

Cultivating New Habits, Jewishly (part 1)

Rabbi Lily Solochek

1. www.jewishboston.com, “New Years Resolutions are:”



2. Iggeret haGra 1:9

... since one must work hard on one's speech and character traits, and only through good habits can we control ourselves. All beginnings are hard. But afterwards, one is worthy of praise

3. Dvarim (Deuteronomy) 30:19

הַעֵיִדֹתִי בְכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת־הַחַיִּים וְאֶת־הַמָּוֶת וְהַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה וּבַחֲרַתְּ בְּחַיִּים לְמַעַן תַּחֲיֶה אֶתָּה וְזַרְעֶךָ:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life—if you and your offspring would live—

4. Taanit 20a

תנו רבנן לעולם יהא אדם רך כקנה ואל יהא קשה כארו

The Sages further taught in praise of the reed: A person should always be soft like a reed, and he should not be stiff like a cedar.

5. Shabbat 31a

אמר רבא בשעה שמכניסין אדם לדין אומרים לו נשאת ונתת באמונה קבעת עתים לתורה עסקת בפריה ורביה צפית לישועה פלפלת בחכמה הבנת דבר מתוך דבר

With regard to the same verse, Rava said: After departing from this world, when a person is brought to judgment for the life he lived in this world, they say to him in the order of

that verse: Did you conduct business faithfully? Did you designate times for Torah study? Did you engage in procreation? Did you await salvation? Did you engage in the dialectics of wisdom or understand one matter from another?

6. Shaarei Teshuvah, Orach Chayim 156

שקבעת הוא מלשון "קבען פלניא" שאף מי שהוא טרוד גדול בעסקיו יש לו לגזול מזה עת ללמוד תורה
The word "keva" ("set") is parallel to "keva planya" (this one is a thief), that one who is busy with many things must steal time for Torah study.

7. Letting go of perfection

If we want our world to be different, beginning with our personal world, our family, our community, and our family, we must not fear imperfection because it is all a part of our story, and we need not to be perfect to be human. (*Debbie Friedman*)

8. Rambam Hilchot Deot 1:1,1:7

הַדֶּרֶךְ הַיְשָׁרָה הִיא מִדָּה בֵּינֹנִית שֶׁבְּכָל דְּעָה וְדְעָה מִכָּל הַדְּעוֹת שִׁישׁ לֹו לְאָדָם. וְהִיא הַדְּעָה שֶׁהִיא רְחוּקָה מִשְׁתֵּי הַקְּצוּוֹת רְחוּק שְׁנֵה וְאִינָה קְרוּבָה לָא לְזוֹ וְלֹא לְזוֹ. לְפִיכֵךְ צִוּוּ חֲכָמִים הַרְאִשׁוֹנִים שֶׁיְהִי אָדָם שֶׁמִּדְּעוֹתָיו תִּמְיֵד וּמִשְׁעֵר אוֹתָם וּמְכוֹן אוֹתָם בְּדֶרֶךְ הָאֲמֻצָּעִית כְּדִי שֶׁיְהִי שְׁלֵם בְּגוּפוֹ. כִּי צִד. לֹא יִהְיֶה בְּעַל חֲמָה נוֹחַ לְכַעַס וְלֹא כִּמְת שְׁאִינוּ מְרָגִישׁ אֶלָּא בֵּינֹנִי. לֹא יִכְעַס אֶלָּא עַל דְּבַר גָּדוֹל שֶׁרְאוּי לְכַעַס עָלָיו כְּדִי שֶׁלֹּא יַעֲשֶׂה כִּיּוֹצֵא בּוֹ פַּעַם אַחֲרָת.

The right way is the mean in each group of dispositions common to humanity; namely, that disposition which is equally distant from the two extremes in its class, not being nearer to the one than to the other. Hence, our ancient sages exhorted us that a person should always evaluate his dispositions and so adjust them that they shall be at the mean between the extremes, and this will secure his physical health. Thus a man should not be choleric, easily moved to anger, nor be like the dead without feeling; but should aim at the happy medium; be angry only for a grave cause that rightly calls for indignation, so that the like shall not be done again. [...]

וְכִי צִד יְרָגִיל אָדָם עֲצָמוֹ בְּדְעוֹת אֵלּוֹ עַד שֶׁיִּקְבְּעוּ בּוֹ. יַעֲשֶׂה וְיִשְׁנֶה וְיִשְׁלֵשׁ בְּמַעֲשָׂיִם שֶׁעוֹשֶׂה עַל פִּי הַדְּעוֹת הָאֲמֻצָּעִיּוֹת וְיִחְזֹר בָּהֶם תִּמְיֵד עַד שֶׁיְהִיוּ מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם קְלִיִּים עָלָיו וְלֹא יִהְיֶה בָּהֶם טְרַח עָלָיו וְיִקְבְּעוּ הַדְּעוֹת בְּנַפְשׁוֹ. וְלִפִּי שֶׁהַשְּׂמוֹת הָאֵלּוֹ נִקְרָא בָּהֶן הַיּוֹצֵר וְהֵם הַדֶּרֶךְ הַבֵּינֹנִית שֶׁאֵנוּ חִיבִין לְלַקֵּחַ בָּהֶן. נִקְרָאת דֶּרֶךְ זוֹ דֶּרֶךְ ה'. וְהִיא שֶׁלֹּא אֲבִירָה אֲבִינוּ לְבָנָיו שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (בראשית יח יט) "כִּי יִדְעֹתָיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה" וְגו'. וְהַהוֹלֵךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ זוֹ מְבִיא טוֹבָה וּבִרְכָה לְעַצְמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (בראשית יח יט) "לְמַעַן הִבִּיא ה' עַל אֲבִירָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עָלָיו":

(7) How shall a man train himself in these dispositions, so that they become ingrained? Let him practise again and again the actions prompted by those dispositions which are the mean between the extremes, and repeat them continually till they become easy and are no longer irksome to him, and so the corresponding dispositions will become a fixed part of his character.

9. Constant Change

“We are not autonomous substances. Rather. We are interconnected, dynamic events. In fact, everything is in the process of continuous change. If we take seriously that what we are is changing, developing, dynamic patterns of light, then we are connected to the entire cosmos, which is also interconnected, shifting patterns of energy. We are connected to all; there is a oneness that is bigger than even the biosphere. We are made out of the same stuff as distant galaxies and stars; there is an entire universe in us. [...] Minds are not things. Minds are brains acting in a living creature in a living environment.

If this is the case, if God is the grand integration of all becoming, if God is the dynamic that makes for novelty, innovation, complexity and growth; if God is the capacity of everything to relate to everything else, and we, therefore, partake of that godliness by our capacity to relate and innovate and create, then we are invited to rethink God’s power. [...]

And then, because God is becoming, as are we, God internalizes our choice, freely made. That choice becomes objectively real in God, forever. God meets you in that new moment, offering the best choice we can make in that new instant. (Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson, “I Will Be Who I Will Be,” Jewish Theology in Our Time, pp.8-10)