

# Parsha Story

Stories and Parables from  
the famed Maggid of Dubno  
by Rabbi Chanan Morrison

## The Maggid and the Skeptic

### NITZAVIM

A skeptic once approached the Maggid of Dubno, a smirk on his face like a card player holding a winning hand.

“Rabbi”, he began, “they say your words can turn stone hearts to flesh. They say your wisdom is so compelling, that even a stubborn heretic like me will see the error of his ways. Well then, prove it. Work your magic. Turn me into a good Jew.”

The Maggid studied the man for a moment. “Look, I’m really just known for my stories. So let me tell you one...”

### The Villager and the Bellows

“Once”, the Maggid began, “there was a villager, not particularly bright, but certainly well-meaning. On a rare trip to the big city, he came across a blacksmith hard at work. The villager watched in fascination as the blacksmith pumped the bellows, coaxing the fire into a fiery frenzy. He was mesmerized. ‘This’, he thought to himself, ‘is the secret to a perfect fire!’

Immediately, he emptied his pockets – parting with more than a few coins – and bought the very same bellows. He returned home, proudly presenting the bellows to his wife like it was the holy grail of domestic efficiency.

‘Here’, he declared, ‘this will make your cooking easier than ever! No more struggling with that oven of yours!’”

The next morning, his wife, no longer patient with her husband’s grand ideas, confronted him. ‘What kind of useless gadget did you buy?’ she exclaimed, hands on her hips. ‘I pump and I pump and I pump, but the oven is still as cold as a winter night in Siberia!’

“The villager, a bit perplexed, took a look at the oven. There it was – full of coal – but no fire. He let out a hearty laugh. ‘Foolish woman’, he said, ‘don’t you know? The bellows can only fan a fire that already has a spark. Without a spark, all the pumping in the world won’t do a thing!’”

### A Spark in the Ashes

The Maggid turned to the skeptic. “My friend”, he said, “the same is true of the human soul. If there is even a PINTELE YID – a hidden spark of Jewishness, an inner longing for holiness – then that tiny spark can be fanned into a fire. A fire that will warm the heart and illuminate the path of t’shuva and good deeds.”

**"But if there is no spark, no ember to ignite, then all my words would be no better than pumping hot air at a cold heap of coal."**

**The Maggid turned away, leaving the skeptic to wonder whether there was, perhaps, a tiny spark hidden somewhere in the ashes of his heart.**