

Don't Be Afraid to Leap¹

When you think of the characteristics that best depict artists, what words come to mind?

Free-spirited. Creative. Unbounded. Unrestrained. Innovative.

Somehow artists don't elicit words like disciplined, constricted by rules, boundaries, or regulations.

To be creative, we need the freedom to move, to grow, and develop, without which our creativity becomes stifled and strangled.

But in truth, any type of artistic pursuit requires a tremendous amount of discipline, with many rules and boundaries. Writers are restricted by an overwhelming number of grammatical rules; they are bound by specific sentence and paragraph structure, not to mention spelling rules and more.

Musicians and artists, similarly, need hours of disciplined study and practice, closely following the rules of their craft.

*And yet, to be a true artist, you also need to occasionally break free from those rules. **Some of the greatest masterpieces were born by artists who made exceptions to the rules to create a work of awesome beauty.***

The key is to know when to use the strict parameters of discipline and when to break free to allow uninhibited, radical originality.

In most years, the Torah portion of Nitzavim and Vayeilech are read together as a combined portion. Only very occasionally, in some years, are they read separately. These two portions contain the essential aspects of our covenantal agreement with G-d.

Nitzavim means "standing firm," while *Vayeilech* means "and he walked."

These two portions allude to the roles of these complimentary aspects of our spiritual growth. **There are times when we need to stand firm and hold our place. There are other times when we need the flexibility and progress of moving forward.**

We need to hold strong and stand firmly rooted when it comes to upholding our values and morals, our heritage and customs.

Abraham our forefather was called *Ivri*, because he came from the other side of the river. He was also called *Ivri* because he stood on the other side of accepted cultural mores, teaching the world about the oneness of G-d.

Every Jew must at times stand proudly "on the other side," firm and uncompromising in his commitment, not swayed by popular opinions.

But at the same time, we can't be so stuck in our places and so inflexible in our positions or way of doing things that we stunt our own personal growth.

Vayeilech means walking, and spiritually we must constantly be progressing to a new level, so that the place where one foot landed is not the same as the next step, as we constantly progress and deepen our relationship with G-d.

We shouldn't feel restrained, either by our own personal feelings of failure of misgiving or by our fear of change. Every day is a new opportunity for us to leave the old and make ourselves into a newer, better person.

1. *Some of the greatest masterpieces were born by artists who made exceptions to the rules to create a work of awesome beauty*

- a. "The picture of three apostles staring at (Yeshua), one of them poking his finger into the wound in his side, looks unconventional enough," Gombrich writes. "One can imagine that **such a painting struck devout people as being irreverent and even outrageous. They were accustomed to seeing the apostles as dignified figures draped in beautiful folds**—here they looked like common labourers."²

Yet the ugliness and ordinariness that Caravaggio³ paints in his scene enabled open-minded art lovers to see afresh the kind of Bible story that many would have heard thousands of times.



1 Chana Weisberg, *Shabbat deLights, Vayikra/Bamidbar/Devarim*, (Chabad.org), pp. 295-297.

2 <https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2015/september/29/gombrich-explains-the-beauty-in-caravaggio/>

3 Caravaggio (1571-1610), was an Italian painter active in Rome.



From the Getty Museum, saints Peter and Paul.⁴

2. *There are times when we need to stand firm and hold our place. There are other times when we need the flexibility and progress of moving forward.*

a. Exodus 14:10-14

¹⁰As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. ¹¹They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? ¹²Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" ¹³Moses answered the people, "**Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again.**" ¹⁴The LORD will fight for you; **you need only to be still.**"

⁴ The Master of Sir John Fastolf was an anonymous illuminator active in France and England in the second quarter of the 1400s, during the period of French-English strife known as the Hundred Years War. The Master's name comes from a manuscript he illuminated for Sir John Fastolf in England around 1450.

b. 1Corinthians 16:13-14

¹³Be on your guard; **stand firm in the faith**; be courageous; be strong.

¹⁴Do everything in love.

c. 2Thessalonians 2:13-15

¹³But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah. ¹⁵So then, brothers and sisters, **stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you**, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

d. James 5:7-9

⁷Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. ⁸You too, **be patient and stand firm**, because the Lord's coming is near. ⁹Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

e. Ephesians 4:3-8

³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷But **to each one of us grace has been given as Messiah apportioned it.** ⁸This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives **and gave gifts to his people.**"

1) Psalms 68:18

¹⁸When you ascended on high, you took many captives; **you received gifts from people**, even from the rebellious—that you, LORD God, might dwell there.

2) The quotation itself, though indubitably biblical, is not without its difficulties, since Paul does not cite either MT or LXX. Three changes are observable. Two of them are only slight: a transfer of person from "you" (sing.) to "he" and a purely stylistic transformation of a finite verb into a participle ("having ascended"; NIV, "when he ascended"). **More substantial is the alteration from "received gifts for men" to "gave gifts to men."** Attempts have been made to account for the apparent discrepancy by the conjecture that Paul was quoting from memory and that his recollection was imperfect, or that he arbitrarily doctored the text to suit his line of argument. With more plausibility some have claimed that, under the inspiration of the Spirit, **Paul felt free to amplify the meaning of the Psalm, since the**

giving is implicit in the receiving for. But it seems more probable that the apostle was drawing on an ancient oral tradition reflected in the Aramaic Targum on the Psalter and the Syriac Peshitta version, both of which read, "Thou hast given gifts to men." **Early rabbinical comments applied the verse to Moses when he received the Law on Sinai so as to bring it to the people.**⁵

f. Galatians 3:16

¹⁶The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed" (Gen 12:7; 13:15; 24:7), meaning one person, who is Messiah.

- 1) In the *Tenach* the term "**seed**" (Hebrew *zera'*), like English "posterity," is used in the singular as a collective noun to refer to all of a person's descendants. Thus the *p'shat* (simple sense, Mat 2:15) of this text has "**seed**" referring to Abraham's descendants. **But Sha'ul is not expounding the *p'shat***; rather, his emphasis on the singular form of the word allows the seed to sprout into a richly layered *midrash*.⁶
 - (1) Israel is God's son.
 - (2) The Messiah is God's son.
 - (3) Israel is descended from Avraham, is Avraham's seed, the children of Avraham.
 - (4) The "true" children of Avraham are those who trust.
 - (5) Those who trust in Yeshua are united with him by that trust—they are part of his Body, one with him, one, singular.
 - (6) In the thinking of the *Tanakh*, a king represents his people to the point of being one with them; and the king of Israel is treated as representing Israel, standing for them, being one with them.
 - (7) The Messiah Yeshua is the King of Israel, the promised Son of David, one with Israel.
 - (8) By trusting, Gentiles become identified with and in sense a part of Israel.
 - (9) All of God's promises reach their culmination and fulfillment in the Messiah, who is Avraham's "seed."

All nine of these truths lead to this verse, and this verse

leads to these nine truths, each of which is expressed at greater length elsewhere in Galatians and the rest of the Bible (see Hos 11:1; Mat 2:15; John 17:20-26; Rom 9:6-13; 2Cor 1:20; Gal 3:26-4:7; 4:21-31).

3. *Every Jew must at times stand proudly "on the other side," firm and uncompromising in his commitment, not swayed by popular opinions.*

a. Exodus 23:2 (CJB)

²Do not follow the crowd when it does what is wrong; and **don't allow the popular view to sway you** into offering testimony for any cause if the effect will be to pervert justice.

b. Psalms 1:1-2

¹Blessed is the one **who does not walk in step with the wicked** or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, ²but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.

c. Luke 11:28

²⁸He replied, "Blessed ... are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

4. *But at the same time, we can't be so stuck in our places and so inflexible in our positions or way of doing things that we stunt our own personal growth.*

a. Luke 8:14

¹⁴The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, **and they do not mature.**

b. Philippians 3:12-16

¹²Not that I have already ... arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Messiah Yeshua took hold of me. ¹³Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Messiah Yeshua. ¹⁵All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

c. Hebrews 5:11-14

¹¹We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you **because you no longer try to understand.** ¹²In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is

5 Frank E. Gaebelien, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, (Zondervan Publishing House), p. 57.

6 David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, (Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 549.

not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

d. James 1:2-4

²Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. **“Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete,** not lacking anything.

f. A parable attributed to Rabbi Akiva in the Jerusalem Talmud uses the term *chatzuf* (i.e., *chutzpah*) in a positive manner. **It deals with the theme of faith-filled persistence in prayer for rain.**

1) The Tenacious Daughter⁷

R. Leazar (Eleazar) observed a fast but no rain fell. R. Akiva observed a fast, and rain fell. He (R. Akiva) went in and said to them, “I will tell you a parable. To what may the matter be compared? To a king who had two daughters. One was tenacious (חֲצִיפָה—*chatzufah*) and the other was gracious (כַּשִּׁירָה—*kashirah*). When the tenacious one wanted something and came before him, he said: “Give her what she wants so she will get out of here.” But when the gracious one wanted something and came in before him, **he lengthened his dealing with her because he enjoyed listening to her conversation.**”

a) R. Leazar should not be considered to be lacking in spirituality or religious piety because his fast did not receive a response from heaven. His prayer was proper.

b) Akiva showed his appreciation and reverence for his senior, who was his respected teacher.

c) Akiva received what he prayed for because of his bold disposition.

d) **While honoring graciousness, the positive value of *chutzpah* is clearly seen.**

e) Matthew 21:22 (cf. Mat 7:8; John 14:13)

²²**If you believe** (i.e., “trust”), **you will receive** whatever you ask for in prayer.”

1) John 15:7 (CJB)

⁷**IF** you remain united with me, and my words with you, **THEN** ask whatever you want, and it will happen for you.

2) James 4:3

³When you ask, **you do not receive**, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

3) John 9:1-3

¹As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Yeshua, “but **this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.**”

5. Vayelech means walking, and spiritually we must constantly be progressing to a new level ...

a. Deuteronomy 29:29

²⁹“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this Torah.”

1) **This is an important idea**—God has revealed some things to us—He has granted us only glimpses of other things—and some things remained closed.

2) There are a great many things we do NOT know ... things that the Scriptures have only hinted at—and even though Yeshua is a crucial revelation of God—even he is not God’s entire *revelation* of “secret things.”

3) **“It is ironic that things which are essentially unknowable and intangible are the things which divide us, one from another, the most deeply.** Differences of opinion and interpretation on theological issues typically define the borders between one denomination and another, one sect and another, one congregation and another, one brother and another. Differences are often over matters of conjecture—things inferred from the Scriptures but left ultimately unanswered. Though we may have different theories regarding theology and biblical eschatology, we all have the certain obligation to heed the commandments. If only we could learn to let the secret things remain the LORD’s and spend all our energy on accomplishing that which has been clearly revealed!” (FFOZ)

—Then we’d be too busy trying to live our lives according to God’s will rather than separating ourselves from one another.

b. Daniel 12:1-10

¹“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your

⁷ Brad H. young, *The Parables, Jewish Tradition and Messiahian Interpretation*, (Hendrickson), pp. 51-52.

people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. ²Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. ³Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens ... ⁴**But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.**"

⁵Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank. ⁶One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" ⁷The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed." ⁸I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, **what will the outcome of all this be?**" ⁹He replied, **"Go your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end.**" ¹⁰Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. **None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand ...**

c. Proverbs 25:2

It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.

d. Matthew 24:32-36 (Mark 13:32)

³²"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ³³Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁴Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³⁶**"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.**

e. Acts 1:6-8

⁶Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: **"It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.**" ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

f. Romans 11:33

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! **How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!**

g. 1 John 3:2

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that **when Messiah appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.**

6. *Every day is a new opportunity for us to leave the old and make ourselves into a newer, better person.*

a. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 (CJB)

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is united with the Messiah, **he is a new creation**—the old has passed; look, what has come is fresh and new!

¹⁸And it is all from God, who through the Messiah has reconciled us to himself and has given us the work of that reconciliation,

1) This is the ... language used by Calvin and Luther and eventually by the evangelicals. It suggests that God does not accept the old person as we are but rather requires us to have **a one time transformation** initiated by him.