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# בשבת



אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

PARSHAS  
METZORAH

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT  
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## NEW BEGINNINGS

Our *Parshah*, *Parshas Metzorah*, discusses the purification process that a *metzorah* has to undergo, after having been stricken with *tzora'as*. As part of this process, all of the hair of the *metzorah* is shaven off, and he goes into a *mikvah*.<sup>1</sup>

Going into a *mikvah* is standard for anyone who is *tamei*, but the *metzorah* goes into a *mikvah* twice - once when he is ready to become *tahor*, and then seven days later, when it is indeed finally time to become *tahor*.

As well, the *metzorah* undergoes the shaving process twice, once at the beginning of the seven days, and then again seven days later. We don't find the requirement to shave anywhere else in the Torah,<sup>2</sup> and here we find it twice! What is the significance of this procedure - of the *mikvah* and the shaving?

The *Sefer Hachinuch*<sup>3</sup> (attributed to R' Aharon Halevi, 1235 – c. 1290) explains that it is important for a person who has sinned to feel that they can change their outlook and actions, and are not bound by the person that they once were. By shaving and going into a pure body of water, the *metzorah* impresses upon himself the idea of renewal, the idea that he can start anew, and change his ways for the better.

We all have habits that we've grown accustomed to, parts of our lives that we think we won't be able to change. Or, there may have been times where we truly wanted to change, but felt held back, by ourselves, or by the way others viewed us. Through the story of the *metzorah* we can find a new strategy for growth - the ability to disconnect today from yesterday, and to view each new action in its own right. Yes, I may have fallen before, but that does not define me. Going forward, I'm a fighter, and as such, I will do everything I can to succeed.

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### Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

There is a saying, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." However, it's easier to say it than to feel it. How is one supposed to feel that they have a new beginning, knowing that they have years of bad habits behind them?

This question comes from a misunderstanding of the advice given by Rabbeinu Yonah.<sup>1</sup> Of course we cannot deny the reality that it is very hard to change our habits. It's a rare individual who is able to wake up one day, and totally change whatever they have been doing until now.

However, one big reason we hold ourselves back is because of the guilt - the feeling that we can never do *teshuvah*, we've done terrible things, and that it won't work anyway.

To this, Rabbeinu Yonah writes that though we are totally incorrect, and one can always do *teshuvah*, these feelings can prevent us from trying to change. Therefore, we must mentally separate ourselves from the past. Then, we can take the time and effort needed to change. And the first step is to believe that today is your day to start.

<sup>1</sup> Sod Hateshuvah

<sup>1</sup> Vayikrah 14:1-9

<sup>2</sup> Barring the one-time event when the *Leviim* were first installed. (*Bamidbar* 8:7)

<sup>3</sup> *Mitzvah* 173, 174

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**Studying Sifrei Mussar is not a seasonal pastime, reserved for the Aseres Yimei Teshuvah; rather, we must study Mussar the whole year round.**

- Mishnah Berurah 603:2, citing Arizal

# LEAVING IT BEHIND

Yossi Applebaum\* cleared his throat as he started speaking at the *siyum* he was making on *Mesechta Gittin*. Though he was fifteen, this was the second *siyum* he was making, the first one on *Mesechta Makkos*, finished when he was thirteen.

After thanking Hashem, his parents, and his *chavrusos*, Yossi paused. Taking a breath, he started to share something that he had kept hidden for a long time. "As many of you know, I came to this *yeshiva* in the fifth grade, having moved here from another community. Many of you know me as a sweet and studious kid. However, this was not always the case. You see, in my old school, I was not sweet, and I was certainly not studious.

"I was everything from the class clown to the class bully. I spent more time at the principal than I spent in my own classroom! All that changed, though, when I switched schools.

"As you can imagine, I was nervous at the idea of attending a new school. I'd have to make new friends, deal with new situations, and so on. One day during the summer, my father and I took a walk together, just to spend some time with each other. He brought up the subject of the new school, recognizing that I was feeling nervous and anxious.

"Then he said something that really changed my direction. 'Yossi, I think we both know that the past couple of years have not been so great in terms of school. However, you have such an opportunity in front of you. The new kids, the *rebbeim*, nobody there knows you! They will see you as whatever type of person you show yourself to be - they have no basis to see you as anything else. You really have a chance in front of you; you just need to choose the type of person you want to be.'

"I was all of ten years old when my father said this to me. But it really struck home. I decided that very night to be serious about my studies, and to be a pleasant friend. Don't get me wrong, it took work to change old habits. How many times I had to bite my tongue when I had something hurtful to say! But it worked!

"And now, thanks to my father, I am finishing a second *mesechta* of *gemara*. I honestly can't believe it."

*\*Based on a true story, name has been changed.*

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## DID YOU KNOW?

- Even if a person has sinned many times, it is important to feel that today is the day that everything can turn around, and that the past mistakes don't determine the future results.<sup>1</sup>
- Growth is normally a step-by-step process, but through *teshuvah*, a person can hurdle to the highest spiritual heights in a short span of time.<sup>2</sup>
- It's important to do *teshuvah* as soon as possible, because once a person repeats a sin, it becomes much harder to do *teshuvah*.<sup>3</sup>

1 *Rabbeinu Yonah* in *Sod Hateshuvah*

2 *Shem Mishmuel* on *Vayakhel*, 5678

3 *Shaarei Teshuvah*, Chap. 1