

# TALMUD TORAH 3:3

*by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom*

**3:** No other Mitzva among the Mitzvot can be equated to TT; rather TT is equal to all of the Mitzvot combined; for study leads to action. Therefore, study takes precedence over action in all cases.

**Q1:** R's language here is strange; instead of "TT is equal to all of the Mitzvot", R begins with the negative - "no other Mitzva among the Mitzvot!". Why?

**JB** ([Jay Bailey](#)): For emphasis. Compare: I have more hamentashen than anyone vs. Nobody has as many hamentashen as I do. It's simply a way to stress a point; proof of this is that the second clause DOES utilize the positive!

**YE** ([Yitz Etshalom](#)): R is actually saying two things here: a) there is not one Mitzva among the other Mitzvot which equals TT; b) all of the Mitzvot combined balance with TT (which is, of course, an even more powerful statement about the weight of TT). There is no simple way to state the first premise without resorting to the negative phrasing which R employs.

**Q2:** R seems to be constructing an argument as follows:

- 1: Since TT leads to action;
- 2: Therefore, TT is equal to all of the Mitzvot combined; AND
- 3: Therefore, TT always takes precedence over action (=Mitzvot)

The argument is missing something; just because learning leads to action, that doesn't give TT equal significance. Just the opposite - if the significance of learning is that it leads to action, that implies a greater weight to action over learning! What is/are the "missing premise/s" in this argument?

**JR** ([Judy Rubin](#)): In physics there is a law that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. All forms of education create cognitive dissonance in the learner hence change results. All the more so for Talmud Torah. What is missing is the explanation given for the arba'a minim during sukkot. Of what use is the scholar without ma'asim tovim, good deeds? While Talmud Torah is equal to all of the mitzvot combined, combining study with the performance of mitzvot perpetually enhances Talmud Torah. Appointing an agent to fulfill one's own obligation to perform mitzvot so that one can continue to study seems second rate. Like the hadas which has smell but no taste being compared to the person who is learned but does not perform good deeds.

**HH:** ([H.H.](#)): Perhaps R is not talking about the intrinsic importance of learning. R may assume that action is as important as TT in itself. But action requires TT. Since TT is both a means and an end, it is

equal to all of the Mitzvot combined.

**JB:** You are correct that TT does not have equal significance...but significance does not mean priority, which it does sometimes have. Keitzad? Let me try to answer this with one of my (in)famous analogies. Consider Bill Clinton and White House Chief of Staff, Leon Panetta. Who's more important? Bill. Who is the lowly "tool"? Leon. No question about who is more important. But priority is a utilitarian issue. What happens if Bill calls in with the flu? Leon simply has an easier day. But if Leon calls in with the flu, Bill is up a creek (whitewater? ;-). Anyway, to bring this a little closer to home, TT leads to action. It's our Leon. Ultimately, God put us here to act, otherwise we'd simply be amorphous beings who contemplated all day. (This is a major objection to kollelim not aimed at the elite.[mod: this is an issue which will be discussed in detail when we get to TT 3:10 in a couple of weeks]) TT's goal is to teach us how to act. As a result, this "tool" is more valuable than anything else, INCLUDING A PARTICULAR ACTION! Because while the act is a one-shot deal, the learning is for a life time. So if possible, allow someone else to do it (so it does, in fact, get done) while you keep learning. We have to let Leon Panetta run the show, enter Bill's office at will, etc., because without him, the whole program grinds to a halt.

**YE:** Perhaps we have to reexamine the notion of "TT is equal to all of the Mitzvot" - the Hebrew word for equal, as used here, is \*Shaql\* - which literally translates to "balanced" or "equally weighted". Instead of understanding R's statement as one of value, i.e. that studying Torah is equal in value to doing all of the Mitzvot combined - rather, understand it as one of importance - i.e., it is as important to study as it is to do all of the Mitzvot. Why is that? Because involvement in Torah leads one to fulfill the Mitzvot - whereas the inverse is not true (as R stated in TT 1:3). Therefore, TT takes precedence - since being anchored in TT will always insure that we take the proper and necessary action when it is called for ; but, if we remove ourselves from learning in order to "take action" - that insures neither a further commitment to action, nor a return to study.

In other words, his argument runs as follows:

- 1) Constant involvement in Torah study leads you to action - a constant commitment to fulfilling Mitzvot;
- 2) Therefore, TT is an equally important involvement as doing Mitzvot (since it insures continued fulfillment) and
- 3) TT takes precedence over action WHERE THAT ACTION CAN BE FULFILLED BY ANOTHER.

**Q3:** R already mentioned "study leads to action" and "study takes precedence over action" (TT 1:3). Why the repetition?

**JB:** The first mention is a clarification of a proof-text, one that begs the question of order in the pasuk. This reference is in context. Once we have accepted and discussed the value and balance of TT and action, it is time to address priorities.

**YE:** I believe that there are two applications of this principle: 1) For a person's individual learning

(which is probably the intent of the source text in BT Kiddushin 40b) - as R discusses here. Secondly, (and this is likely R's application of the principle) - it explains why we educate the child in the sequence that we do. We start by teaching him Torah - but not just practical study, such as the operative laws of Shabbat, prayer, dietary laws etc., rather he learns Humash and other parts of our literature which train him to be involved in the study of Torah on its own terms. R, in Ch. 1, is laying out the sequence of raising a child - and, if the child was not properly educated - of that child raising himself! Study comes first, for without study, he cannot know what to do and he cannot have the proper attitude towards fulfilling Mitzvot.

R, in Ch. 1, is defining a sequential system - TT comes before Mitzvot; here, he is proposing a constant preference and tension - study as much as possible, for that will strengthen your commitment to do Mitzvot, increase your awareness of the meaning behind them etc.

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