

GREAT FOR SHARING
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

PARSHAS
NITZAVIM

בשבת

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN



אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

THE ROOTS OF CHANGE

Parshas Nitzavim opens with Moshe Rabbeinu cautioning all of Klal Yisrael to remain faithful to Hashem after entering Eretz Yisrael. He warns that there may be those among Klal Yisrael who currently harbor such feelings of rebelliousness, “Perhaps there is among you a root flourishing with gall and wormwood (bitter substances).”¹

The simple understanding of this *passuk* is that there may be one who has thoughts of dissent and plans on ignoring Hashem’s commandments. However, the first part of the *passuk* already addressed those people — “Perhaps there is among you a man or woman, or a family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from being with Hashem, our G-d, to go and serve the gods of the nations.” If the people who plan to flaunt Hashem’s will have already been addressed, who is Moshe referring to when he speaks of a ‘root flourishing?’

Reb Aharon Kotler² (1891 – 1962) explains that our actions are manifestations of our thoughts and feelings. Oftentimes those thoughts and feelings are below the surface, almost imperceptible even to the very person himself. These were the people Moshe was speaking to — people who held thoughts of contempt in a very deep place in their psyche. In fact, the acts of rebellion may not come through them; rather, their children or children’s children may be the ones to act on their grandfather’s subtle thoughts. Such is the impact of our deepest thoughts and feelings.

When one wants to truly change, the deeper one is capable of effecting the change, the better. Sometimes we can change our superficial acts, but our thinking still remains the same as it always was. Over time, we are at risk of reverting back to our old habits.

But there is a better way! If we truly change our thinking, our feelings will follow, and then our actions as well.

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

How can I ‘change my thinking’ and change the person who I am?

To reach deep into one’s soul, Reb Yisrael Salanter outlined a multi-pronged strategy.

1. *Chochmas hamussar* — studying the Torah’s explanation of how the human being thinks and acts, and *chazal’s* understanding of what the Torah says about a particular trait.¹

2. *Mussar b’hispailus* — this is the method by which we emotionally connect to that which we intellectually understand. We do this through repetition of a particular thought or passage that hits us a certain way, using our imagination to unpack the broad ramifications of the words we are saying, while reciting the words with emotion and receptivity.²

3. *Chinuch hamussar* — deliberately acting in the manner of the person who we wish to become. By consciously acting this way, we ingrain these good habits in ourselves, gradually making it more natural for us to act this way in the future.³

1 *Ohr Yisrael*, Letter 31

2 *ibid.* Letter 2

3 *Rambam on Avos 3:15* s.v. זה המאמר

1 *Devarim 29:17*

2 *Mishnas Reb Aharon Al Hatorah*, pg. 360

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**Sefer Chovos HaLevavos changed
my life.** - Rav Avigdor Miller zt”l in joyous
retrospection on the final day of his life,
eponymous biography by Rabbi Yaakov Y.
Hamburger, pg. 549

THE GAME OF LIFE

Dov Tellem* walked into the kitchen just in time to see his wife wiping away a small tear. "What's wrong?" Dov asked, surprised. He could think of nothing at all that had happened; bedtime had ended, it was just him and his wife cleaning up and putting things away at the end of the day.

Miriam looked at Dov but remained silent. "Please tell me, is there anything I can do?" Dov asked.

After a moment Miriam nodded. "I'm not sure how to say this, and I know we've spoken about this before. I know that it's important for you to relax, you work hard all day, and when you come home you need down time. However, I'm concerned that you're spending a large amount of time ignoring the rest of your family while you read or play games."

Miriam fell silent, reluctant to continue. Dov was silent as well. She was right, he knew this about himself for years. *It's funny*, he thought ruefully. *When I was younger I remember noticing how much time people waste. And yet, here I am...*

"You are right, and I appreciate you bringing it up. And I think it's time for me to do something about it." The words stuck in Dov's mouth like chalk. How was he to get by? He needed his down time, no human can work 24/7. But maybe he didn't need to spend *hours* in front of the computer. Maybe he could do something else.

The next day, Dov sat down and wrote a list. He listed productive things that he enjoyed doing, ideas that he could use to replace his current bad habit. Additionally, he sought out a good friend to discuss his motivations for procrastination, and his need for some leisure. And lastly, he spent a long time learning about the value of every moment in this world.¹

The months passed. Though Dov still found himself caught in a struggle, he found that he created some very good habits. No longer did he ignore his family immediately after dinner, and his children now knew that when they wanted to speak to him, they more often than not would find him in the living room with a *sefer*, and not on the computer.

Thus, it was no surprise when Dov made a *siyum* on *mishnayos Seder Zeraim*, Dov started his speech with, "I'd like to thank my wife Miriam. I can honestly say without a doubt that this *siyum* is because of her."

And his children now knew that when they wanted to speak to him, they more often than not would find him in the living room with a *sefer*...

**Names have been changed.*

¹ Avos 4:17

DID YOU KNOW?

- *Mussar* has a way of reaching the deepest trenches of one's soul and straightening one's path in a way that no other study or school of thought can accomplish.¹
- The greatest Torah scholars won't truly understand Hashem's greatness without learning *mussar*.²

¹ *Seridei Aish* Vol. 4, pg. 334

² *Chochmah U'Mussar* Vol. 1, *Siman* 130

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