

פ' ראה תשפ"ד

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DROSHO TO BOYANER BOCHURIM LAST WEEK

The way to grow in Torah is by not losing a single moment, and knowing that Hashem gives a reward for every moment you study Torah. You have to live with the awareness that your reward is not only for a 'day' of Torah or an entire *perek* etc.; a reward awaits you for every moment you study Torah, even for one word of Torah. When you become aware of this, you will try very hard to make the most of your time, until you merit to grow in Torah.

The main thing is not to give up, and even if at the beginning of a *bochur's* journey, it sometimes seems very difficult to succeed in Torah, to the point where he might think that 'nothing will come of me', the truth is that this is not the case, because Hashem does not expect more from us than we are capable of achieving, and if He requires of us to study His holy Torah and to be conversant in *Shas* and *poskim*, then we are necessarily capable of this. We must remember that Hashem loves us more than the love a father feels for his son. Hashem wants us to succeed, and He certainly gave us the ability to succeed, except that He gave permission to the *Soton*/evil inclination to get in the way, in order to give us the opportunity to receive a special reward when we overcome the evil inclination.

Even someone who has not been blessed with impressive talents must realize that if he perseveres and toils in Torah out of fear of Heaven, he will merit to become great in Torah. I know of several *gedolim* who did not have an amazing intellect, and their teachers almost gave up on them, but they took upon themselves the burden of Torah and learnt with great perseverance, until they first became *talmidei chachomim*, and then *gedolei yisroel*.

Therefore, dear boys, you should know that the eyes of the entire nation are focused on you, that you will become the *gedolim* of future generations, and therefore learn and be strong, and cherish every moment so as not to waste moments in vain, and, above all, everyone should accept the 'yoke' of Torah, meaning that you should undertake to learn even if this involves difficulties.

Those who accept the yoke of the Torah, will be privileged to experience miracles until they become great in Torah. May you all be successful, learn *Shas* and become real *gedolim*, may Hashem derive pleasure from you, and may we be comforted in the coming of *Moshiach*.

LOOKING AT OURSELVES

"See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse" (11:26)

Re'eh – "See" is in the singular: the *possuk* is addressing each individual and telling him not to look around and see what level others are on. We should not assume that we are on a higher level than others and basically on the right track, with not much room for improvement. Instead, we should look only at ourselves to establish whether we are fulfilling our own specific potential, comparing ourselves only to those around us whose level of *avodas Hashem* surpasses ours.

I - The evil inclination tries to convince a person that he is so immersed in sin that it is impossible for him to repent. To this Hashem responds that "I" have given the *mitzvos*, I am all-powerful and assist whoever wants to return to Me to detach themselves completely from their former way of life. Those who deal with *ba'alei teshuva* and tell them to continue using unfiltered Internet etc., must realize that *ba'alei teshuva* enjoy divine assistance to undergo a complete change to their lifestyles and should encourage them to act accordingly.

Today – do not tell yourself that yesterday I exhausted myself learning, I gave a lot of *zedoko* and performed other *mitzvos*, today I need to relax a bit, and tomorrow I will get back to my routine. Instead, our task each day is to ascertain how we can best fulfill the will of Hashem during the coming day. Sometimes this will indeed consist in resting or relaxing, but we have to be honest with ourselves. If we are fully aware that each and every day presents unique and irreplaceable opportunities for grabbing more Torah and *mitzvos* and

acquiring eternal life, any urge to rest will be more likely to stem from a proper desire to strengthen ourselves for our *avodas Hashem* than from mere laziness.

ELUL

Today – The *yetzer horo* tries to make us despair of becoming closer to Hashem due to the burdens of our sins and the difficulty of *teshuva*. Hence, the way to strengthen our *avodas Hashem* is not to think about the past at all, but to start off with a clean slate, imagining that we were born today, with specific duties to be discharged today without any connection to the past.

The *Chiddushei Harim* during *divrei hisorerus* in *Elul* would say that during this period we have to completely forget the past, imagine that we are newborn babies, and undertake to serve Hashem properly for a short period at a time. That way we will merit a pure heart.

On the other hand, a person should not delay the fulfilment of his duties until tomorrow, but rather resolve to make the necessary changes from this very moment. He should resolve to stick to his resolutions for a realistic fixed period, say of three days. Once that period has elapsed, he can make a new resolution for another fixed period, thus gradually attaining ever-higher levels of *avodas Hashem*.

REWARD

The blessing, that you will heed the commandments of Hashem (11:27)

It says “the blessing *that* you will heed” and not “the blessing *if* you will heed.” The Or Hachaim *Hakodosh* derives from this that the very fact that we are performing the will of Hashem and are privileged to serve Him is a blessing in and of itself, even without the expectation of any other recompense. He says that someone who feels the sweet taste of Torah will feel a desire to pay back the One who gave the Torah, rather than expect a reward for having received such pleasure.

In a similar vein, Rav Yechezkel Abramsky wondered how he would receive a reward in the afterlife for learning Torah, since he had already received his reward in this life in the form of the pleasure derived from that learning. He answered that a person deserves reward for learning Torah if he has learned it as the Torah of Hashem, with the intention of understanding and performing His will, and not as just another form of wisdom.

It says that “the reward for a mitzvah is a mitzvah” (*Ovos* 4:2). The joy derived from performing a mitzvah is in itself a reward. Angels do not have the opportunity to sanctify Hashem’s Name at any time, but only at certain limited intervals, whereas we are privileged to learn His Torah and perform His will at every moment, and so it does not behoove us to demand any additional reward. After all, the privilege of being able to serve the Creator is the greatest conceivable reward. However, Hashem in His great mercy nevertheless rewards us for our performance of *mitzvos*.

ONLY GREATNESS WILL DO

"A blessing and a curse" - there is no middle way. If you abide by the will of Hashem, you will be blessed, and if not, you will be cursed.

Some people say that it is enough for them if their children are G-d-fearing Jews who believe in Hashem and His Torah. However, in reality, a person must yearn and pray for his sons to become big *talmidei chochomim* specifically, do whatever he can to achieve that goal, and not make do with less. Only if it becomes obvious that this goal cannot be achieved in the case of a particular child, should the father focus on ensuring that the son will at least become a *yere shomayim*.

A yeshiva *bochur*, in particular, who joins a yeshiva thinking he will presumably not become a major *talmid chochom* is ruining his whole future Torah edifice, because without an aspiration to become a big *talmid chochom* he is lacking the foundation of this edifice. Rav Boruch Ber Leibowitz, for example, said: “I aspired to become great like Rabi Akiva Eger, and remained R. Boruch Ber, but if I would have wanted to be just R. Boruch Ber, nothing would have become of me”.

One of the main tasks of Torah educators in Yeshivos is to elevate their students by instilling in them the message that they possess many strengths. That way they will succeed and prepare themselves to become *gedolim*.

The Vilna Gaon (in the introduction to *Ma'alos Hatorah*) writes that after a person passes away when he is taken from the bed to the floor and awaiting his funeral, angels come and show him the spiritual powers which he possessed during his lifetime, and he perceives tangibly that he could have become a *godol* and

tzaddik. The pain the person experiences then when he realizes how he missed the opportunity to acquire eternal life is greater than *chibbut hakever* and other punishments.

HERESY IN ERETZ YISROEL

“And you shall tear down their altars, smash their monuments, burn their asherim with fire, cut down the graven images of their gods, and destroy their name from that place” (12:3)

This *possuk* includes a special warning to the residents of *Eretz Yisroel* not to permit any idol worship whatsoever. Although overseas a person is also obligated to destroy any idol worship which he comes across, in *Eretz Yisroel* there is a special obligation. Even when one does not come across it directly, one is obligated to ensure that there is no trace of idol worship in the country, and one must pursue it in order to eradicate it.

In our times too, we have a special duty in *Eretz Yisroel* to eradicate heretical views, “to destroy their name”, i.e., that they should not be mentioned, that they should have no possibility of distributing their views, and certainly not to strengthen or encourage them in the Holy Land.

For example, one has to keep a distance from movements such as the “Hillel” organization, which encourages and incites people to leave religion. We are obligated to prevent them from gaining a foothold in our communities.

UNITY IN YESHIVOS

But only to the place which Hashem, your G-d shall choose from all your tribes, to set His Name there; you [plural] shall inquire after His dwelling and come [singular] there (12:5)

Why does the *possuk* start off in the plural and end up in the singular?

On the way to the *Beis Hamikdosh* there may not be complete unity amongst the *olei haregel*, since peoples’ temperaments, natures, backgrounds and customs differ, but as soon as they enter the *Beis Hamikdosh* the public unites completely to serve Hashem.

Similarly, *Yeshivos* are the *Beis Hamikdosh* of our times and even though the boys learning there come from different backgrounds, as soon as they have entered the *Beis Hamedrash* to sit and learn, there must be complete unity between them to fulfil the Will of Hashem.

WEALTH AND POVERTY

“When Hashem your G-d, expands your boundary, as He has spoken to you, and you say, ‘I will eat meat’ because your soul desires to eat meat” (12:20-21)

When Hashem blesses a person with wealth (“expands his boundary”) he is often tempted to go after his desires (“I will eat meat”).

The test of wealth is not easier than the test of poverty. Rav Sternbuch’s great-uncle, R. Berel Zeldowitz, was one the leaders of the Minsk community and one of the richest men in Russia. He generously supported *yeshivos*, *talmidei chochomim* and the poor, but in the end, he lost his entire fortune. When Rav Chaim Brisker was asked why this had happened to him, he replied that R. Berel had already passed the test of wealth and was now being tested with the test of poverty.

The Brisker Rov elaborated on his father’s response and explained that someone in university studies in one department and after completing his training and passing a test moves on to another department. Similarly, Hashem examined R. Berel in the “wealth” department and when He saw that he had passed this stage, R. Berel was moved to the “poverty” department to see how he would fare there. R. Berel received a double reward for having passed two tests with distinction. Happy is his lot.

ETERNAL JOY

“You are children of Hashem, your G-d. You shall neither cut yourselves nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead” (14:1)

The Or Hachaim *Hakodosh* says that “you are the children of Hashem” is an explanation as to why one should not cut oneself. Since we are the children of Hashem, when a person dies, he does not leave his permanent place of abode, but, on the contrary, his soul returns to its original abode with his Father in Heaven. His entire sojourn in this world was only for a brief period in order to accumulate Torah, *mitzvos* and good

deeds. Now that the person has returned to his place of origin, next to the *Shechina*, one must not cut oneself, or be upset about his death.

When Rav Yitzchok Eizik Sher, Rosh Yeshivas Slabodka, heard that his son had died sanctifying the divine name together with his fellow Jews during the Holocaust, he accepted the divine judgement peacefully.

During a speech to his students, many of whom had also lost relatives during the war, he said as follows. “If I would have been informed now that my son is in the top floor of a house full of good things, and is lacking nothing, but the door to the house is locked and I have no way of entering it and witnessing my son’s happiness, then even though I could not see this with my own eyes, I would still undoubtedly be overjoyed to hear about his happy existence. That is how we should currently be conducting ourselves, because we believe that these martyrs are situated in the proximity of *Hakodosh Boruch Hu*, enjoying eternal pleasures, and even though we are far from them and the door has been locked preventing our entry, nevertheless, we should be overjoyed thinking about the joy they are experiencing in the afterlife”.

TZEDOKO

You shall tithe all the seed crop that the field gives forth (14:22)

It is brought down in the name of the Vilna Gaon (*Keter Rosh*, s. 123) that giving *ma’aser kesofim* is a *segula* for avoiding losses, and giving a fifth of one’s earnings is a *segula* for wealth. However, Rav Chaim Vital (in *Sha’ar Hamitzvos*) explains that only someone who fulfils the *mitzvah* of *tzedoko* with joy enjoys Hashem’s blessings, but not someone who does it only to rid himself of the poor person. Accordingly, people who set aside *ma’aser kesofim* who do not witness Hashem’s blessings in their financial affairs should examine their actions to see if they are performed wholeheartedly and joyfully.

If someone gives charity with a sour face, although he has fulfilled a *mitzvah*, he will not enjoy Hashem’s blessings. The test of wealth is no less difficult than the test of poverty. It can be very challenging for a wealthy person to keep a calm and pleasant demeanor all the way to the end of a long line of people waiting to see him, and give everybody who comes to see him for help a good feeling.

A wealthy person once came to see the late Satmar Rebbe, Rav Yoel. The Rebbe asked him to make a donation for a needy Jew, but the visitor said: “the Rebbe doesn’t have to worry, Hashem will surely look after the needs of this poor Yid.” The Rebbe responded by telling the visitor that now he understood something that had been bothering him. It is a general principle that every negative quality can be used for holy purposes. For example, the trait of pride can be used for standing up for one’s principles, but he had never understood how the trait of heresy could be used for holy purposes, but now he realized that if a poor person comes to us, we must act like a heretic and refuse to believe that Hashem will help them, but rather believe that the matter depends entirely on us, and make a generous donation, thereby fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *tzedoko* properly.

Every man shall bring as much as he can afford, according to the blessing of Hashem, your G-d, which He has given you (16:17)

Rav Sternbuch once knew a diamond merchant who admitted that during certain periods he earned almost one million dollars a month, but when Rav Sternbuch asked him for a donation, he said that he was not earning so much at the moment because of an economic slump, and he refused to give anything. Rav Sternbuch responded that Hashem had paid him in advance on account, and instead of providing him with a living in dribs and drabs, He had paid him huge amounts in a short period from which he could live comfortably also in the future, so that he was now obliged to pay Hashem back by giving charity out of the funds he had received in advance - for now.

The *possuk* here states that if someone has been the recipient of a blessing of Hashem “which He has given him”, i.e. in the past, he must continue to give as he did in the past, and not claim to be exempt from the commandment of giving *tzedoko* because he currently has no earnings. Anyone acting in this way would be showing disrespect and lack of gratitude for Hashem’s kindness to him in the past.

LEARNING YIRAS SHOMAYIM

“So that you may learn to fear Hashem your G-d all the days” (14:23)

Just like a medical student cannot learn medicine just by studying medical textbooks without being in the vicinity of doctors, so too fear of Heaven can only be “learned” by being in the vicinity of *tzaddikim* and witnessing their *yiras shomayim* and *avodas Hashem*.