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בְּשִׁיטְיָחָה



אור ישראל

Self Inspired

PARSHAS
NITZAVIM

BY RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN
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SPEAK TO YOUR HEART

Parshas Nitzavim finds Moshe Rabbeinu continuing his farewell speech to Klal Yisrael. He warns the Jewish nation of days to come, days of rebellion and repentance. He then states that adherence to the Torah is not difficult to obtain — it is not in the heavens, nor is it across the sea. Rather, says Moshe Rabbeinu, the Torah is carried in one's mouth and one's heart.¹

Though there are poetic overtones in the wording of this *passuk*, the actual meaning seems obscured. What, exactly, is in one's mouth and one's heart. Furthermore, why refer to both one's mouth and heart, does one alone not suffice?

Reb Eliyahu Dessler² (1892–1953) explains, both the heart and mouth are referring to thinking like a Jewish person — the outlook and understanding that surrounds the Torah, *mitzvos*, and Hashem. Moshe Rabbeinu was telling the Jewish people their adherence to the Torah is not dependent on heroic journeys or impossible tasks. Rather, it is dependent upon one's personal attitude and understanding of *yiddishkeit*.

This can explain the 'heart,' but what about the 'mouth'? How does the mouth refer to one's ideology?

To explain this, Rav Dessler first asks that though the heart refers to one's personal beliefs, how does one get to have those beliefs? Furthermore, even if one believes something, how do they strengthen that belief, and hold to it in the face of challenges from the general society? This, says Rav Dessler, is the role of one's mouth. When one verbalizes their thoughts, they are not simply giving words to ideas, rather, the very act of speaking these ideas gives strength to them, furthering and deepening one's commitment to these ideals.

Thus, says Rav Dessler, the role of one's mouth is paramount. The audible study of the complexities of Torah, and of the wisdom of *mussar*, is crucial for one's commitment to Hashem. Without it, one's core beliefs may end up withering under the constant onslaught of competing philosophies, or perhaps worse, apathy.

Expressing the Torah's ideals is a sure way to accelerate one's spiritual growth.

Adherence to the Torah is not dependent on impossible tasks. Rather, it is dependent upon one's personal attitude...

Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

A great strategy when learning a *mussar sefer* is to study out loud, and even speak to oneself. Though this may come naturally to some, to others it may feel strange and stilted. Moreover, there may be times where it is inappropriate, as one may disturb others who are around.

R' Yitzchak Blazer¹ suggests having a dedicated *beis medrash*, just for the study of *mussar*. This will allow one to feel more comfortable with their own studying, and not disturb others. However, this is not always feasible.

One suggestion, especially for those who are uncomfortable speaking to oneself, is to start in the privacy of one's home, or when no one is around. Yes, it may feel odd at first, but as one grows accustomed to this sort of conversation, one will feel more confident in this mode of study, even when others are present.

In those scenarios, if it would indeed be disturbing to others, one can still speak softly to oneself. Though it may look odd to the outside world, the experience of knowing that this works will outweigh any potential negatives.

1 Sha'arei Ohr, 11

1 Devarim 30:14

2 Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. IV, pg. 257

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Without Mussar, I am not confident that a person can properly fulfill the first sif in the Shulchan Aruch. - The 'Alter' of Novordhak, R' Yosef Yozel Horowitz, Madreigos Ha'adom, pg. 233

TALKING TO YOURSELF

Chaim* sat across from his *rebbe*, anxiety written on his face. “And I just feel like I can’t get ahead. I try, and sometimes I even make progress, but then I slip up, and I’m back to where I began.”

“Back to where you began?” asked Rabbi Barish. “But what about all those successes?”

“What about them? They’re gone, and I feel like I didn’t accomplish anything.”

Chaim was already four years out of high school, learning full time in *yeshiva*. He was a fine student, and a sincere young man. However, he felt that his growth in *middos* and *mussar* was stagnant, and whatever area he decided to work on was just not working.

Rabbi Barish was silent for a bit. “Tell me, Chaim, when you are successful, what do you tell yourself?”

“Tell myself? What do you mean?”

“Like, what are your thoughts? Do you congratulate yourself?”

Chaim laughed. “No! Like tell myself, ‘attaboy’? No, I just keep going.”

“And when you mess up, what do you tell yourself?”

“Also nothing, I just...” Chaim trailed off, as realization set in. “Actually, I do beat myself up about it. I get upset at myself for not doing what I was supposed to do.”

Rabbi Barish shook his head. “I’m guessing you wouldn’t talk to your friends the way you speak to yourself. Let me make a suggestion. When you accomplish whatever it is that you’re taking on, whether it’s coming on time to *tefillah*, or not getting angry, or doing a *chesed*, whatever it may be, congratulate yourself. Verbalize the praise, as if you were speaking to a friend.

“Also, in general, it’s a very good exercise to repeat throughout the day a particular thought as it pertains to whatever you’re working on. Something that has meaning to you, that can inspire you, and keep you on track. It’s important to do both, to remind yourself of what you’re trying to accomplish, and to combat that voice in your head that is bringing you down.”

Three months later, there was a knock on Rabbi Barish’s office door. “Come in!” he called out.

Chaim peeked his head through the doorway. “Hi Rebbi, I just wanted to say thank you. These past three months have been explosive — not only have I experienced a real change, but I’m excited to take on new challenges, something that I’ve always been nervous about before. Thank you.”

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- To obtain *yiras shamayim*, one should study *mussar* with a prepared heart, a mournful melody, and with lips aflame.¹
- Giving words to ideas can help refine one’s ideas, and answer questions one may have.²

¹ *Sha’arei Ohr*, 9

² *Tosfos* s.v. כיון דפסקה on *Gittin* 83b

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