't have to do it alone: 6 “*I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper so He may be with you forever—*” (John 14:16 TLV). We have His Holy Spirit living in us, but even so, we can improve. Are we genuinely listening to the Holy Spirit's guidance in our hearts? 1st Chronicles explains that Judah was taken captive to Babylon בְּמַעְלָם, *b'ma'alam*, because of their unfaithfulness (9:1). We need to ask ourselves: “How faithful are we?” This is a very relevant question since *Rosh Hashanah* begins Monday evening at sundown, marking the start of an even more intense period of reflection—the Ten Days of Awe, the days between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. What is the opposite of *ma'al*, the word describing an unfaithful act? We discussed it last week. It is אֱמוּנָה *emunah*, which means faithfulness—a word that describes a person's consistent obedience and loyalty, something Yeshua expects from us.

The Israelites whom Moses addressed in this *parasha* were a people who had been redeemed. When they were safely away from Pharaoh on the east bank of the Red Sea, Moses and the Israelites sang this song: 13 *You in Your lovingkindness led the people You have redeemed. You guided them in Your strength to Your holy habitation.* (Exodus 15:13 TLV). They were redeemed from Egypt by ADONAI, and shortly afterward, He established His covenant with them at Mount Sinai. As a redeemed covenant-keeping people, they were required to follow the *Torah*, the teaching and instruction of the First Covenant. If they offered the appropriate sacrifices and the High Priest took their sins to ADONAI for forgiveness on *Yom Kippur*, they continued to be a part of the redeemed community. But this system would not last forever. When the Temple was destroyed in the year 70 CE, those provisions provided in ADONAI's First Covenant were no longer available to the people of Israel.

But ADONAI had already brought a replacement for this system. The author of the Book of Hebrews wrote this seemingly cryptic statement about it: *13 In saying “new,” He has treated the first as old; but what is being made old and aging is close to vanishing* (Hebrews 8:13 TLV). This was around the year 64 or 65 CE, and Yeshua had died on the cross more than thirty years before. What is the “new and old he refers to?” If you read a different Bible version, you will most likely find that the word “covenant” has been added to this verse. The NIV has: *13 By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.* (Hebrews 8:13 NIV). That’s very clear. NIV states that the First Covenant is “obsolete.” But is that the correct understanding? Is the First Covenant being replaced by the New Covenant? No, that’s not it at all. The Tree of Life Bible Version has also translated the Greek text and does not add the word “covenant,” because it’s not in the Greek text. If the “first” that is becoming obsolete isn’t the “first covenant,” then what is it?

The answer to the “first” is found in the opening verses of Hebrews chapter 8. *1 Now here is the main point being said. We do have such a Kohen Gadol, (High Priest) who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. 2 He is a priestly attendant of the Holies and the true Tent—which ADONAI set up, not man. 3 For every kohen gadol is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, so it is necessary for this One also to have something to offer. 4 Now if He (Yeshua) were on earth, He would not be a kohen at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Torah (the Levitical Priests). 5 They offer service in a replica and foreshadower of the heavenlies (the Tabernacle in the Wilderness)—one that is just as Moses was instructed by God when he was about to complete the tabernacle. For He says, “See that you make everything according to the design that was shown to you on the mountain.* (Hebrews 8:1-5 TLV). What is the author trying to communicate? In these verses, he is not referring to the whole First Covenant, but to a part of it. The “first” is found in verse 4: *4 Now if He (Yeshua) were on earth, He would not be a kohen at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Torah.* Those who offer gifts according to the Torah is the Levitical priests. In verse 13, the “first” the author refers to is the “Levitical Priesthood,” which, at the time this letter was written—about five or six years before the Temple was destroyed—was old, aging, and nearly gone. Those who offered gifts according to the *Torah* are the Levitical priests. They are the “first” mentioned in verse 13. This is the “first priesthood,” the priesthood of Aaron, which would no longer be active just a few years later.

The complete picture is about ADONAI’s Son Yeshua as the *Kohen HaGadol*, the High Priest of Israel. No Scripture was removed from the Bible to allow Him to receive this position; nevertheless, it was ADONAI’s plan, and at His death on the cross, Yeshua became the new High Priest of Israel. He is a priest after the order of *Malkitzedek* (Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110:4), the King of Salem, the place which later became Jerusalem. However, Aaron’s descendants continued to carry out the “first priesthood” commands as long as the Temple stood. Verse 13 explains that what is becoming old, fading, and near vanishing are the Temple practices performed by the Levitical priesthood, a key part of the First Covenant atonement. They began to age upon the death of Yeshua on the cross in 30 CE and entirely disappeared when the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE. However, ADONAI’s commands regarding the first sacrificial system established by the *Torah* did not

immediately change at Yeshua's death on the cross. ADONAI allowed the priests to carry on, even though their sacrifices no longer provided atonement, and the Levitical Priesthood and the Temple kept operating for forty more years. The verses regarding these matters are still part of the *Torah*, but they are inactive and cannot be practiced now because there is no Temple or Levitical priests to carry them out. Yeshua is now our High Priest, and He officiates from the Tabernacle in heaven, the original one that served as the pattern for the Tabernacle in the Wilderness.

We discuss the month of *Elul* as a time of repentance for reviewing our relationship with Yeshua, but it is also an opportunity to understand the very close relationship we are meant to have with Him. Last *Shabbat*, we considered it as a husband-and-wife love relationship like the one Solomon described in Song of Songs—a profound love. There is another encounter in Scripture that can be seen as illustrating the kind of love relationship we are meant to have with Yeshua.

After Yeshua's resurrection, *Shimon Kefa* and six other disciples were fishing in the Sea of Galilee all night but caught nothing. As the first light of dawn broke, they saw Yeshua on the shore but didn't recognize Him. He asked if they had any fish, and after being told no, He told them to throw their net on the right side of the boat, and they would catch some. They did, and there were so many fish in it that they couldn't bring it ashore. It was then that John recognized Yeshua and said, "It's the L-rd." When *Kefa* realized it was Him, he jumped out of the boat and swam to shore. On the beach, a fire was burning, with a fish cooking on it and some bread. Yeshua told them to bring some of the fish they'd just caught and then have breakfast. As they ate, they knew it was Yeshua, but no one dared to ask, "Who are you?"

After breakfast, Yeshua asked Peter this question: "*Shim'on Bar-Yochanan* (Simon, son of John), do you love me more than these?" He used the Greek word *agapas* (ag-ap-as), the verb form of love, to ask him if he loved Him. It is related to *agape* (ag-ap-eh), the noun, and refers to unconditional love — the highest and most spiritual kind of love. It is the love mentioned in the *Shema*, where we are told to love "with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength." If Peter had *agape* love for Yeshua, it would have been love above all things and all people, including himself. But because Yeshua said, "more than these," his fellow disciples, Peter must have thought He was referring to "brotherly love." *Kefa* answered: "Yes, L-rd, You know I *phileo* (fih-LEH-oh) You." *Phileo* love is described as warm and affectionate, based on deep friendship and mutual admiration, often called brotherly love. Yeshua asked Peter a second time, "Do you *agapao* (ag-a-pa-o) me?" *Agapao* is another form of the verb, meaning "to love with the highest form of love." Again, Peter responded: "L-rd, You know I *phileo* You." He said, "I'm Your friend; I have brotherly love for You. Yeshua asked Peter a third time, and this time He used *phileo*, asking "Are you my friend?" *Kefa* was a little hurt by this and responded, "Yes L-rd, I *phileo* You; You are my friend. (John 21:1-7).

Two thoughts have been presented in the things we've discussed thus far: love and obedience, and both are important to us as disciples of Yeshua. In Hebrews chapter 8, from which we just read, a chapter that speaks of obedience, we also find these words: 10 "*For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,*

says Adonai. *I will put My Torah into their mind, and upon their hearts I will write it. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*" (Hebrews 8:10 TLV). The author is quoting Jeremiah 31:32. ADONAI has established a new covenant with Israel, and He has placed a desire in the hearts of those who understand it to obey His *Torah*. But which commands were written on our hearts? The simple answer is that they are the *mitzvot* that can be carried out today that do not require either the Temple or the Levitical Priesthood. The others are inactive. This, we understand.

We, as members of Yeshua's modern Messianic Jewish Movement, His followers in *Beit Shalom*, also understand the Hebrew word הלכה *halakhah*. Derived from הלך *halakh*, meaning "to walk," it is the way that we carry out ADONAI's righteous *mitzvot*, His commandments applicable for us today. While the Church does not have a specific name for "the way they walk," they do have their own understanding of Yeshua's commandments and how they are to follow them. This means that the *halakhah* of each group is specific to the doctrine of the individual body of Yeshua's followers to which a person is called.

But how do we know what our *halakhah* is? We know because Yeshua gave instructions for making *halakhah* to His disciples. In Matthew 16, He asked them who people say the Son of Man is. *Shimon Kefa* answered: 16 ... "*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16b TLV). Yeshua said: "You're right," and: 19 "*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will have been forbidden in heaven and what you permit on earth will have been permitted in heaven*" (Matthew 16:19 TLV). The keys to the kingdom of heaven are the authority Yeshua gave His disciples to establish *halakhah*, authority to interpret the *Torah*, and all Scriptures. This authority has been passed down from leader to leader through the ages and is conveyed upon a leader by *s'mikhah*, the laying on of hands, rabbinic ordination. As Yeshua's Messianic followers, it is our responsibility not only to know and to understand what *halakhah* is for us, but also to act upon it. There is a *halakhah* established for *Beit Shalom* Messianic Synagogue, and each of us knows what it is.

For those of us in Messianic Judaism, there should be no excuse for not knowing the *halakhah* of our congregation. While some teach that Yeshua's death on the cross fulfilled the Law and eliminated the need to obey only specific Laws, we have been taught differently. We understand that none of ADONAI's *Torah* commands were done away with when Yeshua died on the cross. *Sha'ul* said something was removed, but it was not the Law: 14 "*He (Yeshua) wiped away the bill of charges against us. Because of the regulations, it stood as a testimony against us; but he removed it by nailing it to the execution-stake*" (Colossians 2:14 CJB). It was not the Law that was nailed to the cross, as some say, but our sins—the charges against us. Symbolically, the crimes we were charged with were nailed to the cross, that is, removed by Yeshua's death. Some teach that it was "the Law" nailed to the cross, signifying that the *Torah* no longer needs to be obeyed, and that is their right under our understanding of Yeshua's "keys of the kingdom." However, we believe differently; the *mitzvot*, the commands, remain active for us to obey. And according to Jeremiah 31:32, if we have trusted in Yeshua, they have been written on our hearts.

Yeshua has told us that our righteousness must be greater than that of the Scribes and Pharisees. Are we more righteous? Are we *tzadikim*, righteous ones, in the sense that

Yeshua taught? Are we truly obeying the command that Yeshua called “the second greatest,” which is to “love your neighbor as yourself?” The word *חֶסֶד* *chesed* means love, but is usually expressed as “loving kindness.” *Chesed* is what Abraham displayed when ADONAI and two angels appeared at his tent by the Oaks of Mamre (Genesis 18). His hospitality is legendary, as he prepared an extravagant meal for them. The author of Hebrews likens the Greek *philoxenia* (fee-lox-en-EE-ah), meaning hospitality to strangers, to what Abraham did for ADONAI: *1 Let brotherly love (phileo) continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers (philoxenia)—for in doing so, some have entertained angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:1-2 TLV).* It is *phileo*, brotherly love, that we show when we display *chesed*. In traditional Judaism, this concept is further refined and is called *Gemilut chasadim*, which means loving care for others. In Jewish literature, *chesed* is one of the primary virtues. Rabbi Simon the Just, who lived in the third century BCE, taught: “The world rests upon three things: *Torah*, service to God, and bestowing kindness” (*Pirkei Avot 1:2*). Rabbi Simlai who lived in the 3rd century CE, six hundred years later, wrote: “The *Torah* begins with *chesed* and ends with *chesed*.” (*Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sotah 14a*). Another way to understand this is that the entire *Torah* is defined by *chesed*, showing us that our lives should focus on mercy and compassion. *Gemilut chasidim* can involve giving money to those in need, but it can also mean providing personal service to someone in need. It’s all about caring for our neighbor, the significant horizontal relationship we must have.

What is your vision of the *Torah*? Some see it merely as do’s and don’ts, while others mainly view it as related to gaining hidden knowledge. No matter how we view the *Torah*, we must learn as much as we can about it and understand how to apply it in our lives. We must make the *Torah* meaningful in our hearts so that we stay in the right relationship with ADONAI. That’s our vertical relationship, but it must also be a part of our horizontal relationships so that we can have a positive relationship with our neighbor, our brothers and sisters.

The most challenging thing for us as human beings is to forgive those who have wronged us. But it’s not an option. Yeshua said we must forgive. *21 Then Peter came to Him and said, “Master, how often shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” 22 Yeshua said to him, “No, not up to seven times, I tell you, but seventy times seven!” (Matthew 18:21-22 TLV).* Seventy times seven is Yeshua’s metaphor for “forever.” We must forgive ten thousand times ten thousand times, or as many times as we are offended. But failing in this seemingly small point in the *Torah*, forgiving others, is one that appears to cause the most damage to our spiritual relationship with ADONAI. Speaking through Moses, ADONAI said: *18 You are not to take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am Adonai (Leviticus 19:18 TLV).* We are not to bear any grudge, even a small one. Why did He say, “I am ADONAI?” Most likely, it was to emphasize that He is “I Am,” our omnipotent Creator, and by saying “I am ADONAI,” He underscores that He is the ultimate authority and has commanded us not to seek revenge or hold a grudge. Do we, the created ones, the clay in the Potter’s hands, dare to disobey Him? Yes, we do. Many times, we disobey Him without considering the consequences. Yeshua went even further regarding the topic of holding a grudge. We pray: *12 And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

(Matthew 6:12 TLV). We want Him to forgive us our debts. But have we forgiven those with whom we have a grudge? If we haven't, we are placing ourselves in serious jeopardy. Just two verses later, Yeshua said: 14 *"For if you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions"* (Matthew 6:14-15 TLV). We all sin, some more than others, but everyone sins. And we also know that repentance is available when we sin. When we repent, we feel better. We feel that we've restored our relationship with ADONAI. But we must be certain that it has been completely restored. Are there other grudges which we continue to hold against our neighbor, some of which we may have actively chosen not to forgive? Yeshua said, *"But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions."* If we continue to hold grudges and refuse to forgive others, our relationship with Yeshua and the Father is damaged. Often, what we hold onto is petty, like a moment when someone corrects us in front of others, which embarrasses us. Not forgiving them doesn't mean that we are going to Hell; we don't lose our promise of salvation. But it does mean that none of our prayers are being answered. And in most cases, this indicates that we are focusing all our effort on the vertical relationship and neglecting the horizontal relationship with our neighbor. Unless we examine our hearts and forgive, we are seriously hindering the effectiveness and unity of the body of Messiah. Multiply that by millions! Unforgiveness is a major challenge Yeshua's followers are facing in these last days. As we approach *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, is our righteousness greater than the righteousness of the Pharisees? Yeshua said: 20 *"For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees and Torah scholars, you shall never enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:20 TLV)! He is our judge. He knows our hearts, and He also knows our works.

Does Yeshua's dialogue with *Kefa* at the Sea of Galilee have any relevance to our lives? Do the questions Yeshua asked him have significance for us? What if Yeshua didn't get the response from Peter He was expecting? Isn't it possible that He wanted him to say, "Yes, Lord, I *agapao* You, the word signifying highest love instead of I *phileo* you?" Peter was a mighty man of G-d, and he went on to feed Yeshua's sheep and even die for Him. However, I think what Yeshua wanted *Kefa* to say went right over his head. Reflect on the relationship between the bride and bridegroom in Song of Songs, and consider the possibility that *Shimon Kefa* at the Sea of Galilee is somehow meant to represent us, the "Bride of Messiah." Think about how Yeshua, the Bridegroom, expects us to respond to His question. If Yeshua were to ask us individually, "Do you *agapao* Me," what would our answer be? As followers of Yeshua, this is a question that each of us must answer. Insert your name at the beginning of this sentence, "_____, do you *agapao* Me asks Yeshua? What is our true relationship with our Messiah? Today, if He directly asked us this question, as He did with Peter, what would our answer be? Would we answer as *Kefa* did, "Yes L-rd, I *phileo* You, or would we say, "Yes L-rd, I *agapao* you." If we are only His friend, we would not have the unconditional love relationship Yeshua and the New Covenant require. He wants our relationship to be one of *agapao*, high and unconditional love, a high level of obedience. Although some of us may not have reached that level, it is not too late; it is still attainable. Our walk with our Messiah Yeshua is a journey, one in which we continually seek to draw closer to Him, the process we call sanctification. Song of Songs 6:3, "*Ani l'dodi v'dodi li,*" means for us, "I *agapao* Yeshua just as Yeshua *agapao*s me." He

is our beloved, just as we are His, and this is the love relationship He wishes us to have with Him. May each of us seek to answer Yeshua, “Yes, Lord, I *agapao* You.”

We began today with Yeshua’s words: 15 “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*” (John 14:15 TLV). We can understand this as His question to us: “Do you love me?” If we answer yes, Yeshua’s response is “Then, keep my commandments.” This is the dual relationship we have with our Messiah: love and obedience, the two main factors that define our righteousness. May we each have that kind of righteousness! *Shabbat shalom!*