



Torah Reflections: Conversations on the Weekly Parsha
Parshat Nitzavim-Vayelech 5784: Being Versus Doing

Integrating Torah into one's life through reflection and conversation can be an incredibly fun and engaging experience. It's a journey of discovery, where ancient wisdom and timeless teachings come to life in our daily experiences. Through reflection, we have the opportunity to dive deep into the rich tapestry of Torah, extracting profound insights and lessons that resonate with our modern lives. The joy lies in the 'aha' moments, those instances when a Torah verse or story suddenly connects with our personal challenges, aspirations, and values. And when we engage in conversations about Torah with others, it becomes an interactive exploration, where diverse perspectives and interpretations enhance our understanding. These dialogues often spark excitement and intellectual curiosity, making the learning process both enjoyable and fulfilling. Torah becomes a vibrant and dynamic part of our lives, offering not just guidance but also a source of endless fascination, connection, and growth.

NOTE: Don't feel obligated to go through every source or answer all the questions—unless you want to. Even one source, or one question will give you plenty of material for discussion and meditation. Enjoy this!

Some thoughts from the parsha

In *Devarim* 29:9-10, Moshe gathers the entire nation of Israel—leaders, men, women, children, and even the strangers among them—before G-d, marking a crucial moment of covenant renewal. The Hebrew word "נצבים" (*nitzavim*), meaning "standing," suggests more than just standing still; it conveys reaching a spiritual plateau, a moment of readiness for the next phase. This idea parallels Jacob, who erected a *matzevah* (a signpost or altar) in *Parshat Vayitzei* to commemorate a spiritual turning point in his life.

For Jacob, the *matzevah* symbolized the transition from the era of the forefathers to the era of the twelve tribes. For the Israelites, it marked their shift from a miraculous existence in the desert, where G-d's presence was evident, to a more natural, earthly life in the Land of Israel, where perceiving G-d amidst the distractions of the physical world would require greater effort.

The *matzevah* teaches us about the importance of pausing to reflect on where we are spiritually and where we are headed. This is especially relevant before significant moments, such as Rosh Hashanah. Interestingly, a tombstone is also called a *matzevah* in Hebrew, which highlights how a person is remembered after their life has ended. But while the *matzevah* is fixed and unchanging, our lives should not be.

Many people focus on *being* something—being a good person, being successful, or being a member of a community. But this static sense of identity, though comforting, misses the essence of spiritual growth. True spirituality is about *doing*—constantly striving, learning, and transforming. Life is not about reaching a final state of perfection but about the ongoing process of becoming. Like a sporting season, where the excitement comes from every game, not just the final win, the spiritual life finds meaning in each step, each action, and each moment of growth.

This distinction is also reflected in the Torah's instruction that, after it was given, Israel was no longer allowed to use a *matzevah* for worship. Instead, they were to build a *mizbeich* (altar), symbolizing an ongoing, dynamic relationship with G-d. The Izhbitzer Rebbe teaches that even our concept of G-d should not become rigid, like metal, but should remain fluid, capable of growing and deepening. Spirituality that is focused on *doing* reflects this principle—it remains alive, adaptable, and open to change.



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Now, consider these questions for deep personal reflection and discussion:

1. In what areas of your life have you focused more on *being* something (e.g., a particular identity or role), and how can you shift toward *doing*—constantly striving and growing in that area?
2. How can you create regular “signposts” or *matzevot* in your life to pause and reflect on your spiritual growth, helping you stay on the path of becoming rather than remaining fixed?
3. Reflecting on the idea that a tombstone is a *matzevah* marking the essence of one’s life, what do you hope your life’s “summary” will be, and how does that influence the actions you take today?
4. How can you cultivate a spirituality that is fluid and dynamic, one that grows and adapts, rather than one that is rigid and fixed in place?
5. In moments of distraction or difficulty, how do you maintain focus on the actions that lead to spiritual growth, especially when the distractions of the physical world make G-d’s presence harder to perceive?

Shabbat Shalom!