

# Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Bechukosai

“AND I WILL PLACE MY DWELLING IN YOUR MIDST, AND MY SPIRIT WILL NOT BE DISGUSTED BY YOU.” (VAYIKRA 26:11)

**This doesn't seem to set high expectations for the Jewish people**

THE SIMPLE READING of the above verse is sequential: Hashem will dwell amongst us and then He will not be revolted by us. The Ralbag, however, explains the *pasuk* in the reverse order, that Hashem is telling *B'nei Yisrael* that as long as He is not, “disgusted by us,” He will, “dwell in our midst.” This doesn't seem to set high expectations for the Jewish people. Shouldn't it be that Hashem chooses to be among us because of our sterling behavior and our unwavering commitment to His *mitzvos*? Are we the Chosen Nation merely because Hashem is not disgusted with us? The Ralbag answers that, in truth, we did not deserve to have Hashem's holy presence rest amongst us in the Mishkan because we had not reached the appropriate level of spiritual perfection. Nevertheless, the Ralbag continues, as long as we refrain from acts that would make Hashem disgusted with us, He will dwell among us because Hashem is confident that, under such circumstances, the Torah will eventually bring us to perfection.

The gap between the spiritual stratosphere of perfection, and the lowly level of merely not being spiritually repulsive, is a vast chasm indeed. It is hard to believe that a person barely avoiding Divine disgust has any thoughts about reaching perfection. We would imagine that perfection would only come into one's sights when he has already reached very high levels of the performance of Hashem's commandments. A person who is merely avoiding disgusting acts – and not yet working on positive growth – would not seem to even be ready to start climbing the ladder of perfection. How can the Ralbag say that Hashem is confident that such a novice at striving for spiritual perfection will certainly reach expert status?

**A human cannot remain spiritually stagnant**

We know that a human cannot remain spiritually stagnant. A salmon swimming upstream cannot relax his efforts and hope the river's current will allow him to stay in the same place, nor can a bird stop flapping its wings and expect to remain aloft. If we are not growing, we will eventually fall prey to the law of spiritual gravity and begin to decline religiously. The opposite is also true. If a person is growing, and striving upwards – even if he is many miles from his goal – observing the Torah will propel him to ascend, overcoming the negative forces that drag others down, until he eventually reaches perfection.

**It's only a matter of time before the spirituality of Torah conduct brings us higher and higher**

We must realize the dangers of letting down our guard and relaxing our efforts to continually improve ourselves. Let us recognize the forces that pull us away from our Creator, away from perfection, and fight them with whatever level of Torah and *mitzvah* observance we can muster. If we try our best to move upwards, even if we are starting from the most basic level of just avoiding repulsive behavior, we are headed towards perfection, because it's only a matter of time before the spirituality of Torah conduct brings us higher and higher to reach that lofty plateau. In the meantime, Hashem is ready to dwell amongst us, because He knows, better than anyone else, the greatness and potential we have within us.